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Rhizomatic Responses: The Organisation of Women's Football in the Islamic Republic of Iran

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Abstract

This thesis argues that the organisation of women's football in Iran is a fluid one which moves across institutional barriers. I illustrate that women's football is not necessarily bound by the formalized bureaucratic structures set out officially but escape these on a daily basis. The argument here presented is that these 'flows', or 'lines of flight', are never permanent but return to enforce the dominant structural and discursive formations they temporarily escape. Based on ethnographic research, peer ethnography and observations in Iran between 2008-2009, this thesis will therefore argue that the organisation of women's football cannot be located as either within or outside the official bureaucracy. It cannot be described as a space of resistance to or even subversion of official limits created through Iran's sports institutions. Although extra-bureaucratic connections are made and utilized to sustain and sometimes strengthen the potentiality of women's sports in different contexts women's football is well within the norms and practices expected of the institution of football in its bureaucratic practice. This image of the footballer, particularly in an Islamic country, contrasts starkly with the dominant picture of the female athlete as a de facto opponent to patriarchal norms, traditional expectations and above all religious obstacles.

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Glossary of relevant institutions, organisations and acronyms

DWA (Director of Women's Affairs)	Integrated into the Football Federation and responsible for Women's Football
Department of Women's Sports	Responsible for Women's sports, later incorporated into the Ministry of Physical Education
STB (Sazeman-e Taribyat Badani) Ministry of Physical Education	Responsible for the development of sport in Iran
FIFA	International Governing Body of association football

Glossary of words in Farsi

Bonyad	officially extra-state charities with significant political influence
Heyyat	Federation
Kaardani	Vocational courses at Higher Education Institutions
Kaarshenasi	Undergraduate courses
Kaarshenasi Arshad	Postgraduate courses
Nayeb Raees	Deputy Manager
Ostan	Province in Iran. Iran is subdivided into thirty-one provinces
Sarparast	Guardian, here referring to local official responsible for safeguarding a given group

Introduction

Thesis Objective

This thesis examines women's football in the Islamic Republic of Iran. It concerns itself with the way in which women's football is organized, across public and private institutions, for both professional, semi-professional and university footballers and how they, the people involved, or it, the institution of women's football, interacts with politics and embodiment of gender and gender norms. This is not an organisational study that contrasts exteriority and interiority that often dominate that field, nor is it limited to the actions within a given organisational setting or to a set of specific subjects. Following Pikko Markula's work on feminist sport sociology and Deleuzian philosophy, I challenge reductionist notions of contradictions that dominate a great deal of feminist scholarship in sport sociology¹.

This thesis presents women's football in Iran as a social meshwork, which spreads itself through the country using heterogeneous elements such as private and public institutions, street football, and fandom, which in the words of Linstead and Thanem "endogenously generate stable behavioural patterns at regular temporal or spatial *intervals*."² This means, heterogeneous elements of what we call 'women's football', like private clubs, university teams, players, coaches etc., work together at certain times and in certain places to progress and develop the sport due to internal reasons, without exogenous factors. This endogenous process can be called a fluid one, as parts interconnect and disconnect from time to time depending on circumstances. For example, a coach working for a private club may

¹ P. Markula, 'Body-Movement-Change: Dance as Performative Qualitative Research', *Journal of Sport & Social Issues*, Vol. 30 (4), November 2006, pp. 353-363

² S. Linstead and T. Thanem, 'Multiplicity, Virtuality and Organisation: The Contribution of Gilles Deleuze', *Organisation Studies*, vol. 28 (10), May 2007, p. 7

use her connections at a university football club in order to organise resources like transportation or information about tournaments for her private club footballers. From an organisational sociology point of view women's football in Iran thus moves across institutions and maintains its functionality by utilising cross-institutional and cross-hierarchical alliances. Examples of institutions and hierarchies in this context are: I further illustrate that women's football is not necessarily bound by the formalized bureaucratic structures set out officially, but that it moves across official spatial formations, such as private and public delimitations or player/coach divisions and invents new ones based on for example third party guarantees.³ Finally, I argue that many women footballers 'tune' their bodies towards specific tasks they believe are important to their sport, and often those that are culturally coded 'masculine'. According to reductionist notions of contradiction, all of these characteristics could be seen as inherent 'contradictions' that could effect change. As explained above, instead these should be seen as 'lines of flight' that are not permanent, but which return to enforce the dominant structural and discursive formations they temporarily escape.

The image of the footballer found in this thesis will not correspond with most other works on female athletes, particularly in Islamic contexts, which tend to portray the former as soldiers of liberty against imposed normative limitations: patriarchal, traditional and religious. Instead, the footballer will be cast as a dedicated athlete, devoted to their sport and becoming better at it.

³ See discussion p. 122

Brief Historical Context

This brief historical context is primarily for situating the thesis within a general history of Iran. A more thorough historical analysis of the history of Iran in relation to sports can be found in Chapter 1.

Through the 19th and early 20th century, Iran served as a 'buffer state' in the conflicting claims of imperial powers (Britain and Russia), a status Iran kept throughout much of the Cold war. Iran's history – as for the most part Iranian politics and society – cannot be described as typically colonial, but rather as 'semi-colonial'. Iran was not fully absorbed into a formal colonial system; the development of the state was comparatively disjointed⁴. The main form of European penetration was through the grant of monopolies and concessions to European interests, the contracting of European loans and the ceding of major offices to European management.⁵

The state operated 'above' society, in the sense that the social classes did not participate in the state and made no permanent claims on it. Since Iran was not fully colonised, the pattern of political mobilisation could not be one of struggle against foreign imperial rule.⁶ In the pre-modern period, the social classes were disintegrated in the state, while the state eschewed direct European control through a process of bargaining and negotiation with foreign powers as well as with domestic interests. No real sense of class for example was created in Iran as tribal lineages, religious communities and linguistic differences, among other things, dissuaded a

⁴ See F. Kazemzadeh, 'Iranian Relations with Russia and the Soviet Union, to 1921', and R. Greaves, 'Iranian Relations With Great Britain and British India', in P. Avery, G. Hambly, C., Melville, *The Cambridge History of Iran*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991),

⁵ See in general H. Katouzian. *State and Society in Modern Iran: The Eclipse of the Qajar and the Emergence of the Pahlavis*, (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2006)

⁶ A. Marashi, 'Paradigms of Iranian Nationalism: History, Theory, and Historiography', in K., Aghaie and A., Marashi, *Rethinking Iranian Nationalism and Modernity*, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014), . pp. 18-19

consolidation or creation of ‘class-consciousness’.⁷ Thus social grievances – what might be termed ‘political action’ – were disorganised. Social concerns were local and not ‘national’ or ‘territory-wide’.

This pattern breaks with the tobacco revolt of 1891, when the social classes began to revolt against the granting to Britain of a monopoly on tobacco production. This protest, which marks the first time Iranian society organised against the state, culminated in the constitutional revolution of 1905-6 and laid the ground for the development of modern Iranian politics. indeed, many of the institutions of the constitutional period – such as the National Assembly, the Judiciary, the Press – and many of the substantive rights of the constitutional period were preserved many decades later after the ‘Islamic revolution’ of 1979.⁸

More importantly, the lasting legacy of the constitutional revolution was that of “citizenship” and rights-demanding social movements. Women too were central in the process of bringing about the constitutional revolution, though they were not to benefit from the new dispensation until they were granted the right to vote in 1963 during the reign of Mohammad-Reza Pahlavi (1941-1979).⁹ Others argue that, the beginning of modern Iran is less the constitutional revolution and more the reign of Reza Shah, during which time Iran embarked on a process of state-building and modernisation.¹⁰ It is indeed during this time that the Iranian state gained effective control of its territory, through forced de-tribalisation and the quelling of centrifugal forces (an extremely violent process). Iran gained a

⁷ E. Abrahamian, ‘The Causes of the Constitutional Revolution in Iran’, *The International Journal of Middle East Studies*, 10:3 (1979) p. 388, see also V. Martin, the *Qajar Pact: Bargaining, Protest and the State, in Nineteenth-Century Persia*, (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2005)

⁸ F. Azimi, *The Quest for Democracy in Iran: A Century of Struggle Against Authoritarian Rule*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008)

⁹ A. Mahdi, ‘The Iranian Women’s Movement: A Century Long Struggle’, *The Muslim World*, 94, pp. 427-432

¹⁰ See for example S. Cronin, *The Army and the Creation of the Pahlavi State in Iran, 1910-1926*, (London and New York: Tauris Academic Studies, 1997) pp. 1-16

standing army built on conscription, for the first time established a National Bank, a University, a nation-wide system of judicial and land administration, a national legal system, a system of national identification, a national railway and the myriad props of a modern state.

The history of modern Iran is also in many ways the history of how the democratic movement born during the constitutional revolution developed throughout the decades by contest, trial-and-error, and under overwhelming internal and external pressure. The abdication of Reza Shah in 1941 during the Second World War and the occupation of Iran by Russia and Britain ushered in a short period of experimentation with democratic politics that lasted until 1953. Between 1951 and 1953, when the government of the then Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh was brought down by a US and British-led coup, Iran developed one of the region's most ambitious plans for progressive social and political reform on the back of the nationalisation of the Iranian oil industry.

Notwithstanding the great variations in political loyalty and affiliation which marked Iran's "National Movement" (*Nehzat-e Melli*), it is this brief experiment in democratic politics in the 1950s which the scholarship has highlighted as enduring in the protests that led to Iran's revolution in 1979 and the reform movement of the 1990s. Indeed, the unexpected election of Mohammad Khatami in 1997, which ushered in an abortive era of reform, brought with it the emergence of a familiar discourse about 'civil and political rights', 'rule of law' and the place of women in society and in the work place, themes which had been explored and partially implemented in the decades since the constitutional revolution and during Iran's brief experiment with sovereign, parliamentary democracy.

Women in Iran – a literature review

A thesis on women's football in Iran is going to be firmly placed within the popular 'women in Iran' body of scholarship. This literature tackles both directly and indirectly the experiences of women in Iran before, during and after the revolution and can often be categorised as one of three narratives. One sees Islam and the revolution of 1979 as a catastrophe for women's rights¹¹. The second highlights the importance of Islam and Islamic symbols and language in the anti-colonial resistance and emphasises Islamic feminism as the channel through which Iranian women's situation can be improved¹². The third emphasises the continuities between these two schools, and the complexities and multiple agendas involved in Iranian women's political participation¹³.

In Tohidi's analysis, Khomeini's role was considered by women to be merely spiritual in nature, and the creation of the Islamic Republic was unexpected. Tohidi writes, "today, in spite of the massive participation of

¹¹ See for example H. Shahidian who writes "In post-revolutionary Iran, patriarchy enjoys state sanction, religious blessing, and traditional justification" H. Shahidian, *Women in Iran: Emerging Voices in the Women's Movement*, (London: Greenwood Press, 2002), p. 38. See also F. Azari (Ed.), *Women of Iran: The Conflict of Fundamentalist Islam*, (London: Ithaca Press, 1983) and Erika Friedl, *In the Eye of the Storm: Women in Post-Revolutionary Iran*, (London: IB Taurus, 1994), Nayereh Tohidi. 'Gender, Fundamentalism and Feminist Politics in Iran', *Third World Women and Politics of Feminism*, eds. Chandra Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1991

¹² See for example F. Adelhahi who writes "Since the end of the 1980s it was clear that the new order could not be reduced to a binary opposition between dominators and the dominated, including women" in F. Adelhahi, Framing the Public Sphere, in A. Salvatore and D. Eickelman (Eds.), *Public Islam and the Common Good*, (Boston: Brill, 2004), p. 230

¹³ See for example, N. Naghibi, 'Bad Feminist or Bad-Hijabi: Moving Outside the Hijab Debate', *International Journal of Postcolonial Studies*, 1:4, pp. 555-571, and A. Najmabadi, 'Veiled Discourse- Unveiled Bodies', *Feminist Studies* Vol. 19 (3), Autumn 1993, pp. 487-518

Iranian women in the revolution, women's position has worsened rather than improved"¹⁴. Hammed Shahidian writes,

“The discrepancy between the promises of better life for women and the realities of the Islamization project is especially troublesome for those women who have turned to Islam in search of sexual equality”.¹⁵

Here the author emphasises 'sexual equality' as the overarching goal for Iranian women. The Islamic Republic's notion of Islam, and particularly the symbolic power of enforced hijab, becomes incompatible with Shahidian's notion of liberty and equality. The leaders of the revolution took stances that clearly supported this conclusion. For example, in 1962, Ayatollah Khomeini denounced women's suffrage and the Shah's general reforms as against Islam, before emphasising the importance of women's participation in the public sphere and in politics more generally in the 70s¹⁶.

The third school attempts to build a bridge between first two. They explain the events of 1978-79 as a process of a new hegemonic order, a collapse of dichotomies of West/East, which “created space for all kinds of transgression and various forms of resistance”¹⁷. Women's role in this process was crucial in their rejection of the state and the authority of the family, and their laws, rules and norms. Mino Moallem, for example, refuses to conform to an assumption of a homogenous women's cause and does not claim objective knowledge of women's agenda. The

¹⁴ Nayereh Tohidi. 'Gender, Fundamentalism and Feminist Politics in Iran', *Third World Women and Politics of Feminism*, eds. Chandra Mohanty, Ann Russo, and Lourdes Torres, Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1991, p. 253

¹⁵ H. Shahidian. *Women in Iran*, Greenwood Press, Westport, 2002, p. 39

¹⁶ For a thorough discussion of the effects of the revolution, but also the pre-revolutionary Family Protection Laws on gender relations and the position of women in Iranian society see H. Sadeghi, *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, unveiling and revealing*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 134-141

¹⁷ M. Moallem, *Between warrior brother and veiled sister : Islamic fundamentalism and the politics of patriarchy in Iran*, University of California Press, Berkley, 2005, pp. 3-4

revolution merely removes the old models and binaries which people used to define themselves and others by, i.e. tradition/modern, scripture/image, elite/popular. The revolution and the state it created then began a remapping of these models, and particularly a remapping of the civic body, a site where culture acts on individuals to turn them into subjects and through 'dividing practices', objectifying it¹⁸. Mino Moallem, following Abu Lughod¹⁹, Saba Mahmood²⁰ and Deniz Kandiyoti²¹, are authors who refuse to accept the 'modernisation paradigm' "with its implicit progressive and activist approach"²² which uncritically accepts western feminist notions of equality and liberty as universal and engage instead with the contingent feminisms in the Middle East, some of which define themselves in Islamic parameters.

In the study of 'Islamic sport', an often-perceived regressive role is attributed to Islam, one emphatically symbolised by the veil, which both literally and metaphorically is seen as an obstacle to the movement and freedom of the participating players²³. The academic study of feminist sports sociology develops and critically analyses gender divisions as created and reinforced in sport and gender discrimination in terms of funding, resource and representation²⁴. At the same time however,

¹⁸ Ibid. p. 60

¹⁹ Lila Abu-Lughod, *Remaking women, feminism and modernity in the Middle East*, (Philadelphia Princeton University Press, 1998)

²⁰ S. Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject*, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005)

²¹ D. Kandiyoti (Ed.), *Women, Islam, and the State*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991)

²² Ibid. pp. 8-9

²³ See for example K. Walseth, 'Young Muslim Women and Sport: The Impact of Identity Work', *Leisure Studies*, 25:1 (2006), pp. 75-94 and L. Sfeir, 'The Status of Muslim Women in Sport: Conflict between Cultural Tradition and Modernization', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 20:4 (1985), pp. 283-304

²⁴ See for example review of feminism sports literature in M. Ann Hall, *Feminism and Sporting Bodies; essays on theory and practice*, Human Kinetics, Champaign, IL, 1996, S. Birrell, 'Studying Gender in Sport: A Feminist Perspective', in N. Theberge and P. Donnelly (Eds.), *Sport and the Sociological Imagination*, (Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1984), J. Hargreaves, *Heroines of Sport: the politics of difference and identity*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2000) and H. Lenskyi, *Out of Bounds: Women, Sport, and Sexuality*, (Toronto: The Women's Press, 1986)

women's sports in the Middle East are continuously discussed in the metaphor of the veil. Leila Ahmed argues that this 'fixation' on the hijab by European observers stems from the colonial obsession with unveiling as a form of control²⁵.

Sports in particular have always been an arena in which gender divisions are made 'clear' and, quite literally, played out to an audience. Though racial differentiation and stereotypes can also be reproduced and reinforced in sports, through commentary and journalism for example, it is the male-female division that is a given at almost given at any sports event. This dichotomy is maintained through, for example, "gender verification" testing in competitive sport where women who want to compete as women are proven as such by a series of sex chromatin analysis²⁶, thus disqualifying several women with so-called 'genetic disorders'²⁷. Mariah Burton Nelson discusses different cases of women being disqualified for not being 'woman enough'²⁸. The "femininity control" test illustrates the way in which sports produces and reproduces a sex-dichotomy, reinforcing notions of biologism and sexual difference. The tests also implies that if you have capabilities beyond a certain points, you are no longer a woman²⁹.

²⁵ Leila Ahmed, *Women and gender in Islam : historical roots of a modern debate*, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1992)

²⁶ M. Ann Hall, *Feminism and Sporting Bodies; essays on theory and practice*, Champaign: Human Kinetics, 1996), p. 16

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Mariah Burton Nelson, *The Stronger Women Get, the More Men Love Football: Sexism and the American culture of Sport*, (London: The Women's Press Ltd, 1996), pp. 69-72

²⁹ Ibid. p. 70, see also Jayne Caudwell, 'Sporting Gender: Women's Footballing Bodies As Sites/Sights for the (Re)Articulation of Sex, Gender, and Desire', *Sociology of Sport Journal*, Vol. 20, 2003, p. 378

Liberal feminist discourse and the other

Muslim women in sport is a field which has received some attention, although this is understandably limited in the West. Journal articles exploring the relationship of Muslim women and sport with titles such as ‘Young Muslim and Sport: the Impact of Identity Work’³⁰, ‘Sport Exercise and the female Muslim body’³¹ and ‘Daughters of Islam Family Influences on Muslim Young Women’s Participation in Sport’³² often focus on the disparity between the demands of the religion and the family on the women in question on the one hand and the requirements of the sport on the other. Liberal feminist discourse provides the dominant frame through which “Muslim women” in sports are seen³³.

What is particularly visible in feminist studies of football, and sport in general, is the centrality of the body and therefore the centrality of the fundamental issues that are still contested within feminist literature, such as can we essentialise a concept of ‘woman’, what are the corporeal effects of patriarchal society, and what is the role of women in every day life in reproducing sexist and patriarchal power relations. As will be illustrated here however, when examining the topic of “Muslim women” in sport, or rather women athletes in Islamic countries, many of these questions are reduced to a struggle between ‘tradition’ and ‘modernity’

³⁰ Kristin Walseth, ‘Young Muslim Women and Sport: The Impact of Identity Work’, *Leisure Studies*, Vol 25 (1), 2006

³¹ Jennifer Hargreaves, ‘Sport, exercise and the female Muslim body’ in J. Hargreaves and P. Vertinsky (Eds) *Physical culture, power, and the body*, (New York: Routledge)

³² Tess Kay, ‘Daughters of Islam: family influences on Muslim young women’s participation in sport’, *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, Vol 41 (3)

³³ A complete review of this literature would require a whole thesis length, but it is important here to examine the ways in which feminist scholarship has shaped and continues to shape our understanding of the lives of Muslim women, or rather that of women in Islamic settings, as the specific religion of individuals are rarely examined and will not be in this thesis either. The decision was made together with my interlocutors, that we would avoid framing the experience of the women and men we interviewed and observed within traditional religion/secular, traditional/liberal notions unless these were provided to some extent by the interviewees themselves.

and women's participation in the sport through the lens of a singular narrative of resistance. In order to understand this in more depth, it is worth exploring the different positions of feminist literature, particularly in relation to sport and Islam.

As described above, women's football can be seen as a space in which masculinities and femininities are reproduced and gender differences reinforced. Subsequently perhaps, women's football, which contradicts the notion of football as 'a man's game', can be viewed as a resistance not only against gender norms but the binary system on which it is founded. One of the most famous theses on the resistance to the fixity of gender via that which subverts it is Judith Butler's who sees drag as a form of resistance or subversion³⁴ to the fixity of gender. 'Drag' reveals for Butler the ways in which gender is performed and is materialised through repetition and performance, and highlights the fragility of the concept that is in need of repetition and reproduction to reinforce itself. Borrowing from Butler's analyses I can evaluate the very existence of women footballer's in Iranian society and politics as a threat to the status quo and to gender and gender norms³⁵. Lila Abu-Lughod warns us, however, against an over-emphasis on resistance and resisters and writes about the importance of finding 'power' where resistance is found. It is an important point to make, particularly regarding Butler's analysis which can be applied to specific contexts of resistance, misattributing to its subjects forms of consciousness or politics that are not part of their experience³⁶.

It could be argued that the ways in which the duality of gender, and its social construction, is emphasised in scholarship can have the reverse

³⁴ Although the limitations of this placed by Butler herself will be examined later in the thesis.

³⁵ See discussion on drag in Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (New York and London: Routledge, 1999), pp. 186-189.

³⁶ Lila Abu-Lughod, 'The romance of resistance; tracing transformations of power through Bedouin women', *American Ethnologist*, Vol. 17 (1), February 1990, p. 47

effect of undermining a feminist struggle based on the common identity of 'woman'. However, the issue at hand for many feminists is whether anyone can *be* a woman, not whether "women" exist as a social group. These issues have taken place around essentialist concepts which rest on biologism, naturalism, and universalism³⁷. In doing so feminists, as Cressida Hayes explains, have sometimes themselves attempted at finding generalised definition of women, as united by their oppression for example, and tried to "reduce complex phenomena to their simplest roots"³⁸. It is also dangerous here to have too narrow a definition of 'oppression' and thereby ignoring the discursive role of phallogentric hegemony, which dismisses the 'feminine', builds economy and biology on her submission, and history on her absence.

Ziba Mir-Hosseini argues that gender roles and relations, and women's rights are not fixed or absolute. In a discussion regarding these issues in the Muslim world she writes,

"[gender roles and relations] are negotiated and changing cultural constructs, produced in response to lived realities, through debates that are now going on all over the Muslim world, through the voices of women and men who want either to retain or to change the present situation. They exist in and through the ways in which we talk about them both publicly and privately, and as we study and write about what gender relations and women's rights in Islam are and can be."³⁹

Liberal feminist discourse on 'other' women however, tends to have a more simplified notion of the oppressed, in this case the Muslim woman. She is seen as the eternal victim, defined according to her sexed body, a victim of male violence, a victim of the colonial process as well as the

³⁷ E. Grosz, 'A Note on Essentialism and Difference', in S. Gunew, *Feminist Knowledge: Critique and Construct*, (London: Routledge, 1990), p. 333

³⁸ C. Hayes, *Line Drawing: Defining Women Through Feminist Practice*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), p. 5

³⁹ Z. Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and gender; the religious debate in contemporary Iran*, (London: I.B. Tauris Publishers, 2000), p. 6

Islamic code⁴⁰. Mohanty compares these feminists' understanding of women as similar to those of the theologians, denying women their presence and agency, quoting Marnia Lazreg's criticism of reductionism in Western feminist studies of the Middle East and North Africa, "women are subsumed under religion presented in fundamental terms, they are inevitably seen as evolving in non-historical time"⁴¹. Eurocentric perspectives in feminist studies, especially when discussing 'other' women, but also when ignoring those and universalising the experiences of white middle class women, have been one of the main criticisms of what Reina Lewis and Sara Mills refer to as the Postcolonial feminist movement⁴².

Mohanty sees the Eurocentrism of many feminist studies of the 'Orient' as a colonialist move, making Western feminists the true subjects of this counter history, "Third world women, in contrast, never rise above the debilitating generality of their 'object' status"⁴³. European and American hegemony means the sustained and reinforced idea of the superiority of the 'West', creating the 'Other' woman in homogenous terms of "the powerful mother, the chaste virgin, the obedient wife, the veiled woman" which exist in universal, ahistorical narratives of knowing, coding and appropriating the Third World. These images are reproduced in texts and articles not created only by men, but also by women who write in the name of the mentioned universal struggle against patriarchy. Nor is Western feminism an absolutely 'Western phenomenon', precisely as it is not White European and American women advocate western notions of freedom, liberty and equality.

⁴⁰ See C. Talpade Mohanty, *Feminism without Borders: Decolonising Theory, Practicing Solidarity*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), p. 23. see also for discussion on publications about Iranian women by Iranian women, who perpetuate the stereotypes, in Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and gender*, p. 284

⁴¹ Marnia Lazreg quoted in Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders*, p. 29

⁴² R. Lewis and S. Mills eds., *Feminist Postcolonial Theory; A Reader*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2003), p. 1

⁴³ Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders*, p. 39

It is in this regard that Luce Irigaray writes, “a direct feminine challenge to this condition means demanding to speak as a (masculine) ‘subject’, that is, it means to postulate a relation to the intelligible that would maintain sexual indifference”⁴⁴. By mentioning the ‘power and productivity’ of the West, Fatima Mernissi is also repeating the assumptions of much of modernization theory. In a discussion on the simplification of the role of religion, Mohanty writes,

“A ritual is established whereby the writer appeals to religion as the cause of gender inequality just as it is made the source of underdevelopment in much of modernization theory. In an uncanny way, feminist discourse on women from the Middle East and North Africa mirrors that of theologians’ own interpretation of women in Islam. The overall effect of this paradigm is to deprive women of self-presence, of being. Because women are subsumed under religion presented in fundamental terms, they are inevitably seen as evolving in non-historical time. They virtually have no history. Any analysis of change is therefore foreclosed.”⁴⁵

The problems of Mernissi’s analysis are made clear in the title of the introduction, “The Root of the Modern Situation”. From the start then we are looking at a scale of modern/traditional on which civilisations, which are repeatedly defined as East and West, are placed. Mernissi as an example of Western feminist analysis of Middle Eastern women is helpful not only because it evaluates what seems to be an indigenous, read ‘authentic’, study. Moreover, the study uses one of the recurring themes in Western studies of the “Orient” as the eternally religious, mystical, timeless place. A chapter on what is referred to as a “Muslim community” is discussed by first looking at prophet Muhammad’s notion of ‘umma’, not as this notion is understood in contemporary Morocco, but in order to

⁴⁴ L. Irigaray, *This Sex which is not one*, Catherine Porter and Carolyn Burke (trans.), (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), p. 78

⁴⁵ Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders*, p. 28

illustrate the notions of community in the 'Arab mind' and argues that the connection is important because family and community structure is, in the "Muslim mind", considered "unchangeable", thus repeating yet another old orientalist myth. Mernissi writes, "the link in the Muslim mind between sexuality and the shari'a has shaped the legal and ideological history of the Muslim family structure and consequently of relations between the sexes."⁴⁶ Although the sentence is part of a criticism of the sexist foundations of Islamic Law, yet the author never allows agency to the objects of that law, and the law is taken at face value.

Through this line of argument the author is able to discuss "Male-Female dynamics in Muslim Society" without necessarily having to focus on the "society" part of that title. The theme of religion is important here as in other depictions of the Middle East. The great emphasis which is laid upon religion in both Middle Eastern society and people, simplifies the study of those areas as well as deny the people themselves of all agency as they are thought to be led by their religious belief. In what could have been an analysis of the "Muslim concept of Active Female Sexuality", which is the title of a chapter, the author begins with the concept of sexuality in Christianity, once again and quite literally understanding and reading the Middle East 'through Western eyes'. It is here that Mohanty's call for a realisation of the context in which we understand "Third World women" comes in hand, and we must ask ourselves as she does, "Which/Whose history do we draw upon to chart this map of Third World women's engagement with feminism?"⁴⁷

Ziba Mir Hosseini writes that Mernissi's position in "Beyond the Veil" came to change in the latter's later work, for example *Le Harem politique*, in

⁴⁶ F. Mernissi, *Beyond the Veil: Male-Female Dynamics in Modern Muslim Society*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), p. 18

⁴⁷ Mohanty, *Feminism Without Borders*, p. 28

which she looks at ancient texts and tries to find new meanings in them⁴⁸. Mir-Hosseini further divides the literature on Islam and gender, into “insider” and “outsider”, and splits the former into a dominant group, with a strong religious tone and content, and works with an Islamic feminist stance. Mir-Hosseini’s own stance on gender roles can be summarised as “not fixed, not given, not absolute” but rather as cultural contexts which are changing and negotiated, “produced in response to lived realities, through debates that are now going on all over the Muslim world, through the voices of women and men who want either to retain or to change the present situation”⁴⁹. What both Kandiyoti and Mir-Hosseini argue is that women in the Middle East must not be studied in terms of an eternal Islam or Islamic culture but rather,

“through the different political projects of nation-states, with their distinct histories, relationships to colonialism and the west, class politics, ideological uses of an Islamic idiom, and struggles over the role of Islamic law in state legal apparatuses.”⁵⁰

There is a growing number of works on the empowerment of women in Islamic contexts, some with a particular focus on sports and leisure as a means to empower women, although these are often focused on women in the diaspora⁵¹. The primary aims of these are social inclusion and development, and when it comes to qualitative analyses of the relationship between women in Islamic countries and sport they often

⁴⁸ Mir-Hosseini, *Islam and gender*, p. 5

⁴⁹ Ibid.

⁵⁰ L. Abu-Lughod, *Remaking Women*, p. 3. For a deeper discussion on Islamic feminism, or one form of this, see Mir-Hosseini’s discussion on Shari’ah and fiqh, or divine revelation and human interpretation and the relationship between this distinction and Islamic feminism, see Ziba Mir-Hosseini, ‘Towards Gender Equity: Muslim Family Laws and the Shari’ah’, in Zainah Anwar (ed.), *Wanted: Equality and Justice in the Muslim Family, Musawah: an initiative of Sisters in Islam*, Selangor, 2009, pp. 26-29

⁵¹ E. Sherry, ‘(Re)engaging marginalized groups through sport: The Homeless World Cup’, *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, Vol 45, 2010, pp. 59-71, C. Palmer, ‘Muslim Women and Sport’, *Sport in Society*, Vol 14, 2011, pp. 726-728, Walseth, ‘Bridging and bonding social capital in sport: Sport, Education and Society’, Vol 13, 2008, pp. 1-17, K. Toffoletti, ‘Iranian Women’s sports fandom: Gender, Resistance and Identity in the Football Movie Offside’, *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, Vol 38, 2014

borrow from earlier studies. Jennifer Hargreaves is one of these oft used and cited authors. Her work is referred to in many of the mentioned studies of Muslim women⁵². Even in Toffoletti and Palmer's article which sets out to review "new approaches" for studying "Muslim women and sport" Hargreaves essay, discussed below, is mentioned as the main authority on the relationship between Islam, the body and sport for female athletes⁵³. Hargreaves work is therefore going to be a particular focus below, as it seems particularly central to even more contemporary studies on "Muslims women" and sport.

In her book, "Heroines of Sport", Hargreaves sets out to bring agency back to the sportswoman who has been denied her place as a heroine, due to masculine definitions of heroes and gender discriminatory representation of sports. However, when discussing Iran, the book switches to an analysis of veil-Islam-patriarchy, with the opening chapter titled "The Muslim female heroic – shorts or veils?". In a discussion on Nawal El-Moutawakel, who took the 300-metre hurdle title in the 1984 Los Angeles Olympics to become the first African, Arab and Muslim woman to win a gold medal, Hargreaves is quick to point out that this was not because of Islam but despite its obstacles. She writes, "In contrast to most other girls and young women in Morocco and across the Arab world, her parents were keen to encourage her athletic ambition"⁵⁴. Islam is in this analysis an obstacle; the "more Islamic" the society the smaller the chances of sportswomen winning gold medals. In Hargreaves' analysis her subject as a Muslim woman, is identified by her religion; Islam becomes the unifier.

⁵² See for example K. Walseth 'Sport within Muslim organization in Norway: ethnic segregated activities as arena for integration', *Leisure Studies Journal*, Vol 35 (1) 2016, and G. Pfister 'Approaching Sport from Historical and Sociological Perspectives: the Life and Work of a Feminist Scholar', in K. Young (Ed) *Reflections on Sociology of Sport*, Vol 10, pp. 153-169

⁵³ K. Toffoletti and C. Palmer, 'New Approaches for Studies of Muslim Women and Sport', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, Vol. 5, (2), 2017, accessed online at <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690215589326>

⁵⁴ J. Hargreaves, *Heroines of Sport: the politics of difference and identity*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 46

Consequently, Islam's holy book is taken as a guide to the inner workings of those who follow it and it becomes the main tool for the author in analysing sports in the Muslim world. Hence, the sportswoman can never be seen except within the parameters of Islam. Even when someone like El-Moutawakel is successful, she is so because of the relative 'lack of Islamic influence', or she and her practices are at least influenced by "liberal Islam"⁵⁵.

In Hargreaves's analysis of Iranian sports, women cannot break out of this constricting focus on Islam, and the book never offers a socio-political analysis of sports and gender in Iranian society but remains an analysis of Islam. There is no real discussion regarding modern Islam, which is instead mentioned in terms of Rushdie-Khomeini-fatwa-hijab-"Gulf war". The main reference is Ernest Gellner who is quoted at length discussing the difficulty for Muslims to live in the 'modern' world as the Quran is incompatible with modernity in its literal form⁵⁶. I will discuss Gellner below.

The belief in the clash of civilisations is a constant theme here, as the West is seen supporting change, youth consumerism, speed and movement, and the East (Islam) discourages change and emphasises status quo and stability⁵⁷. Political Islam is also only mentioned in its lacks and absences of its Western alternatives, communism and capitalism, and how it can fill the gap of communism as a challenge to capitalism⁵⁸. These sentiments have orientalist epistemological and ontological foundations which are discussed in detail by Edward Said⁵⁹. By seeing her objects as part of an eternal, ahistorical, religious world, Hargreaves essentialises her subjects and consequently writes simplified conclusions such as, women in Islam

⁵⁵ Ibid. p. 48

⁵⁶ Ibid. p. 49

⁵⁷ A. Ahmed and H. Donnan quoted in Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid. p. 50

⁵⁹ E. Said, *Culture and Imperialism*, (London: Vintage, 1994)

are “fearful of victimisation”⁶⁰. Women remain the victims, the objects of Islamic politics which can only have “negative effects” on women⁶¹. The main symbol of this “negative effect” is often the veil.⁶²

Hargreaves analyses the veil as a Muslim necessity and therefore, for her, not wearing one becomes a ‘liberal statement’. Equally the struggle of sportswomen in these societies becomes one against the veil and other ‘non-Western’ clothing, not against gender representation, economic disparity, gender discrimination in sports events, or ideas of biologism, which their ‘Western’ counterparts are fighting against. The only agency given regarding the wearing of the veil is given to “Islamists” who use veiling as a sign of holding onto traditions in an “increasing globalized world”⁶³.

Looking at the 1979 revolution and its aftermath in purely gender terms, sidelining issues of class and anti-colonialism, leads to the belief that Iran was transformed “from a modernizing Islamic state” into “a backward looking Islamic republic governed by ancient laws which were, according to some interpretations, deployed to subjugate women in many ways that were worse than during the Pahlavi regime”.⁶⁴ The constant referral to this imaginary scale on which societies can be judged to be forwards or backwards, modern or traditional, is what is at the heart of Hargreaves’s analysis. Everything is judged according to this scale; even levels of feminism amongst Muslims is decided by their ‘liberalness’ versus their ‘belief in Islam’⁶⁵.

⁶⁰ J. Hargreaves, *Heroines of Sport*, p. 51

⁶¹ Ibid. p. 50

⁶² See discussion on the use of the term ‘veil’ in F. El-Guindi, *Veil; Modesty, Privacy and Resistance*, (Oxford: Berg, 1999)

⁶³ J. Hargreaves, *Heroines of Sport*, p. 53

⁶⁴ Ibid. p. 54

⁶⁵ Ibid. p. 55

Other authors writing on Muslim women and sport follow the same pattern of discussion and, as mentioned above, base themselves not only on male experiences but also European (white) understandings of leisure and sport. In “Doing Sport in a Headscarf?” Gertrud Pfister writes that sports can be used “as a way of helping foreign people to adapt to the mainstream culture of the country in which they live”⁶⁶. Pfister is however more concerned with investigating the attitudes to sport amongst ‘immigrant girls and women’, but the study’s perceived ‘apolitical’ and empirical approach nevertheless reinforces the way in which Islam and Muslims are perceived⁶⁷.

Western Women’s sport is seen in either purely economic terms⁶⁸, or in terms of empowerment contrary to Islamic traditions⁶⁹. Hargreaves is particularly affected by this criticism as she sets out to reclaim the women’s sports experience, describing in her methodology the importance of cultural sensitivity. The author builds her methodology on non-Western women on what she refers to bell hooks’ call for allowing ‘indigenous’ women to ‘speak for themselves’, which however is a common feminist methodology not just in relation to racial difference

⁶⁶ G. Pfister, ‘Doing Sport in a Headscarf? German Sport and Turkish Females’, *Journal of Sport History*, Vol. 27 (3), Autumn 2000, p. 497

⁶⁷ Perhaps this seems too rash a conclusion considering Pfisters extensive work on and for immigrant populations to be able to participate in sports in Germany or Denmark. Nevertheless, the packaging of the problem at hand as ‘sport in headscarves’ sets the study off from a misleading positionality of contradiction between Islam/Veil and sport even though it merely refers to the item of clothing of scarf. For example, you would never see a study be done on men’s football entitled ‘football in shorts’, even though playing the game in speedos would clearly allow for a greater mobility and fluidity in the game. Ibid.

⁶⁸ W. H. Martin and S. Mason, ‘The Development of Leisure in Iran: The Experiences of the Twentieth Century’, *Middle Eastern Studies* Vol 42 (2), 2006

⁶⁹ A. Strandbu, ‘Identity, embodied culture and physical exercise: stories from Muslim girls in Oslo with immigrant backgrounds’, *Young: Nordic Journal of Youth research*, Vol. 13 (1), 2005. See also B. Majumdar, ‘Forwards and Backwards: Women’s Soccer in Twentieth-Century India’, *Soccer and Society*, Vol. 4 (2 & 3), June 2003, pp. 80-94. Majumdar starts the discussion on women’s football in India using the film *Bend it Like Beckham* which is a story told in the stereotypical ‘culture-clash’ narrative, see discussion on the film in J. Puar, ‘The Remaking of a Model Minority: Perverse Projectiles under the Specter of (Counter)Terrorism’, *Social Text* – 80, Volume 22 (2), Autumn 2004, pp. 75-104

between the researcher and researched⁷⁰. However, in the chapter on Islamic sport she changes her approach and interprets those same experiences through the use of Eurocentric models⁷¹, which see the spread of Western liberal values (often via sport) as detrimental to local or traditional culture, thereby ignoring the many ways the 'local' can redefine and selectively accept and re-imagine what seems like external norms⁷².

Stuck in the middle: the Islam / Modernity dichotomy

To better understand the conclusions of Western feminist sports sociologists writing on 'Islamic sport' one must discuss the foundations on which they are built. Jennifer Hargreaves uses much Ernest Gellner's "Postmodernism, Reason and Religion"⁷³ as her methodological framework. Gellner uses binaries, such as faith versus reason, modern versus traditional, modern versus post-modern, in his analysis⁷⁴. Gellner divides the world into religious fundamentalists, relativists, and rationalists. He refers to the adherents of fundamentalism as "unsophisticated"⁷⁵ and goes on to say that in the modern world "fundamentalism is strongest in Islam"⁷⁶. Gellner asks why Islam is "secularization-resistant"⁷⁷. Change in the Christian West came after political pressure, presumably from

⁷⁰ See for example Jayne Caudwell's methodology which aimed to avoid connecting with only those who have similar backgrounds to the researcher by reaching out to those with an interest in the study rather than chosen due to their merit as footballer's or any other externally imposed filter. Jayne Caudwell, *Sporting Gender*, p. 374

⁷¹ There are also many who resist Eurocentrism and Phallogentrism in sports sociology, see for example M. Saavedra, 'Football Feminine – Development of the African Game: Senegal, Nigeria and South Africa', *Soccer and Society* Vol. 4 (2 & 3), 2003, pp. 225-253 which however simplifies the study into local versus global culture, and on the ethnocentrism of Western sports sociology see M. Amara and I. Henry, 'Between Globalization and Local 'Modernity'. The Diffusion and Modernization of Football in Algeria', *Soccer and Society*. Vol. 5 (1), Spring 2004, pp. 1-26

⁷² See M. Amara and I. Henry, 'Between Globalization and Local 'Modernity', p. 2

⁷³ Ernest Gellner, *Postmodernism, Reason and Religion*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1997)

⁷⁴ *Ibid.* p. 1

⁷⁵ *Ibid.* p. 3

⁷⁶ *Ibid.* p. 4

rationalists, however in Islamic societies the change was merely a “rotation of personnel in an unchanging social order”⁷⁸.

In the discussion regarding the veil, Gellner seemingly acknowledges the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist factors involved, by stating that “the typical Muslim woman in a Muslim city doesn’t wear the veil because her grandmother did so, but because her grandmother did not”⁷⁹. However, he continues to explain that the grandmother was busy working in the fields and did not consider the veil, which was left to later generations who in the spirit of the “eternal or cyclical reformation” of Islam advocated a ‘return’ to pure Islam emphasising the Islamic importance of the veil⁸⁰. In effect, Gellner believes in a globalized world where secularisation, modernity and technological advancement are progressing⁸¹. This ‘unstoppable force’ is explained as incompatible with Islam which in its essence is “enormously simple, powerful, earthy, sometimes cruel, absorbing socially fortifying movement, which gives a sense of direction and orientation to millions of men and women”⁸². Hargreaves, by building on this ontological foundation, sees football as part of this Western/liberal force which is ineffectually being resisted by fundamentalists in Islamic societies. It is understandable, given an uncritical adoption of the above ideas, that Hargreaves takes football, particularly women’s football, as a direct form of resistance to ‘traditional’ and ‘fundamentalist’ Islam.

By avoiding collapsing the experience of women footballers immediately into these pre-existing categorisations and following conceptual frameworks that allow for fluidity and escape without necessarily reducing

⁷⁷ Ibid. p. 5

⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 10

⁷⁹ Ibid. p. 16

⁸⁰ Ibid. pp. 15-17

⁸¹ Ibid. p. 4

⁸² Ibid. p. 72

these to resistance or subversion, I hope to illustrate how women's football exists as a marginalised social activity without submitting to the above reductionist conclusions. Furthermore, I wish to illustrate the apolitical, self-improving side of the sports, especially for women, whilst remaining critical of arguments such as Kaveh Basmenji's who argues that football's increasing grasp of Iranian urban youth illustrates their boredom with politics⁸³. Football can be political in its performance and its representation, however, like other parts of society it cannot be analysed with exclusive reference to one phenomenon, whether it be Islam, Europe or Leisure, but analysed as part of the consciousness of Iranian football fans and players and in terms of its historical and cultural context.

Lessons from Politics of Piety

Before setting out her important argument in *Politics of Piety*, Saba Mahmood discusses notions of freedom, both positive and negative, which she argues underpin feminist scholarship today. Mahmood's argument is that both of these, negative being the absence of obstacles and positive being capacity of self-realisation, rest on a notion of individual autonomy, that is to say actions that are consequences of own will "rather than custom, tradition, or social coercion". This is very much true of feminist sports sociology too; women athletes are seen as determined individuals who strengthen their bodies despite societal norms pressuring against it, overcoming boundaries – they are retainers of both positive and negative

⁸³ K. Basmenji's paragraph on Iranian celebrations following the national teams victory over the United States is particularly revealing: "Although the demands of young people have political implications on Iran's tense factional battleground, many agree that their motivations are anything but political. While hundreds of thousands of youths poured into the streets to celebrate the victory of Iran's soccer team over the United States in the World Cup in 1998, the most heated pro-Khatami rallies in the heyday of his presidency never drew more than just a few thousand people." K. Basmenji, *Tehran Blues: Youth Culture in Iran*, (London: Saqi Books, 2005)

freedom⁸⁴. Mahmood then proceeds to critique assumptions of a model which assumes individualist resistance to societal barriers from a poststructuralist perspective, particularly noting Butler as one of those who makes these assumptions but without resorting to what she argues is an “overwhelming tendency within poststructuralist feminist scholarship to conceptualise agency in terms of subversion or resignification of social norms”⁸⁵. I agree with this critique; the duality of subversion/compliance collapses experience into reductionist categories that in some sense do little to move away from liberal notions of freedom that they aim to critique and replace.

Mahmood’s rescuing of the piety movement from secular-liberal or secular-left dismissal as compliant in their own oppression comes in the end not as a reconsideration of the very notion of agency, but rather from illustrating in the ethical actions of the women her work is focused on within normative frameworks. The foundation of this is set when Mahmood illustrates how despite Muslims following the One code, Quran, the mosque movement pushes followers to recognise their *individual* roles as interpreters⁸⁶. In order to open the eyes of those who have a “deep self-assurance about the truth of the progressive-secular imaginary, one that assumes that the life forms it offers are the best way out for these unenlightened souls.”

Mahmood illustrates how the mosque movement, if we look closely, does within given parameters of patriarchal religion allow for ethical agency⁸⁷. However valuable that may be, it retains the magical mysticism of that same secular imaginary Mahmood points out in

⁸⁴ Mahmood discusses positive and negative freedom albeit in a different context in Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, pp. 1-38

⁸⁵ Ibid. p. 14

⁸⁶ Ibid. pp. 30-31

⁸⁷ See the entire Preface, quote from Ibid. p. xi

her preface. In the epilogue the author does note that the juxtaposition of secular-liberal understandings of agency and body against the actions of piety were “thrust upon” her by the fact that they would be central to the dominant secular-liberal paradigms in the West⁸⁸. However, this is not where my contentions lie. My disagreement with Mahmood is not in regards to the juxtaposition of the two but with the assumptions behind Mahmood’s framework. In her analysis, Mahmood discusses Butler’s gender theory arguing that for Butler there is no pre-representational sex (or material body) that is not already constituted by the heteronormative matrix. Butler therefore focuses on an analysis of language as a system of signification through which subjects are produced, through a process of reiterated enactments of heterosexual norms, which retroactively produce the appearance of gender.

Putting it simply, Mahmood writes,

“In contrast to a long tradition of scholarship that treated norms as an external social imposition that constrains the individual, Butler forces us to rethink this external-internal opposition by arguing that social norms are the necessary ground through which the subject is realised and comes to enact her agency.”⁸⁹

I further agree with Mahmood that there is a tension in Butler’s work in the overemphasis on ‘rearticulation’ and subversion of norms, or rather the undoing of these in relation to her firm stand against simplistic liberatory tendencies in feminist scholarship which see subversion and resistance as the only forms of agency. The tensions

⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 191

⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 19

in Butler's work aside, there are certain tensions in Mahmood's work too that need pointing out. On the one hand Mahmood argues that the practices of the women's piety movement in Egypt are not important because of the meanings they signify to the individuals involved, but in the work they do in constituting the individual, and continues to say "the body is not a medium of signification but the substance and the necessary tool through which the embodied subject is formed"⁹⁰. The refusal of reducing actions to the resistance/compliance duality maintains this theoretical conviction in her analysis. Yet her judgment of the agency of these women is contingent upon their subjectivity within a particular historical and discursive tradition "whose logic and power far exceeds the consciousness of the subjects they enable"⁹¹.

Mahmood follows Foucault's notion that subjects are produced through power relations which form the necessary condition of their possibility, it is only through these particular subjectivities that subjects can then achieve agency through the mentioned ethical actions. Mahmood writes that "Foucault thus treats subjectivity not as a private space of self-cultivation", but rather the particular and local specificities that knowledge produces allow within them certain ethical-moral subjects to be formed⁹². Foucault writes, "knowledge is also a space in which the subject may take up a position and speak of the objects with which he deals in his discourse"⁹³. Neither Mahmood, nor Foucault for that matter, illustrate what these spaces actually are. What do we mean when we talk about "private space of self-cultivation"? More importantly, there is an avoidance of the ways in which bodies come into contact with

⁹⁰ Ibid. p. 29

⁹¹ Ibid. p. 32

⁹² Ibid. p. 28

⁹³ M. Foucault, *Archaeology of Knowledge*, (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 2008), p. 182

norms/discourse/knowledge, what Lefebvre calls a “leap over an entire area”⁹⁴. To put it in different terms, if “agency” is defined as a modality of action, what would be examples of modalities of inaction?

The reason I am so drawn to Saba Mahmood’s work is not just that I share with her an interest in the notion of liberation in an Islamic setting. My thesis, like her work, focuses on “Muslim women” which carry the burden of answering to secular-liberal insquisitions due to the “assumptions this dubious [of “Muslim woman”] triggers in the Western imagination concerning Islam’s patriarchal and misogynist qualities.”⁹⁵ In this sense, Mahmood’s strategy is to –through a juxtaposition of the practices of religious Muslim women against secular-liberal notions of agency, body and authority– to examine the Egyptian mosque movement. This, she argues, was a task she did not chose but one which was ‘thrust upon her’ by outside forces, e.g. expectations of the readership. She writes,

“Not wanting to promote the particular assumptions that such a framing entails, I have attempted to circumvent these predictable modes of reading by parochializing the terms my readership is likely to bring to this material, displacing them through a combination of narrative description and analytical pre-emption.”⁹⁶

My work is linked with Mahmood’s because I too have chosen to focus on a subject matter which involves women in an Islamic setting, against the backdrop of ‘secular-liberal assumptions’. But while Mahmood’s ethnographic work looks at pious women, illustrating, by using secular-liberal tools, how these negotiate their fate if only we look at agency differently – I look at women engaged in social activities on the other side of the secular-liberal spectrum (to put it

⁹⁴ H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1991), p. 5

⁹⁵ S. Mahmood, *Politics of Piety*, p. 189

⁹⁶ *Ibid.* p. 191

crudely). This thesis looks at women footballers in the Islamic Republic of Iran, women whose activity is portrayed to be inundated with connotations of resistance and subversion of a dominant misogynist, patriarchal and religious state.

Canaries in the mine

A study of women's football in Iran might seem to some at first glance as the study of a phenomenon which is fundamentally at odds with the Iranian state ideology today. Women's football is both peripheral to the way in which football is coded by the state, as well as being sidelined by the history of football more generally. Yet, on closer observation, this very conceptualization of seeing women's football as an activity for the peripheries, places the State firmly at the centre of the debate, as the nodal point of the image. Azar Nafisi, the author of *Reading Lolita in Tehran*, says "women have now become the canaries in the mine in Iran [...] if you want to know how free a society is, you look at its women"⁹⁷. Nafisi's observation is not a novel one, women's activities are often linked to the state on a dual scale of resistance versus compliance. The term 'state' here means the ideological and signifying state apparatus as a whole which includes extra-state bodies which legitimise state ideologies.

I have already discussed at the image of women's football in Iran, the connotations and stories already captured in the image of an Iranian woman playing football in *hijab* in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The image works both ways, for some it shows a resistance against Islamic ideas of women's movement and ways of being, to others it shows a reimagining of a masculine and secular sport by creative women resisting both limitations

⁹⁷ Azar Nafisi, "Iran's Women: canaries in the coalmine", *the Times*, November 27, 2010, (Accessed August 12, 2012), <http://www.thetimes.co.uk/tto/opinion/columnists/article2823802.ece>

within the Islamic Republic as well as international masculine and corporate norms within football in general. Whatever the story, the image is one which is weighed against and refers to the state, as a signifier, whether this is the Islamic Republic or the international community of the state-football nexus. The notion of rhizomatic responses aims to move beyond, or away from, this way of seeing, of always having a rigid and constant state, which is not only at the top and centre of the situation but also embodied in the agents within it. The very organisation of women's football in Iran suggests this as a more useful analytic tool, based on personal connections across the bureaucratic field, working for and against the state simultaneously as it moves and changes.

On the one hand I would like to examine the changing normative notions of women's sexuality within the context of the nation-state. The close relation of football to the making of the modern nation state would make this a viable and relevant context for my argument. I could then continue to look at how women's football in the Islamic Republic can be seen as a way in which women have become active in a physical activity which they were largely absent from due to its now homosocial context. On the other hand, I could show that women have rather than become present in women's football have redefined and desexualised the sport and re-assigned it within the context of the Islamic Republic, using *hijab* and gender-segregation to create 'private' spaces in public institutions such as parks and other sports facilities. These would however reinforce the role of the state as the signifier, and the although the women are given their agency within state limitations, would be contained solely within the stratification of the state, either resisting, complying or subverting state ideology. The image of women footballers playing in isolated homosocial spaces and/or in hijab is already a coded imagery in relation to the Islamic Republic; already filled with instances of resistance versus compliance. However, this is not only a highly limiting framework of analysis but it is

also a misleading one. It assigns a role to the abstract machine of the state, without actually attempting to conceptualize its relationship with the performances of the women in question. Using this framework would be already burying myself epistemologically before approaching any one women footballer, it would never go beyond the initial exoticised contradictions of veil-yet-movement, Islam yet women's sport, and traditional yet modern. It is worth repeating that the critique of the central role of the 'state as signifier' is not necessarily the same as ignoring the signifying role of the state apparatus as a whole, but rather the avoidance of immediately collapsing everything into a binary relationship with the state.

Erika Friedl discusses what she refers to as "sources of female power" in Iran and mentions work as one of these sources. Friedl writes,

"[women] can derive power to effect changes in their own and in others' affairs from the very relations of inequality that define their position: from concrete, adversarial circumstances in their lives, from the existential conditions to which they are confined, unfavorable as they might be."⁹⁸

On the one hand, this description fits that of women footballers in this thesis. I argue too that the social activity of women's football derives its organisational structure from the very marginalization by the central sporting bodies. However, the notion of confinement due to existential conditions that women through activities in the public sphere challenge or resist is a conceptual paradigm that I do not support. Instead I would argue that we need to take the social activity that is derived from marginalization seriously, and accept it as a challenge to this notion of existential confinement. Through this lens Friedl sees resistance in refusals

⁹⁸ Erika Friedl, *In the Eye of the Storm: Women in Post-Revolutionary Iran*, (London: IB Taurus, 1994), p. 153

to uphold notions of hijab and in some cases of suicide⁹⁹. I agree with the author in the spirit of the statement that subordinate groups are both ‘oppressed and powerful simultaneously’, however I believe that the phrasing of this dichotomy is problematic for more than simply semantic reasons.

Furthermore, activities of women in particular seem to have a tendency to be seen through the lens of the state. Jennifer Hargreaves description of the 1984 300 meter women’s hurdle champion Moutawakel is naturally a victory “over a unified, restricted ‘way of life’ that normally excludes women from sport”¹⁰⁰. Here is the state once again, in the form of a unified Islamic cultural entity against which Moutawakel by definition resists. The latter’s running has no other meaning than that which can be state-signified. It is not only that “women have become potent symbols of identity and visions of society and the nation”¹⁰¹, but that women’s activities and actions seem to only exist as reactions or results of state markers. Najmabadi’s writing on the changing image of sexuality in Iranian national project is another example of this¹⁰². Although the state or state ideology in this study is not hidden but is the central point of reference, it is nevertheless taken for granted as the *creator of signs*. The Iranian state leads the transformation of change, creating or rather redefining signs such as the knowledge of women or transforming women’s presence in the public sphere through printed works. Najmabadi discusses the latter in her paper ‘veiled discourse-unveiled bodies’, in which she attempts to examine what she calls a “rescripting of Iranian women’s language tending to produce a sexually demarked language, a veiled language”¹⁰³. She

⁹⁹ Ibid. pp. 152-153

¹⁰⁰ J. Hargreaves, *Heroines of Sport*, p. 46

¹⁰¹ L. Abu-Lughod, *Remaking women*, p. 3

¹⁰² See A. Najmabadi, ‘Veiled Discourse- Unveiled Bodies’, *Feminist Studies* Vol. 19 (3), Autumn 1993, pp. 487-518, see also A. Najmabadi, *Women with Moustaches and Men without beards: Gender and Sexual Anxieties of Iranian Modernity*, (London: University of California Press, 2005)

¹⁰³ A. Najmabadi, *Veiled Discourse*, p. 487

writes: “Two new institutions were the central spaces in which these transformations took shape: the new school for girls and the new press”¹⁰⁴. I am not critiquing Najmabadi’s argument here as I am looking at one particular element in her argument: the way in which the state, or institutions which are either of the state or directly oppose it, are conceptualized.

Najmabadi refers to the coming of the book as that which allowed women’s voices to reach beyond their homosocial and oral spaces to heterosocial, public and modern spaces. The book makes the private public, or rather the book *creates* the public. Here we notice that the book is not only a space but a vehicle which is already potentially public. The book in this analysis a vehicle of the modern nation state, and already at odds with the voice of the pre-modern Iranian woman which is private and sexual. The language in which women then write becomes immediately related to the state, not only by its content but also through its form, the book. Furthermore, in Najmabadi’s argument the book, as the state, is gendered masculine, and within it women thrive by mimicry.

Their adoption of a desexualized language, the new bodily language of a disciplined educated self, works to produce this new woman, modern and desexualized and simultaneously works to produce the pre-modern woman as physically veiled but sexually unveiled and open¹⁰⁵. The main argument aside, we see the position of the State/Book/Modernity as the central signifier against which women’s language is judged either desexualised or sexualised. In this analysis, there is no room for lines of flight, to movements of de-territorialisation – only stratification. All signs are organized towards the same goal, as *pistan* (Breast) becomes *sine* (Chest), we see a process of transformation of cleansing the language of

¹⁰⁴ Ibid. p. 488

¹⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 488

sexual connotations which the author can trace¹⁰⁶. The language becomes the road that perhaps the vehicle-book travels on, and all roads lead to the centre image, the State.

Abu Lughod's critique of Kandiyoti's focus on state policies and nationalist projects is an important one too. In this focus women become in Abu Lughod's words "passive onlookers", but more importantly even their actions become defined only along state-patriarchal lines¹⁰⁷. Nevertheless, it is Kandiyoti's "patriarchal bargain" which can be seen as a way out of this very problem¹⁰⁸. The patriarchy in this framework is not a rigid and constant state-patriarchy and the patriarchal bargains are "not timeless or immutable entities"¹⁰⁹. The state-bureaucracy is not a rigid entity which limits movements of women who then in turn bargain with it. It is a process of bureaucratization, a process of stratification and retaining of elements and making others exterior to it. This process is also one from which there are lines of flight, connections which work against it, rhizomatic responses which are only resistances or compliances, or combinations thereof, from the view of the abstracted centre of the state, which is in the middle. I will therefore begin by looking at how we can imagine the State, capitalized here as it represents the central bureaucratic organisation, be it the state, the state-football nexus or the hegemonic political ideology. I will show here that the state, rather than signifying or creating signs against which actors can resist or comply, stratifies and retains certain elements which it attempts to consequently divide from other elements; "it inhibits, slows down, or controls those relations"¹¹⁰. To put it crudely, in the case of Najmabadi's desexualised language, the State (which in this case is Najmabadi herself) retains certain

¹⁰⁶ Ibid. pp. 488-489

¹⁰⁷ L. Abu Lughod, *Remaking women*, p. 5

¹⁰⁸ Deniz Kandiyoti, "Bargaining with Patriarchy", *Gender and society* Vol. 2 (3), September 1998, p. 275

¹⁰⁹ Ibid. p. 275

¹¹⁰ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, 2004, p. 478

elements of the book which in itself is made of infinite lines of flight, and cuts it off from other 'external' elements.

The book, and in my case, football, can therefore be seen as not only a vehicle towards the state, which is a role retained by the state, but forms a rhizomatic relationship with the world only to be organized and ordered by a process of stratification but always also involved in the deterritorialization of the world around it. To illustrate this relationship, I will first attempt to look briefly at the history of football. This history is relevant because it presents the physical activity I am concerned with here but also to show its apparent umbilical link with the state. Secondly, I will briefly look at the history of football in Iran and the changing roles of the state-football nexus within the socio-political contexts of the Pahlavi era. Finally, we will look at the revolutionary and post-revolutionary period and what is perceived as the revival of women's football in the Islamic Republic of Iran, basing this section both on secondary sources in English, as well as primary sources and statistical information gathered in Iran including interviews with coaches, players and administrators.

“Women, football and Iran, did you just combine your three favourite topics?”

The questions of why I chose to dedicate a significant part of my life reading, discussing, and writing about women's football in Iran has been asked in every conversation I have had about my thesis. The decision to embark on this journey was taken during my Master Degree in History at the School of Oriental and African Studies. I moved to London from Sweden to study history in 2002 and although initially had more of a regional interest in Southeast Asia, particularly Burma, the political situation around me, and so many other Muslim (or indeed 'Muslim

looking') people shaped much of my political identity. The most memorable event for me was when I was stopped and searched by the Metropolitan Police outside King's Cross Station. I was on my way to the University campus for my History of Islam course and had therefore a bag full of books on Islam. The policeman asked to search my bag and while doing so asked me who I was and where I was going. I explained, but kept my eyes on the bag, realising what he was about to find and I remember feeling afraid and instinctually preparing some form of apology and explanation for his inevitable questioning regarding the books.

Predictably the policeman upon finding the books looked up at me and reached for his radio reporting his find to a colleague who a few minutes later also turned up. They both then began questioning me about the books as one of them flicked through them, paying particular attention to the Venture of Islam. The second police officer turned up and after a short deliberation they allowed me to walk away. I was a little shaken, and late for my class, but after a little reflection I gained perspective on the event and felt an immediate shame. I was ashamed of my apologetic reaction even before the policeman had found the books.

At the time I was also working at a pharmacy as a cashier and in July 2005 there was a bomb scare at the Underground Station next to where I worked. The police came in to the pharmacy and asked me to help them look at the CCTV footage our store had captured of the times the suspect was thought to have passed in front of our shop and I walked away with them to our cellar where the CCTV was located and assisted them. The next day I came to work I noticed the shop staff were acting differently towards me and as I approached the wardrobe to change into work clothes, a colleague told me that the manager wanted to see me. I proceeded to the manager's office, noticing people whispering behind me and could not guess what the meeting would be about. She sat me

down and said, “Arash, you know I like to be straightforward with you so I’m going to go ahead and just ask you something out right: Are you a suicide bomber?” I answered in the negative and after a sigh of relief she smiled and said, “Good, I didn’t think so. I had to ask, you do understand, don’t you?” It turns out people had seen me walking away with the police and assumed this was for questioning regarding the bomb.

These and other similar experiences made me feel like I needed to confront the discourses involved in shaping the image of the ‘Muslim’ in the West. I began paying more attention to the ways in which Muslims were portrayed in the media and in academia and noticed the centrality of gender and the ways in which gender informed much of the imagery used to reduce and essentialise Islam and Muslims vis-à-vis the West. What is referred to as the veil, and the veiled woman, became particularly visible here as important symbols in the representation of Muslims during this period. In popular representation, interpretations of the veil are constantly presented within the binaries of freedom/bondage and rarely understood in any religious or faith based systems or even markers of gender difference. Volkening writes,

“More than a border between men and women the veil signifies [...] the border between Europe and the Muslim world. The veil serves as a symbol for the oppression of women against which the West wants to prove itself as being emancipatory [...] ‘The veiled woman’ marks the point where [...] the colonial West can pose as a liberator (of women)”¹¹¹

During that same period (2005-6) several books were published on or related to the subject of young Iranian women. Amongst these were Azar Nafisi’s “Reading Lolita in Tehran”, Azadeh Moaveni’s “Lipstick Jihad” and Kaveh Basmenji’s “Tehran Blues”. What struck me about these books was

¹¹¹ Volkening (2001) quoted in E. Klaud and S. Kassel, ‘The veil as means of legitimization: An analysis of the interconnectedness of gender, media and war’, *Journalism*, Vol. 6 (3), 2005, p. 341

immediately their cover images, the first with two young women with head scarves looking down with curiosity on what probably is Nabokov's *Lolita*, the second is a young woman on a mobile phone wearing her headscarf half-way up her head casually while walking a mosque, and the third of a young woman in a headscarf tucked behind her ears smoking a cigarette.

In each of these I sensed a story of rebellion and subversion of something traditional and ahistorical, perhaps even resistance to dominant societal pressures. What was most striking however was that the images translated meanings to me due to some kind of symbolic code I had learnt or accepted. A casually veiled woman with a mobile phone in a mosque, a young woman smoking while showing her ears in Iran, and young women reading a sexually suggestive book all meant something more than simply the individual acts they portrayed, they all contained an element of resistance/liberation. How do these images translate to resistance or subversion? What grammatical or symbolic system was I referring to when I translated these as such? More importantly I realised that the images did not only portray resistance but also an atmosphere of liberation. Wendy Brown discusses how what she refers to as "the conceit of secularism" underpins discourse of tolerance in liberal multicultural societies and legitimises their aggression against and intolerance toward non-liberal formations. She writes,

The moral autonomy of the individual at the heart of liberal tolerance discourse is also critical in drawing the line between the tolerable and intolerable both domestically and globally, and thereby serves to sneak liberalism into a civilizational discourse that claims to be respectful of all cultures and religions, many of which it would actually undermine by 'liberalizing'.¹¹²

¹¹² W. Brown, *Regulating Aversion: Tolerance in the Age of Identity and Empire*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), p. 8 P. 8

Just as Orientalism was described by Edward Said as a statement of power and a claim for authority¹¹³, what underpins the image of the veiled woman as a victim or yet-to-be-liberated was an understanding of freedom/liberation as a secular state. It was this that in the end led me to consider starting my research at the juncture of Islam/Women/Freedom.

Simultaneously, in the summer of 2006 I saw the film *Offside* by Jafar Panahi which portrayed the ways in which a group of women attempted to gain entry to in Tehran's Azadi Stadium to watch the Iranian male national team play. The film gathered some coverage and the media had a few articles about the stadium ban for women in Iran during male football matches. It then hit me that women's football in Iran would as a topic capture all of my interest. The image of the woman footballer, covered from head to toe, illustrates like the images above those same signs of resistance/liberation. The veil and loose outfit are seen as obstacles for playing the game efficiently. Yet, it is an imposed and state sanctioned precondition of outdoor football, not to mention the notion of choosing to wear it while also choosing to play the sport. I decided then to pursue this issue, travel to Iran and investigate how women footballers see themselves, what playing football means to them and how they organize their sport and compare these notes to the perspectives I was familiar with.

Methodology

The research for this thesis was meant to be simple. The plan was to arrive in Iran in the summer of 2008 and organise as many meetings

¹¹³ See for example E. Said, 'Orientalism Revisited', *Middle East Research and Information Project*, Vol. 18, January/February 1988, p. 97

as I could with people involved in women's football and essentially draw a map of the organisation of women's football in the Islamic Republic of Iran as I went along. I was also meant to make contact with at least one football team whom I could follow for a few months, during training, before matches and after whenever else they got together. To do this I was going to focus on the professional league, and maybe also the women's national team, whose head coach I had contacted and who was very cooperative and outspoken. In the end however, my methodology was something completely different and new to me. Instead, during the course of my research, it precisely became the way I was gathering data, the way in which I was meeting new players and coaches that became the central aspect of the way I saw the organisation of women's football. The further from my original methodological plan I got the more comfortable I became with our findings, as I moved from a grounded and institutionally bound study to a multi-sited ethnography¹¹⁴.

The experience of research was different from what I had planned, even with the allowance for bureaucratic obstacles. I was faced with abrupt end to interviews when someone I had not met before told me or my interlocutors that we had to leave, phone numbers we were given were out of use, a few times whole institutions were no longer where they were said to be in their official address but had moved across the city and in total more meetings were cancelled than were successfully held. Together with my peer ethnographers, I was moved around, mainly around Tehran, Esfahan and surrounding regions with very little data to show for it.

¹¹⁴ G. E. Marcus, 'Ethnography in/of the World System: The Emergence of Multi-Sited Ethnography', *Annual Review of Anthropology*, Vol. 24, 1995, pp. 95-117

It was one of my interlocutors that opened my eyes to thinking about my research in a different way, and instead of marking the closed doors and constant re-referrals to other people as failed attempts, I instead began making detailed observations of who moves me where and for what purpose.

My own research in Iran took place between August 2008 and October 2008, and a second trip between September and November 2009. I am myself of Iranian origin, with Persian as my mother tongue, and with family and friends scattered around the large urban centres gave me a material advantage to many other reserachers of Iran. However, the issue of insider-outsider identity and ethnographic positioning is far more complex than simply linguistic and cultural. As a man in his late twenties interviewing women about sports, there were several different layers of variables involved. One the one hand, I was a male from a Western University, and therefore met with an understandable suspicion particularly from male bureaucrats, as well as female bureaucrats who were not directly involved with women's football specifically. On the other hand, my age (and I have been told I look like I am in my early twenties when I am clean shaven, which I was at the time) did lead to a certain paternal/maternal relationship with certain authority figures. I was someone doing an ambitious project and they were assisting me with my research, was the general feeling at times¹¹⁵.

As a footballer myself, I did have a connection with many of the active participants in Women's Football that perhaps would not be present had I been solely focused on for example gender or leisure in general. The discussions about football, about injuries and strategic

¹¹⁵ What Easterday would refer to as "paternalistic" attitude, see Easterday, Papademas, Shorri and Valentine, 'the making of a female researcher: Role problems in field work', *Urban Life*, Vol. 6 (3),1977

differences between indoor and outdoor football were smooth and often allowed a deeper discussion about the difficulties and obstacles than I felt my interlocutors, who were not footballers, managed to discuss.

The Interlocutors

Shabbazi discusses the difficulties of working your way around and through the bureaucracy of Iran. He mentions the particular difficulties of local officials and administrators making decisions in the “absence of established administrative procedures”¹¹⁶. Although Shabbazi’s research was in the 90s, there was a constant need to renegotiate, at every turn with local officials or gate keepers, either by myself or my interlocutors. The process of gaining access was a complex process to be discussed in the chapters that follow. Being an ‘insider’ to a certain extent, may have helped my relationship with some officials, however, were equally an obstacle at other times. Most of this work however was not done by myself but was done by three interlocutors, my aunt, my mother and my cousin (a complete family affair) who assisted me both when I was in the country and when I was back home in the UK.

Rouhi, my aunt, is a librarian by trade and works in Esfahan in a private company where she organised and managed the library. She is also an author of several books, articles and hundreds of unpublished short stories. Before I reached Iran she already began interviewing some young women who played in the university football team not far from her house. The early interviews were highly formulaic and I had not agreed to her doing them. Rouhih also tended to ask leading questions, pushing the interviewee into more abstracted conversation about football and Iranian society. After long discussions in my first few days with Rouhih we agreed that we would observe and simply be with footballers as observers, avoid leading questions, and take as many notes as we could. The notes

¹¹⁶ Mohammed Shabbazi, ‘Insider/outsider: an indigenous anthropologist bridges a gap’, *Iranian Studies* Vol 37 (4) 2004, p. 596

would be subjective and personal, and we would go where our interlocutors would lead us. Even at this point my research was open, I did not know what I would end up with apart from the fact that I wanted to be open with those who helped me and those with whom I spoke.

My cousin was a footballer herself, she was not comfortable with the interviews or taking notes, however helped open many doors. Even before 2008, I had spoken to a few footballers, a handball player and a basketball coach on the phone thanks to my cousin's introductions.

My mother was in Iran in 2008 for almost six months. I had not asked her to help me but partly because of her love for me as her son, and partly because it allowed her a pass when it came to any family pressures, she, sometimes together with Rouhi, travelled the country, to different tournaments and football clubs, writing about them in her diary. My mother was new to multi-sited qualitative research, although had worked on her MA Dissertation on Education in Iran, and we spoke about the best way to do it. Contrary to Rouhi, my mother was much less eager to lead discussions with players or coaches to specific places and conversations. Her diaries were invaluable and extremely detailed, expressing her own anxieties while waiting for interviews, navigating the bureaucratic fields and her impressions of every person she talked to. She did fewer interviews, and often with non-footballers she gained access to through the snowballing method, and although these were not used they helped shape the framework and conceptualisation of my thesis.

Gaining access to a gender segregated social activity, in a state with gender repressive laws and strict segregation, was the primary concern when preparing for my field research. To a large extent, this

is what I wanted help with from my interlocutors, to gain access on my behalf and if this was not possible to observe and interview whoever they could and take notes, and if possible record the conversation. Gatekeepers were of particular value. In a state where permissions are never truly 'official' and where local administrators or officials can overturn a permit, or ask for further 'proof' it is these gatekeepers or influencers who allow access. My experience was much like that of Rezai-Rashti who looked to strategies other than permits once those doors began closing, and started looking towards the "network of academics and researchers who were supportive"¹¹⁷. The nature of this method, the use of trust to network will all be discussed below and will make up an important part of my thesis. However, as Rezai-Rashti reflects, it is noteworthy that this form of research clashes to a certain extent with the norms of research in Western academia where clearances and permissions and full transparency is key¹¹⁸.

Having female interlocutors who could gain access to gender-segregated areas, interview younger female footballers and observe training and competition was invaluable for the research. However, in the end I chose to exclude most of the interviews, mainly due to the leading nature of the questions. Yet, the diaries and notes taken by both my interlocutors were invaluable and in 2009 as I sat to consolidate my notes into some coherent thesis I ended up with a significant number of pages of ethnographic notes. It was then that Rouhi introduced me to the work of Dr. Ata Hoodashtian, an Iranian philosopher based in Canada. The reference came to her in an epiphany during a conversation we were having about the difficulties

¹¹⁷ G. Rezai-Rashti, 'Conducting field research on gender relations in a gender repressive state: a case study of gender research in Iran', *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, Vol 26 (4), 2013

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

faced in the research process in Iran. We were discussing how it was not the issue of my gender as a man that seemed to be the most difficult challenge, as I had previously imagined and to some extent prepared for, but rather gaining access to a team or a group of players, something I believed was crucial in the way I had planned my ethnographic research. A traditional ethnography, whatever that may be, seemed impossible. She then opened her laptop and showed me Dr. Hoodashtian discussing the concept of rhizome in an interview on YouTube¹¹⁹.

He said the concept of 'rhizome' was yet to be translated into Farsi and described it as the "opposite of the tree-root system", a description I would disagree with now but which at the time opened my eyes to a whole new way of thinking. I immediately downloaded Deleuze and Guattari's "A Thousand Plateaus" and began reading the entire book from cover to cover, a method of reading it specifically warned against¹²⁰. Everything I had learnt up until then; the history of the sport as an ignored peripheral activity with occasional flashes of confrontation with mainstream male football globally, the post-revolutionary revival of the sport from an informal social activity to an institutionally integrated but nevertheless still ignored and peripheral sport and the way in which it seemed to function outside, beyond and above all hierarchical and bureaucratic lines it was formally given –all fitted into this idea of rhizome. Rather than a concept I could neatly present my data through, the rhizomatic was a confidence-boost in what had seemed as an unproductive research period.

¹¹⁹ A. Hoodashtian Theory of Rhizome, YouTube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=woN7QP0GEEw>

¹²⁰ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A thousand plateaus*, (London: Continuum, 2004)

My research methodology became rhizomatically organised, and no longer institutionally bound. Marcus argues that multi-sited ethnography focuses on a social phenomena or activity that cannot be fully grasped within a single site¹²¹. In this respect, the concept of multi-sited ethnography, and its promotion of spatial decentred-ness, was precisely what I needed to adopt¹²². Critique of multi-sited research includes the notion that these imply a tacit holism, as if those who remain within an institution or 'place' miss out on the 'bigger picture'. Ghassan Hage argues that "the body of the anthropologist, even a post-modern one, simply cannot cope with such fast and intensive travelling for a very lengthy period of time."¹²³ Indeed Hage is right when he claims that many anthropologist, and he specifically mentions Malinowski's study of the Kula ring, have been multi-sited in that they move between "geographically non-contiguous spaces"¹²⁴. But what a multi-sited ethnography does allow is for a research that is forced to consider the space as a production of different forces rather than a backdrop to social events. Mark-Anthony Falzon discusses this in his paper on multi-sited ethnography and its relation to notions of space as a product¹²⁵.

One of the biggest critiques of multi-sited ethnography however, and one which I myself have thought deeply about in relation to my own research is that of 'lack of depth'. However, Falzon puts it eloquently when he states, "it is not just time that transforms and makes, but

¹²¹ G. E. Marcus, Ethnography in/of the World System

¹²² M.A. Falzon, 'Introduction', *Multi-Sited Ethnography: Theory, Praxis and Locality in Contemporary Research*, (Cambridge: University of Cambridge, 2009), p. 2

¹²³ G. Hage, 'A Not so Multi-sited Ethnography of a not so Imagined Community', *Anthropology Theory*, Vol. 5 (4), 2005, p. 465

¹²⁴ Ibid. p. 467

¹²⁵ M.A. Falzon, Introduction', *Multi-Sited Ethnography*, p. 4

also space.”¹²⁶ Thus, to assume time is the only variable that gives depth to research is to overlook the role of space.

The rhizomatic response of women’s football to its experiences in the Islamic Republic of Iran could only be understood by being open to the snowball method. I must make it clear here that I am not proposing that my fieldwork was led by those I met, and that I was a mere pinball led through the maze of Iranian bureaucracy by those I met in the field. As I explained above, I did not know how to proceed and how to conceptualise what seemed like limited data at the time before I came across the Deleuze and Guattari’s work. It was a choice of mine to move from informant to informant as they introduced me to different people, and to cut my ties as they were cut by institutional guardians and try new ways of making new contacts.

I mention my methodological journey because it is an oft repeated one in multi-sited ethnographic research. In fact Falzon summarises what he calls the multi-sited programme’s own “road to Damascus storyline”¹²⁷ as follows:

“As originally planned, my fieldwork was to be conventionally single-sited; after some time on site, however, an epiphanic moment revealed to me that this was inadequate; I therefore those to move around”¹²⁸

I aim to illustrate that the fluid movements of myself and my interlocutors, across the bureaucratic and institutional lines that seemed to exist in theory, allows for a different research and a different thesis – one that would not be possible had I followed a single football club or a single set of players. It is not more holistic, it

¹²⁶ Ibid. p. 8

¹²⁷ M.A. Falzon, 2009, p. 12

¹²⁸ Ibid.

is simply a way to capture a small and importantly limited aspect of women's football in Iran – its organisation.

There is also a different side to the multi-sited approach. In *Faces of the State*, Yael Navaro-Yashin observes correctly that “most recent anthropological studies of the political have followed the strategy of picking a social institution and studying its production of public discourse.”¹²⁹ Partly Navaro-Yashin puts this down to the influence of Michel Foucault who challenged anthropologists to widen the concept of ‘politics’ to incorporate in every domain. Indirectly, this has led to anthropological research to be limited to distinct institutions. Navaro-Yashin’s choice not to limit the study on one institution and its production of discourse but instead the study of the political in Turkey led to “a more messy arena”. Similarly, my thesis of women’s football in Iran, although not as broad as ‘public space’ or ‘political’, is not bound by a single institution and can therefore widen the notion of the political and the political impact of women’s football and its organisational characteristics in relation to larger societal norms and bureaucratic practices.

One of the limitations of the ‘snowball’ methodology is the way in which relying on the recommendations and connections of players that show some interest to the study rather than attaining a foothold in a particular institution or group is that the research is to a large extent driven by the specificities of these individuals. Their commonalities will be highlighted above others, for example those who participated in the interviews and were most helpful were those who were confident and outspoken. For example, as the social

¹²⁹ Y. Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey*, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 2

activity of women's football in Iran is to a large extent dependent on the interconnectedness that my methodology also makes use of, I may not have avoided Clarke's problems of the 'snowball' methodology whereby contacts introduce the researcher to new contacts¹³⁰. The latter realised in her study of lesbian PE teachers that the snowball method limited her contacts to similar socio-economic backgrounds¹³¹. However, the strengths of the method allowed me to move between different spheres, public and private, across hierarchies and together with my interlocutors make contacts, and temporary alliances that made the eventual interviews and observations possible.

The rhizomatic

My introduction to Deleuze and Guattari has been mentioned above. Mostly, when I refer to the work of Deleuze and Guattari I am referring to their *A Thousand Plateaus*. The rhizomatic also ties together the embodied, the spatial and the organisational, aspects I explore below in the core chapters of this thesis. It does so by allowing for interconnectedness, linkages and assemblages as well as lines of flight – the rhizome “fosters connections between fields”¹³².

¹³⁰ G. Clarke, 'Playing a part: The lives of lesbian physical education teachers', in G. Clarke & B. Humberstone (Eds), *Researching women and sport*, (London: Macmillan, 1997)

¹³¹ See Caudwell's discussion of the snowballing method in J. Caudwell, *Sporting Gender*, p. 374

¹³² G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A thousand plateaus*, p. 12 I purposefully do not want to write a long subchapter about Deleuze and Guattari's work and their concept of rhizome as if their metaphor is the central concept in my thesis, it is not. It is a metaphor, a conceptual tool or category that allows me to best present my findings here. Deleuze and Guattari can be and have been used for all sorts of argumentation, most controversially to myself by Shimon Naveh, an Israeli former Brigadier General who helped develop the counterinsurgency doctrine of IDF from the start of the second intifada, see Y. Feldman, 'Dr. Naveh, or, how I learned to stop worrying and walk through walls', *Haaretz*, October 25, 2007

What is particularly helpful with Deleuze and Guattari's notion of the rhizomatic is the way it allows for connections between points, movement and fluidity without seeing these as contradictory to what they refer to as arborescent model of thought: "a new rhizome may form in the heart of a tree."¹³³ Most relevant is way in which the rhizome is heterogenous and it is made up of multiplicities – or rather "multiplicities are rhizomatic". For me this was a helpful way to see women's football because it seemed to have no centralised authority as such, and the rhizomatic is decentred, and radically so: "there are no points or positions in a rhizome, such as those found in a structure, tree, or root. There are only lines."¹³⁴ Women's football in Iran, although it passes through the gates of bureaucracy and institutional nodal points is made up of lines that move across and beyond stratifying institutions and norms. This is not to say that an authoritative office or official hierarchy does not exist, on the contrary the official 'center' or authority of women's football is discussed below as a particularly important point through which much of women's football passes.

The problem arises when Deleuze and Guattari state that the rhizome "never allows itself to be overcoded"¹³⁵, if we therefore mean that women's football cannot be overcoded, cannot be captured by the state or gender norms. I do not mean this and the rhizomatic response that I claim women's football to be is such because of Deleuze and Guattari's follow-up principle, that of "asignifying rupture". They write,

"Every rhizome contains lines of segmentarity according to which it is stratified, territorialised, organised, signified,

¹³³ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A thousand plateaus*, p. 16

¹³⁴ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A thousand plateaus*, p. 9

¹³⁵ Ibid.

attributed, etc., as well as lines of deterritorialisation down which it constantly flees. There is a rupture in the rhizome whenever segmentary lines explode into a line of flight, but the line of flight is part of the rhizome. These lines always tie back to one another. That is why one can never posit a dualism or a dichotomy [...] You may make a rupture, draw a line of flight, yet there is still a danger that you will reencounter organisations that restratify everything”¹³⁶

The rhizomatic is in short a model that refuses dualism, and women’s football, with the implied and sometimes assumed notions of freedom/oppression, modernity/tradition and secular/religious is ripe with dualistic connotations. I did not want to force ‘contradiction’ onto what I was perceiving and hearing, such as women playing football become more masculine, yet they are women¹³⁷. I wanted to avoid this precisely because it seemed to be so apparent in the image of the Iranian female footballer from my own perspective as a Western educated secularised man (Tradition/Modernity, Movement/Modesty, Masculine/Feminine, Religious/Liberal).

Admittedly, Deleuze and Guattari’s work can be interpreted in multiple ways, as can and are all theories. Their theory has provided a way for me to structure my notes, indeed find them in the first place, in such a way that allows for a positive and authoritative thesis that hopefully manages to make a few positive claims while avoiding to make reductionist ones that collapse the experience of football players to that of civilizational warriors.

This thesis is an examination of a social activity, which, at least aesthetically, is centred around the body. Feminist literature on the body continues to find new ways of discussing the relationship of the

¹³⁶ Ibid. p. 10

¹³⁷ See Chapter 5.

body to discourse, and the way in which patriarchal and sexist society relates to the body on an experiential level. I found that Deleuze and Guattari's writing, particularly in *A Thousand Plateaus*, allowed me to consider the experiential level as an interaction with specific tasks, creating assemblages with other bodies in football teams whilst crossing lines of gender, spatial segregation and institutional lines, without resorting to the subversion/resistance literature as I have stated above. Deleuze and Guattari think of bodies as assemblages and as such refute the understanding of the body as a unity which exist in a space (also a unity) and is limited by culture (again a unity). Their theory attempts to avoid beginning with the whole, or the signifier, before examining its parts. More importantly, through them I see women's football as a social activity and a bodily investment not as a representation of a hidden reason or case that is located in some deep structural explanation or some veiled unconscious but see it as I see it in its linkages and connections, as an ever revealing present¹³⁸.

Structure

Chapter 1: The State and the History of Women's Football in Iran

This chapter argues that we need to move beyond reductive resistance/compliance dichotomy when looking at women's football in Iran. Women's activities in particular have a tendency to be seen as respondent solely to state/religion symbolisation and therefore only legitimate within a resistance versus compliance framework. As Abu

¹³⁸ See Deleuze and Guattari, 2004, or the discussion on Deleuze and Guattari in D. Currier, 'Feminist technological futures: Deleuze and body/technology assemblages', *Feminist Theory*, Vol. 4 (3), 2003, p. 326

Lughod argues, this state-centric framework makes women into ‘passive onlookers’¹³⁹. Kandiyoti illustrates the need for fluidity in her notion of a patriarchal bargain, particularly when noting that we should avoid seeing patriarchy as a rigid or constant phenomenon and more importantly for this study we should avoid seeing the patriarchal bargains as ‘timeless or immutable entities’.

The chapter argues that state-bureaucracy is not a rigid entity which limits movement of women who then in turn bargain with it. It is rather that women’s football comes into contact with a bureaucratization, a process of stratification and retaining of certain elements and simultaneously making others exterior to it. From this process, I argue, there are always lines of flight, which are only resistances or subversions if we view it from a centrally positioned State figure. This will be illustrated both by looking at the history of football and at women’s football today.

Football is often seen as a success story of centralisation and state control. These histories place the state in the centre of the history of football and consequently the women’s game, the state-sponsored kind, is relegated to the ‘bottom’. In this paradigm the state is the final phenomenon, all other points link to it through a process of subordination. However, I hope to show that the nature of the state’s ‘acceptance’ of the women’s game helped create a ‘meshwork’ which becomes part of the football bureaucracy which also works away at it. This relationship is a dynamic one, with the state repeatedly attempting to plug the lines of flight, trying to interrupt the movements of de-territorialisation.

Moreover, I will see the development of football as an illustration of societal changes along organisational lines by which I mean “technologies,

¹³⁹ L. Abu Lughod, ‘Introduction: Feminist Longings and postcolonial conditions’, in Lila Abu-Lughod, *Remaking Women*, 1998, p. 5

organisational arrangements and ideational arrays [that] all combine to constitute mixed assemblages that allow certain actions, or 'ways of being' and forbid others. Football was for example integrated into Reza Shah's Iran as a way to further a dominant organisational metaphor. The Islamic Revolution, rather than being a period of pure de-bureaucratisation that some have suggested is rather an opening up of bureaucracy that despite Marx's statement that 'no one can escape bureaucracy', allows for escapes, women's football being one of these.

Chapter 2: Bureaucratic Institution of Women's Football

This chapter goes deeper into the internal structure of the rhizomatic response of women's football in contemporary Iran. It highlights the institutional milieu of this social activity and highlights the ways in which officials and individuals working inside and outside women's football reproduce its integration into the formal sporting structure of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The chapter challenges some feminist organisational studies analyses which see bureaucracy as a fixed patriarchal space within which women can resist through democratic or informal organisational methods. It argues instead that the cross-institutional and cross-hierarchical organisational methods of women's football in Iran both escape the formal structure but are also part of the formal bureaucracy. On an experiential level the chapter argues, those active in women's football see themselves within a large network of women's football which is subordinate to a higher managerial and masculine level. This in turn fuels inter-institutional links through trust and more specifically third-party guarantees internally as well as with outsiders, such as myself and my interlocutors.

The chapter briefly looks at the internal structure of the office of Women's Affairs in the Football Federation in Tehran which further illustrates the internally fluid network of women's football. It is again repeated that the constant deterritorialisation of women's football, which escapes the formalising powers of the state and ministry of physical education, are reterritorialised not through force but through the internal practices of women's football advocates. For example it is illustrated how through multiple employments and alliances coaches or administrators get around the formal channels of their respective institutions. The network is the territory, clearly marked by those in it. Hence the chapter is not arguing that women's football exist outside formal bureaucracy, as some other analyst have, often to fit into traditional views of social activity of women within the mentioned resistance-paradigm.

What is highlighted here is the way in which trust, and particularly third-party guarantees, maintains the ties or nodal points in the network. To some extent the research for this thesis was conducted along both formal lines as well as progressing through the network through third-party guarantees, each with differing results, the latter with significantly better and more in depth ethnographic results.

Chapter 3: Marginalisation, segregation and limitations – spatial dynamics in Women's Football in Iran

The third chapter looks at the spatial contestations involved in women's football in Iran. It begins with the idea that women's football to some respect reshapes or reimagines football stadia and other traditionally 'male' spaces as feminine. What is attempted here is a move away from this form of prioritization of the symbolic or representational over all other aspects of spatial production. As Lefebvre has noted, ethnographers often

prioritise the symbolic spatial configurations above all others. This often leads to those same resistance/compliance paradigms mentioned earlier. Like the discussions around bureaucracy in the chapter 2, structure in these paradigms (whether this is bureaucracy or more abstract notions of space) becomes a static background on which agents of limitless potentiality are foregrounded. The latter then are either liberated or limited depending on the spatial arrangements.

It will be shown here that women's football only materialises through and within gendered spatial configurations and reconfigurations which arguably rearticulate the processes of protection and domesticisation. Women play behind closed doors, in private, and these processes of seclusion reaffirm not only the gendered national discourse of masculine protection but also a gender autonomy and a legitimization of the alliances and rhizomatic responses women's football depends on. Contrary to Martina Low's interpretation, Lefebvrian concepts of spatial production here illustrates clearly that women's football not only contains lines of flight away from perceived rigidity of structure theoretical perspectives on space by Low, but also is in itself multiple lines of flight which the central bureaucracy, seen as a male/masculine entity by participants, working as a conductor that slows and attempts to capture these in certain points.

Chapter 4: Tuning the body – embodiment as a line of flight

The fourth chapter examines the notion that the female footballer is engaged in movements that can be perceived as crossing boundaries of feminine modesty, and thus not only counteracting norms of gender performance but also contradicting norms of gender performance. It begins however not with phallogentric gender norms, but instead begins

with the way in which women footballer's take part in the production of their bodily modalities in relation to the game of football, and consequently how these modalities and ways of being produces discourse. The central concept here is that of 'tuning the body'. This metaphor suggests the body as re-adjusted rather than changed and done so in relation to a certain activity, so as to be able to perform certain given tasks more efficiently. This paradigm therefore stands against reductionist notions of female 'handicap' in sporting situations, or contradicting bodily modalities which preoccupy female athletes who are somehow stuck between the feminine and the masculine.

It will be illustrated in this chapter that the women footballers I spoke to and met have a conscious understanding of their own bodies as alterable and re-adjustable tools in relation to their sport, and rarely if ever put their relative weakness vis-à-vis the men down to physical or biological deficiencies. This 'tuning' it is claimed here takes place within culture and not on some higher or extra-cultural space outside of heterosexual imperatives that stratify and materialise sexual difference in Iranian society. Furthermore, as in previous chapter, I am not arguing that this conceptualisation is a move from the fixed to the fluid, but rather that there is no significant subversion of societal norms taking place as a result of women footballer's bodily tuning.

The chapter will end with a discussion on Young's conclusions assumptions of notions of freedom and potentiality. It will be shown here that Young misses masculine bodily modalities within bodies that are coded female. She also ignores how masculine bodily tunings can come and go within the same body, like when a football player is authoritative and forceful in her playing style but at a later dinner party is tuned differently to the tasks at hand, engaged with the world around her in ways coded feminine.

Chapter 5: The return of the lines of flight

The final chapter will link the emphasis on the rhizomatic, lines of flight, and the fluid to that of the solidifying and dominant powers of the state. This chapter will hope to differentiate between the thesis here and that of others who prioritise the 'lived experience' over representational powers of institutions and state ideology, and indeed that of class relations. The dominance of gender norms within the social activity of women footballers will become evident here, even though this has escaped the previous chapters. What is often identified as transgression of gender norms, contradictions in female athleticism and other ways in which sports women's actions are subtly sidelined and patronised will be discussed here as a misleading phenomenon. It will be shown that the footballers interviewed for this thesis also displayed a belief in gender difference, of their own biological inferiority in their chosen tasks to that of men, and of the need for them to 'remain women', much like those of other similar studies around the world. However, it will be highlighted that the notion of 'contradiction' is a misleading analytical tool, which misses the ways in which the gender awareness and the tuning of bodies towards specific tasks exist simultaneously and without the clashes that 'contradiction' conjures up. Rather they exist in separate, yet connected, realms.

The chapter will also take a closer look at the Wall, a film about a female daredevil motorcyclist which exhibits many of the issues this thesis tackles. Through this film, and as a way to refocus the findings towards women's football and its production of discourse, I will then briefly look at Žižek's notion of 'fetishistic misrecognition' and Tim Ingold's 'logic of inversion'¹⁴⁰.

¹⁴⁰ See Chapter 5

Chapter 1: The State and the History of Women's Football in Iran

The history of women's football in Iran and its relationship with the state is a vibrant example of state interaction, integration and co-option of social forces in ways that helps us understand bureaucracy and state power. In this chapter, I aim to contextualise the discussion on women's football by demonstrating the relationship between the sport and state policies, both internationally and domestically.

Introduction

Football is a national sport in Iran, domestic and international football is followed by millions of fans across the country. H.E Chehabi once wrote, "ask any Iranian what Iran's national sport is, and the answer will be 'wrestling'¹⁴¹, I would humbly disagree with this statement although it probably depends largely on whom, where and when you ask the question. Aside from its mass appeal in terms of fandom and participation, football also provides a uniquely dynamic discussion topic in the country. It became evident to me quite early on in my fieldwork how potent the topic of football was and how quickly a discussion on

¹⁴¹ H. E. Chehabi, 'A political history of football in Iran', *Iranian studies* Vol. 35 (4), 2002, p. 371

football in Iran turned into a discussion of organisational and institutional limitations in the country as a whole.

This chapter will open the discussion on women's football in Iran by looking at its development and history both in the country and globally. In doing so, this study aims to avoid foregrounding the state as an immediate signifier against which all else is seen, when it in fact seems to be in a reactive position vis-à-vis the organisation of women's football, for example through interventions of segregation and creating other obstacles to the development of the sport (see next chapter). Rather than re-tell the established narrative of development from marginalised social activity to inclusion, this chapter attempts to reframe how we think about the relationship between women's football and the state. It is understandably tempting to cast the state as the protagonist in the story of football. International football is of course played between representative sides of nation states, and has experienced growth as an international organisation in the guise of FIFA with a genuine monopoly of all legitimate football. However, in providing a background and context to an analysis of women's football in Iran by looking at its historical development, this chapter is a critique of the place of the state in that narrative generally.

My argument here is two-fold. Primarily, I hope to illustrate that by looking at women's football in Iran we see that the story is far more complicated than a state-football nexus accepting and integrating women's football into its bureaucracy. Rather, the nature of this 'acceptance' has helped shape a meshwork which becomes part of the football bureaucracy over time but which at the same time also works against it. The State-football nexus does not simply integrate or accept women's football but constantly works away at it, trying to plug the lines of flight, and trying to stop or interrupt the movements of de-

territorialisation and to re-stratify it¹⁴². To imagine women's football as a fundamental challenge to patriarchy is therefore a problematic conception. Rather than be seen as a fundamental challenge to football as a patriarchal institution or activity, the history of women's football has to be seen within this interaction between stratification of the state-football nexus and the meshwork of women's football which works away at it both from inside and outside.

On the other hand, the argument is that these flows, these lines of flight, are never permanent and that they return to enforce the dominant structural and discursive formations they temporarily escape. It could be argued therefore that a history of football is not necessary, or in fact relevant, to the overall argument. The development of football is not the primary subject. Rather, the subject is the stratifying character of football's integration into the state bureaucracy. To put it plainly, women's football is historically a marginalised social activity and at the same time a history of integration and acceptance, at least formally, into the bureaucracy and centralised organisation of football.

The incorporation of women's football, into a seemingly hostile footballing organisation, is a matter of interest to us here insofar as it highlights what could be perceived as the former resisting or at least challenging a dominant social form; the idea that women playing football changes the game of football itself. Rather than see the inclusion of women's football into the football family as a pure victory, Jean Williams describes the phenomena as a 'negative integration'¹⁴³. Williams gives four reasons for the use of the term: the fact that international federations delayed the incorporation of women as long as they could without threatening the

¹⁴² G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, pp. 297-298

¹⁴³ Jean Williams, *Beautiful Game: International Perspectives on Women's Football*, (Oxford: Berg, 2007), p. 16

centralisation of the monopoly of legitimate football, the technological support and specialisation around the male game, the representation of football as a male game (seen simply by looking at the World Cup versus the Women's World Cup) and finally the closed and unaccountable organisational treatment given to the woman's game¹⁴⁴. Likewise, I hope to illustrate in this chapter the way in which the development of women's football in Iran is not a story of victory, or challenge against a masculinist social activity, but one arguably of negative integration.

Introduction of football

Having begun as a private and voluntary practice, football soon became a thing for nation-states. The model was set by Italy who in the mid 1920's began institutionalizing football into their Fascist political bureaucracy. The sporting bureaucracy was completely taken over by the state-party and the state-football nexus was born. It was seen as a way to both instil a sense of Italian identity, as well as working as a diplomatic tool abroad to improve the standing of the Italian nation and the Fascist regime¹⁴⁵.

Football fitted well with already established notions of organisation, as it was thought to require stamina and strength but was also a collective effort and promoted discipline. The Italian state-football nexus established the state-football nexus which retained all these mentioned aspects of the game. It also abolished workers' teams and religious sports organisations. Sport was not only state subsidized but also state-defined, spread through the sports culture via the discourse of professionalization. Italy won the World Cup in 1934, and created the strongest league in the world. The model of state-football, and the Fascist bureaucratic model was seen as

¹⁴⁴ Ibid.

¹⁴⁵ S. Martin, *Football and Fascism: the national game under Mussolini*, (New York: Berg Publishing, 2004), p. 2

the most efficient. The French Minister of Sport commented after the successes of Italy, “we have heard all too often that a democratic country is by its very nature incapable of creating a vast sports and leisure organisation. Our ambition is to show the fundamental error of that view”¹⁴⁶. This was to be done by reforming the elitist bureaucracies that controlled sports in France and the sporting infrastructure which would be improved under the supervision of the Ministry of Sport. The bureaucratic model was therefore the same as that of Italy, with the main difference between the self proclaimed democratic system of France and the Italian being mainly symbolic and in the architectural structures and in the level of public accountability of the bureaucracy. The centralised sports bureaucracy became an accepted model, which created a structural hierarchy of professionalism, amateur and recreation all of which it tied to its bureaucratic structure.

The rule of Mohammad Reza Shah, following the Second World War informed notions of modernity and nation-state with, international community. Football’s role as an international community became formalised, and this became accepted by states all over the world. Chehabi writes about how the importance of football shifted from that of a facilitator of modern notions of cooperation and discipline to that of nationalism during the rule of Mohammed Reza Shah following the second world war, following developments in other parts of the world¹⁴⁷. During this latter period therefore, as football becomes a popular spectator sport, both domestically and internationally, we see a growing emphasis on it as an international marker of national development. In 1941 the organisation of Iranian sport begins to reflect this change as the country divides its sport into two parts; one which was placed beneath the ministry of culture (or what later became the ministry of education [amoozesh va parvaresh],

¹⁴⁶ Cited in D. Goldblatt, *The Ball is Round: A global history of soccer*, (New York: Riverhead Books, 2006), p. 105

¹⁴⁷ H. E. Chehabi, ‘A political history of football in Iran’, p. 388

and the second under the union of physical education [anjoman-e tarbiyat] badani). It is during this period that Iranian sport begins being professionalized, with different sporting federations for each sport beginning to appear¹⁴⁸. In 1947 a national Olympic committee was established and the country also joined the Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA). Iran was to join the international community, and its organisation of sports reflected these wishes.

Whether the later Pahlavi years were of economic decline or whether in fact the period of 1960 up until 1977 was a period of economic growth, the period was significant in the rule of Mohammad Reza Shah who with the White Revolution aimed to, what he saw as, revolutionary administrative reform particularly aimed at land reform. Ali Ansari's analysis of these policies highlights the importance of the revolutionary aspect of the Shah's plans and the fact that these reforms were seen as not only changes in one sphere of Iranian society, but a fundamental change in bureaucracy and organisation of society as a whole¹⁴⁹. In a speech during Farmers Day, the Shah said: "the land reform movement is not a reform limited to lands but something that will alter Iranian society...It is the most deep rooted and revolutionary action that can happen in the life of a nation"¹⁵⁰. It is within this context we find the birth of the Sazeman-e Tarbiyat Badani, Department of Physical Education, which was established in 1976 the Department of Physical Education was placed beneath the Ministry of Education (Amoozesh va Parvareh).

It is unlikely that this organisational shift was done for any other reason than to focus the states power, cut public spending and centralise the

¹⁴⁸ *Varzesh va tarbiyat badani dar barnameye sevom tose-e*, (Tehran: Rozanemey-e Iran, 2005) p. 20

¹⁴⁹ A. Ansari, 'The Myth of the White Revolution: Mohammad Reza Shah, 'Modernization' and the Consolidation of Power', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 37 (3), 2001, p. 15

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

bureaucracy in general. Iran was going through a difficult time financially and politically, and the Shah's response to these difficulties was to establish further channels of control. Statistics from this period is therefore particularly unreliable. It is important here to note that organisational changes, such as the inclusion of Physical Education within the Ministry of Education, can be overestimated. Many of these implementations were arbitrary and would often solve economic and political issues in the country. For example, in an attempt to attain the support of some of the labour force, the Shah announced that private employees had to pay an additional three months wage to workers who had no share in company profits¹⁵¹. This was never a law that could be enforced, and merely led to yet another reason for workers to unite against their employers and the state. Similarly, it would be useless to argue that the organisational change of the Department of Physical Education had any qualitative consequences, despite the official publication of the department claiming that the change allowed the sports and physical education to receive more attention and support from the government¹⁵². In 1976 the Department of Physical Education was also given what is still the official constitution, signed by the then speaker of parliament Abdollah Riazzi who was later executed following the 1979 tribunals. It states the general aims of the department, including the nurturing of fitness and spirit of the people, the promotion of public sports, in schools and in private clubs, for athletes of all levels. The mid 70's also saw the rise of football in particular as the sport of choice for the promotion of the monarchy¹⁵³.

¹⁵¹ Parvin Merat Amini, 'A Single Party State in Iran, 1975-78: The Rastakhiz Party – the Final Attempt by the Shah to Consolidate his Political Base', *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 38 (1), 2002, p. 161

¹⁵² *Varzesh va tarbiyat badani dar barnameye sevom tose-e*, p. 24

¹⁵³ For a discussion on this see H. E. Chehabi, 'A political history of football in Iran', pp. 383-389

Apart from its function as a potential tool as a spectator sport, the words of the constitution were merely words and public spending was cut massively (according to the official publication of the department of physical education the spending on the department was in 1976 merely one seventh of what it was in 1974¹⁵⁴). More importantly is the fact that the period following 1976 is one of great political turmoil and societal tension which eventually lead to the 78-79 revolution. To discuss women's football in this period would be misleading if not irrelevant. For the purposes of this study the period between 1979 and 1983 is of more interest. Farazmand, in his aggressively anti-Pahlavi article, calls this period a period of de-bureaucratisation and grassroots organisation¹⁵⁵. Although the latter's argument is largely polemic, few have looked at the organisational aspect of the revolution. Farazmand's statement that "Debureaucratization was the first and most spontaneous movement by the Iranian masses with all socio-political, ethnic, and ideological orientations"¹⁵⁶ might be simplified and marred by an explicit political agenda, however the essential point is fair.

Whether the 'masses' were involved in grassroots organisation or not is not as important as the fact that there was a general sense of de-bureaucratisation in the organisational culture, the discourse of modernity, revolutionary monarchy and centralization had collapsed and with it the organisational metaphor of the militaristic bureaucracy; disciplined, ordered and centralized. To use Marx's analysis of the state, "the Corporations are the materialism of the bureaucracy, and the bureaucracy is the spiritualism of the corporation"¹⁵⁷, the period in question represented the end of the corporation and thus brought in a new and

¹⁵⁴ *Varzesh va tarbiyat badani dar barnameye sevom tose-e*, 2005, p. 25

¹⁵⁵ A. Farazmand, 'Administrative reform in modern Iran: an historical analysis', *International Journal of Public Administration*, Vol. 22 (6), 1999, p. 935

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.* p. 936

¹⁵⁷ K. Marx, *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of right'*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982, p. 45

radical spiritualism of the network. Furthermore, if we take Antoine Bousquet's point that organisational arrangements, and ideational arrays all combine to constitute mixed assemblages that allow certain actions, or "ways of being", and forbid others¹⁵⁸, these arrangements and ideational arrays now allowed ways of being that were at least in their organisational structure, separate from the state corporation. To use Marx's analysis of Hegel's theory of state, where he writes, "The same mind that creates the Corporation in society creates the bureaucracy in the state", the end of the corporation in the mind came about together with a de-bureaucratisation of the state¹⁵⁹.

To some extent one could argue, as I have above, that to look for women's football during this period of political turmoil and uncertainty is academically irrelevant, or at least bound to be misleading to the societal and cultural context of that time. According to the Ministry of Physical Education the leaders of the ministry had yet to discuss the details of issues such as gender segregation in sports, women's movement and clothing, and it was therefore a matter which was postponed until the mid-1980's where we see the beginnings of the organisation of women's football. It is this period however, that allows for our understanding of the state as something that is not rigid and constant and separate from society and bureaucracy. Furthermore, it is here that we may find the origins of the organisation of women's football today. Bazargan had called for the liberation of the country from the Pahlavi shackles of bureaucracy¹⁶⁰, and as the State-Corporation model was replaced with the Revolutionary organisation, women's football like other institutions such as trade-unions, education and religious organisations were struggling for space within the new state which according to Abrahamian "became an arena in which

¹⁵⁸ A. Bousquet, *The Scientific Way of Warfare: Order and Chaos on the Battlefields of Modernity*, Columbia University Press, New York, 2009, p. 31

¹⁵⁹ K. Marx, *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of right'*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982, p. 46

¹⁶⁰ Quoted in E. Abrahamian, 2008, p. 169

various interest groups competed and jockeyed for influence”¹⁶¹. It should be noted however, that for Abrahamian the same state that is an arena is also “the previous state intact”¹⁶². In fact the de-bureaucratisation period ends with the number civil servants going from 304,000 in 1979 to 850,000 in 1982. Farazmand’s conclusions seem far too simple here, it is possible that the de-bureaucratisation period is a bureaucratizing period. As soon as the shackles of bureaucracy are attacked, what Marx calls the corporation mind, “so too is the mind of the bureaucracy”¹⁶³. The bureaucracy then proceeds to save it, and so too in Iran. But rather than the Islamic Republic expanding its bureaucracy, it is the “Islamic Revolution” that fulfils that role¹⁶⁴. As Mitchell states,

“the importance of the state as a common ideological and cultural construct [...] should be grounds not for dismissing the phenomenon in favour of some supposedly more neutral and accurate concept [...] but for taking it seriously.”¹⁶⁵

It is the state as an arena, as a common ideological construct, the organisational metaphor of the revolution, which allows and pushes certain ways of organizing and forbids others.

The rhizomatic response of women footballers takes place in this context, where bureaucracy, rather than committing suicide, opens itself up briefly. The metaphor of the revolution permeates the organisational model, and as the bureaucracy grows, it grows in all directions. Women coaches, administrators and players gain entry, albeit limited entry, into the bureaucracy. This entry was itself rhizomatically organized, through

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ K. Marx, “*Critique of Hegel’s Philosophy of Right*”, *Marxist Internet Archive*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1843/critique-hpr/ch03.htm> (accessed on July 12, 2010)

¹⁶⁴ E. Abrahamian, *A History of Modern Iran*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), p. 169

¹⁶⁵ Timothy Mitchell, *The Limits of the State: Beyond Statist Approaches and Their Critics*, 85:1 (March 1991), p. 81

personal connections between formal positions within the educational sphere and in the sports institutions which worked within the bureaucracy but also grew through connections across its hierarchies and outside it.

Structurally women's football was officially divided, along with women's sport in general from that of men's. The committee of women's sports was created in 1981, within which all women's sports was to be administered. In 1986 this committee became the Department of Women's Sports (Modiriat-e Varzesh-e Banevan), essentially marking a growth in the administrative role of the former. Structurally this department was still separate from the Ministry of Physical Education, women's football which began organizing more significantly, increasing its reach across the country through personal connections as well as structural growth of the department. Marx is wrong when stating "the bureaucracy is a circle from which no one can escape"¹⁶⁶, the organisation of women's football does precisely this, it escapes and grows and comes back.

In 1989 the Department of Women's Sports is formally incorporated within the Ministry of Physical Education. The inclusion of this department trickled down into the federation level where each sport federation created within it a women's affairs offices. Thus, it was not a pure integration of women's sports into the institution of sport, but Amirshaghghi, one of the most active coaches in women's football today and who began her activities in the mid 1980's describes the way in which the already organized women's football institution within the Department of Women's Sports with its connections with coaches and players around the country, although centred in Tehran and Esfahan, became formally part of the larger bureaucracy.

¹⁶⁶ Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's 'Philosophy of right'*

The structural changes formally placed women under the supervision of the men and the same women who were already leading their fields, in football we had a woman in a leading administrative role who did all the work, she was placed under the supervision of the men; she became Deputy Manager (Nayeb Raees) in the Football Federation. Nevertheless, this was useful for the players.¹⁶⁷

The creation of the Deputy Manager in the Football Federation formalised the already existing networks between the provinces, leading to channels of funding propositions between the Heyyat in charge of each province and the Deputy Manager in Tehran. The women's affairs offices in each federation was soon incorporated into the federation.

Contemporary Football

Sport is a visible force in contemporary Iranian society. Billboards, TV programs, and newspaper articles often advocate for the importance of sports on the daily lives of Iranians, sometimes promoting specific campaigns such as calls for families to exercise in designated areas in public parks. Furthermore, most international competitions, as well as European football leagues and the American basketball league (NBA), and any competition with Iranian participation are covered by the national TV channels. Newspapers write extensively about sports. Even the results and efforts of the Iranian Special Olympics team, a competition which in European struggles to attract viewers, was extensively discussed and analysed in broadcast media during the 2008 Beijing Olympics. Yet, sport is today a small, albeit growing, industry in Iran. In the year 2000 approximately forty thousand people were employed within the sports industry, close to 0.25% of the national workforce. That number includes private employers, and it is not clear whether it takes multiple positions of

¹⁶⁷ Amirshaghghi, Interview by A., Sedighi, Khodroo Sports Club Tehran, August 13, 2008

many individuals into account. As a point of comparison, in Germany those involved in the sports sector make up around 2% of the national workforce¹⁶⁸.

The revenue of football in Iran is through public funding through the Ministry of Physical Education, private donations, tax benefits, sponsorships, membership fees from participants, ticket sales from sports events and perhaps most controversially TV coverage. The latter has been the subject of much debate amongst professional clubs, particularly in the field of football, where despite high TV viewing rates, the clubs are paid minimal fees for the coverage of their games by the national broadcasting channel.

Although the role can easily be exaggerated, the Ministry of Physical Education (Sazeman-e Tarbiyat Badani) plays an important role as a social mediator between the state and the large youth population of the country. Its role can be seen as legitimizing the state amongst this politically fragile demographic, who are growing increasingly educated and politically active. It is within this institutional framework that women's football is best understood, and it is here that we can not only understand the way in which the latter is organized but also how the Islamic Republic of Iran, its bureaucratic branches and individuals who reproduce these, work on a day to day level. It is important however to note that this role as a state mediator is a relatively marginal one compared to that of the police, military and 'classical' education spheres which are far more self-consciously relevant state structures affecting the everyday lives of Iranian youth today.

The Department of Physical Education is an underfunded and relatively new organisation which is mainly concerned with the building of facilities

¹⁶⁸ *Varzesh va tarbiyat badani dar barnameye sevom tose-e*, 2005, pp. 104-106

than with creating a centralized and consisted ideology. Nevertheless, this institution and the different branches to which it is formally linked, is growing rapidly. This is particularly important because of the high demand for its services, there are many enthusiastic athletes in Iran, both men and women, who every year not only participate in sporting activities but who also enrol on the many Physical Education courses available on both undergraduate and postgraduate level in Iranian universities.

Moreover, the Ministry of Physical Education as a state institution is unique in its relationship with Iranian youth as it has no explicit ideological associations like other large youth oriented organisations such as the Basij, the army, or even the Education Departments. Hence, the often uninhibited criticism of the institution in the media, both from the public and the political elite. For example, no other mentioned institution would see a statement issuing its total revision and reformation like the Physical Education witnessed before the appointment of Mehr Alizadeh as the President of it. The latter paraphrased the President Khatami's statement about the sport and physical education in the country: "our sport has been struck by an illness and the structure of our sport is suffering, and it needs a total revision"¹⁶⁹. Alizadeh's statement could be seen as the legitimization of a newly appointed leader, however, it is more accurately seen as a reflection of President's Khatami's plans of liberalizing government structures in order to create a future base for economic and social liberalization.

The Ministry of Physical Education is a government structure, which is effectively binding a demographic to the state through its control of physical education and sports. The sport-industrial complex and the strengthened grasp of capital over international competitions, and the celebrity status of international athletes, has created an attractive line of

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

access for Iranian athletes as well as sports fans to what Joseph Maguire refers to as “the zones of prestige”, most noticeably through the World Cup and Olympic Games where Iranian national teams can compete and be measured and outsiders such as Iran can “emulate their imperial masters and become, through the adoption of their sports, more British than the British”¹⁷⁰. The growing reach of the Ministry, through widening reach in rural areas through organized football tournaments, establishing county level headquarters with stronger local reach, opening more all-purpose indoor facilities around the country, can thus be seen as a hegemonic strategy of on the hand meeting the demands of young Iranians who want to join sport clubs and study Physical Education at High School and University levels.

On the other hand they are also utilizing the attraction of International competitive sports by institutionalizing them and thus tying them directly to government structures and thereby linking socialized activities with state institutions. Again we should remain cautious of over-stating the importance of the sporting institution, while still being open to its possibility as a channel through which we can examine the Iranian state. In a report on the state of the Ministry of Physical Education in the country written by members of the organisation, it is written that the responsibility of the organisation is to promote sports and exercise amongst the whole population in order to improve the health of the population. It states,

“this has been an important strategy in Northern European countries as well as North American ones. With sports, society becomes capable of developing its capabilities of professionalism”¹⁷¹

Later in the same report it reads,

¹⁷⁰ J. Maguire, *Power and Global Sport: Zones of Prestige, Emulation and Resistance*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2005), p. 10

¹⁷¹ *Varzesh va tarbiyat badani dar barnameye sevom tose-e*, 2005, p. 105

“In North America sports has been referred to as the religion of industrial society [...] this illustrates the importance of sports in contemporary society in the world.”¹⁷²

There is a clear and conscious understanding that what they are promoting is modern competitive sport, dominated by international capital, particularly by Western states¹⁷³. The aim of the ministry is not simply a continuation of early 20th century rhetoric of European sports bringing European civilization or embodied modernity to the people of Iran, but specific strategies of joining and profiting from the sports-industrial complex¹⁷⁴. In the same report it is stated that the sports industry has been proven profitable for many states and it explains that they should therefore attempt to expand sports and physical education into a profitable industry.¹⁷⁵

Physical Education is not only concerned with exercise and the practice of sports, but is also a growing academic subject. Calls for a centralized education system for coaches and referees have led to a higher demand for physical education at the many universities in the country, including by already established coaches and referees who never attained official training. Furthermore, university education has become an important gateway into organized sports for young people. Many professional football players begin their career as footballers in university teams during their Physical Education studies. Established in 1998 Physical Education departments have provided both undergraduate and postgraduate courses in Iran. 2001 saw 14522 graduates of two-year *kaardani* courses, 11766 *kaarshenasi* undergraduates, 927 postgraduates or *kaarshenasi*

¹⁷² Ibid. p. 106

¹⁷³ See Maguire's discussion on local responses to commercialisation and international sport in J. Maguire. *Power and Global Sport*, pp. 41-59

¹⁷⁴ Ibid. 162

¹⁷⁵ *Varzesh va tarbiyat badani dar barnameye sevom tose-e*, 2005, p. 105

arshad, and 76 PhD degrees in the field of Physical Education¹⁷⁶. The last decade has also seen an increase of support to physical education in schools. The number of Physical Education high-schools increased from 25 in 1997 to 40 in 2000 and continues to rise today. The total budget of research into sports reached in the year 2000 a level of 5 billion Rial, an over 100% increase from 1997¹⁷⁷.

During my fieldwork in 2008 there were wide ranging discussions about the need to reform institutions of sport in Iran. Physical Education departments around the country were given the responsibility to educate and produce the number of coaches and referees that the growing field of sport demanded, and existing sport officials were asked to undergo re-education in an attempt to professionalize the field completely. This professionalization is not only the first step to significantly enlarging the professional arena of sport and opening new markets for employment in an attractive section for the largely unemployed youth, but it is also a major process of centralization and strengthening of muscles by a national bureaucratic structure. With these restructuring the Ministry aims to reach its target audience with greater coherence and potency. The main target of these policies is explicitly the Iranian youth. Particularly in urban centres, the youth are now more educated and unemployed, their transition from youth to adulthood filled with uncertainty and unpredictability¹⁷⁸. The majority of the unemployed in Iran are between the ages of 15 and 24, a statistic which according to some explains the continued youth unrest and activism in the country. In 2004, 34% of this group were unemployed, although this number decreased in recent year to around 25% according to the National Statistics Centre¹⁷⁹. Mohammad Madad, the head of Iran's

¹⁷⁶ Ibid. p. 27

¹⁷⁷ Ibid.

¹⁷⁸ D. Egel and D. Salehi-Isfahani, 'Youth Exclusion in Iran: The State of Education, Employment and Family Formation', *The Middle East Youth Initiative*, Working Paper No. 3, 2007

¹⁷⁹ Mohammad Mada quoted in *Press TV*, May 13, 2008

Statistics Centre explained in a statement to Mehr News Agency: “25% of young people are unemployed but this figure reaches up to 29.6% in the cities and 19.4% in rural areas”¹⁸⁰. For women between the ages of 15 and 24 the unemployment is higher than that of men.

There has also been a significant change in the attitudes of young people from those two or three decades ago. Many describe a frustration of not being able to afford their own place, often extending this insecurity to their ability to get married and settle down. Today approximately 70% of men in their twenties live with their parents¹⁸¹. It is in this social environment that the Ministry of Physical Education promotes active lifestyles amongst the Iranian youth through its various institutional branches. Zahra Rozbehi, in a research funded by the Ministry, confirms the growing youth population which is restless, educated and unemployed as a main concern for the organisation¹⁸². She emphasizes the acceleration of the already high population growth of Iran in the post-revolutionary period as a cause for concern.

Looking at the demographic situation of Iran today explains the emphasis of the state on the STB and the state’s public relations policies towards the youth. With a median age of 26.4 the STB is seen as a vital function of battling the social insecurities of the youth. The media is saturated with images of the importance of sport for both the spirit and the body while reports are given about increased drug use, Satanism, and waning moral

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ *The Youth of Iran*, Saban Centre and US Institute of Peace, Iran Working Group, 10 July (2008), <http://www.brookings.edu/events/2008/07/10-iran> - There is plenty to say about the social and economic situation of youth, a subject which is dealt with in academic work but a literature which is saturated with ‘resistance’ paradigms, see for example S. Khosravi, *Young and Defiant in Tehran* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2008), R. Varzi, *Warring Souls: Youth, Media and Martyrdom in Post-Revolution Iran*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2006), A. Moaveni, *Lipstick Jihad: A Memoir of Growing Up Iranian in America and American in Iran*, Public Affairs, New York, 2005

¹⁸² *Varzesh va tarbiyat badani dar barnameye sevom tose-e*, 2005, pp. 90-91

essence amongst the Iranian youth¹⁸³. Furthermore, in 2008 Ahmadinejad established a new office to encourage and improve the relationship between the President and the country's youth. In the STB's report for the 3rd programme the demographic nature of the Iranian population is mentioned continuously as a highly sensitive situation which needs to be addressed. Also important are the facts that this youth population, particularly between the ages of 20-29 is now increasingly educated, postpone marriage and work until after their education, which has increased the demand for social and leisure activities such as sport¹⁸⁴.

In the conclusion of Zahra Rozbehi's report for the STB she writes, "We need significant investment into the field of sport to meet the growing demands of the youth, i.e. the building of facilities and the providing of sporting equipment and educating staff, coaches and referees"¹⁸⁵. It is interesting to note that despite the vocal intent of attracting youth audiences and participants to the field of sport, the STB's main responsibility in its actions seems to be that of building and administering facilities around the country. Sport and Physical Education is thought to be selling itself and the demand is considered to be far above the supply of proper facilities, sport gear and coaching staff. Thus, the most visible role of the STB, and the most emphasised one in the legitimization of budgetary decisions is that of the building of sport facilities around the country. In a vertical administrative system, the hierarchy of being responsible to your superior office in a chain of command has meant that the STB's different offices constantly are aware of statistical information and physical data, which they need to on the one hand prove that they are keeping spending their money and efforts well, while at the same time

¹⁸³ See for example "Iran arrests 104 in raid on 'Satanist' party", *AFP* 27 May, 2009, accessed via Google News, <http://www.google.com/hostednews/afp/article/ALeqM5jBb4rPcZCq1hip0ZJL4E11yc7Vjw>

¹⁸⁴ *Varzesh va tarbiyat badani dar barnameye sevom tose-e*, 2005, p. 98

¹⁸⁵ *Ibid.* p. 100

using these statistics, some of what describe incomplete projects which are used to affect later budgetary decisions.

This constant insecurity became clearer to me in my discussions with Ehsan Shah-Ali, the co-ordinator for STB in the Shahreza region. Having realised that my project focused on women's sport in particular, he began the discussion defensively and quoted several professional successes of women athletes. It became a reoccurring theme in my interviews for people to quote the relative success of women in international competitions compared to that of men. These will be discussed in a later chapter; however, the important note here is the weight of facilities in the legitimization of each federation and co-ordinator. The facilities are often multi-purpose and not sport specific and are therefore often built under the co-ordination and administration of the county level Heyyat's and not the sport federations themselves whose main responsibility is the 'sporting aspect' of each sport. The facilities are weighed against the population of each county, the larger the population the more facilities are thought to be needed. However, the size and seating capacity of the facilities are considered as important in the equation. One of the overarching aim was for example that each city with a population of over 400,000 would have access to its own out-door stadium with a minimum of 15,000 spectator capacity, this would in effect solve the problems of insufficient facilities in different areas due the importance of spectator capacity in the considered equation¹⁸⁶. The lack of attention to distribution and administrative co-ordination of the facilities lead to problems for many athletes, particularly female athletes, this will be discussed later. The institution of sport in Iran, as represented by the organisation of the STB, can be defined as both the value of its role in the Islamic Republic of Iran, as well as its primary goals and organisational purpose. In the case of the former I have already given the example of the "field of values" as

¹⁸⁶ *Varzesh va tarbiyat badani dar barnameye sevom tose-e*, 2005, p. 132

pronounced by President Ahmadinejad, an explicit example of the value of the STB particularly in its representation of women's sport in the production of Islamic athletes who not only through results but through their faith gain 'results' in the international arena.

Domestically, the STB also works to connect the government structure with the youth of the country, who are growing in numbers and who are getting more access to education and information. It is important to look the organisation as a cultural institution and in this way, evaluate its role in Iranian society, yet if an organisation is a unit which produces output and is goal-oriented, this goal must be included in creating its primary characteristics; what Chester I. Barnard refers to as the 'organisational purpose' is the organisations primary goal - the goal which is prioritized over all other goals which might be lobbied for within the organisation or from external sources.

Looking at the STB and its development since the beginning of the third programme and Khatami's presidency, we see that this goal can be defined as the creation and maintenance of sport and physical education opportunities, and upholding the government structures through which these goals can be achieved as well as evaluating the progress of the private sector in its sporting activities., and one could add, in order to attain better results in domestic and particularly international competitions. The latter addition is a complicated one and only refers to certain aspects of the STB, yet it seems to be the most important goal of all. For example, after the mediocre results at the Beijing Olympics in 2008, many voices called for explanations from the STB and demanded changes and immediate reforms to its policies in order to improve Iranian standards to match that of other countries. Conclusively, one could argue that the value system of the Iranian sport institution is the accumulation of

all these values and goals, which work towards legitimizing its place in the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Stratification and de-territorialisation – the history of football

The history of football is the history of stratification, of hierarchy; the rise of the football institution. Its story has to be that of a centralised body, its expansion and growth. Writing this history, one is tempted to write it as a process of trial and error, pushing the game of football forward, perfecting the game and widening its reach across the globe from the public schools of England to ‘remote’ parts of the global south. Moreover, the narrative of football is always one in which the State, whether the Football Association of a nation state or its global superiors, is the protagonist¹⁸⁷. In the past hundred years football is one of the world’s undisputed conquerors, and its institution’s rise one without parallel. In the words of Goldblatt, “football has either outlasted its oppressors or forced them to relent [...] football has served the greater glories and fed on the brute power of every imaginable political institution”¹⁸⁸. The history of football is the history of the emergence of an institution tied to “a vast ideological raft of Victorian masculinity which presumed that sport like the rest of the public realm was a matter for men alone”¹⁸⁹. This masculinity was not only reinforced by the organisation of the sport in the public schools in Britain,

¹⁸⁷ Professor Alan Tomlinson’s many works on the world governing body of football, FIFA, has detailed the way in which the organisation has strengthened itself politically and economically. He writes, “In whatever directions FIFA might steer the game in the years and decades ahead remains to be seen [...] whatever the response of the FIFA men who run the game might be, it seems certain that – as has been the case for nearly a century – this will be determined, in part at least, by geo-political machinations and Machiavellian practices at the hear of the organisation”. Alan Tomlinson, ‘FIFA and the men who made it’, *Soccer & Society* Vol. 1 (1), 2000, pp. 69-70

¹⁸⁸ D. Goldblatt, *The Ball is Round: A global history of soccer*, Riverhead Books New York, 2006, pp. x-xii

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.* p. 180

or the military academies in the colonial world, but also in the very organisation it promoted through the sport itself which were conceptualized within the military metaphors which were prevalent at the time.

Notions of collective duty, discipline were inherently linked to new notions of modernity and militarism. Thus, football is also linked to the state apparatus. Here I do not mean necessarily football as a game and its role in state formation, but rather the way in which the organisation of football is appropriated and like Deleuze and Guattari's war machine, *allows itself* to be appropriated by the state apparatus¹⁹⁰. It is within this history we find women's football, often beneath the surface of historical records, sometimes appearing as exceptions, resistances and subversions in academic and feminist literature. In his seminal work, *The Ball is Round*, David Goldblatt writes about the end of the brief peak of women's football during the first world war: "Women's football was relegated to odd public and private spaces, parks and municipal pitches. Cut off from formal systems of coaching or finances, the game was reduced to a peripheral and rather odd-looking subculture"¹⁹¹. Goldblatt's words could have been said about women's football in Iran in the 1980's or the early 1990's, and some might even see it as an accurate description of the state of the sport today. It is not the statements accuracy I am interested in, but rather the way it organizes the state unequivocally in the centre, which is not only in the middle but also on top of the milieu described. From this State sponsored football, the women's game is 'relegated' *down to* the bottom, to the periphery and the outskirts.

The state here is indeed the final and highest phenomenon, with which all other points that are combined by a process of subordination. Women's

¹⁹⁰ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 565

¹⁹¹ D. Goldblatt, *The Ball is Round*, p. 181

football can either exist in the periphery of state-sponsored football, or it can be integrated into it. Football is a highly gendered institution, that is to say gender and gender difference is explicitly present in it. However, as in all institutional and organisational structures, this ideology has had to be reinforced and adapted with societal change and challenges. Regardless of the changing role of football, women have always played football. Their participation is rarely recorded as most of the sources contain descriptions of official matches, or those within corporations or public institutions.

However, from the 1896 ban on women's football by the Dutch FA to the 2004 comments by the president of FIFA to introduce tighter shorts for the players, the women's game has never been fully integrated into the 'world of football'¹⁹². Most historians on football however argue that the game has developed, its progress absolute in the sense that it has continuously improved both in its organisational structure and in its spread across ethnic, racial and gender spaces.

My argument here is that rather than seeing this history as a linear progression, the history of football illustrates societal changes along organisational lines. These societal changes can be described in notions of organisation which according to Bousquet allow "for an understanding of social developments in which technologies, organisational arrangements, and ideational arrays all combine to constitute mixed assemblages that allow certain actions, or "ways of being", and forbid others."¹⁹³. This means that we need to look at institutional change within the context of these understandings of assemblages. This is not a purely dialectic relationship but, as mentioned earlier, it is a situation of territorialisation and de-territorialisation which constantly seeks to stabilize the mentioned

¹⁹² M. Christenson and P. Kelso, 'Soccer chief's plan to boost women's game? Hotpants', *The Guardian*, January 16, 2004

¹⁹³ A. Bousquet, *The Scientific Way of Warfare: order and chaos on the battlefields of modernity*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 19

categories; the rhizomatic responses of women's football is not purely one of one of resistance and destabilization but produce stable patterns of compliance at different spatial and temporal intervals.

The state is not a stable category which includes or excludes other elements, but rather as explained by Deleuze and Guattari, it operates by stratification. Rather than *include* the state *retains* an element, such as women's football, and in doing so cuts it off from its relation with other elements which become exterior¹⁹⁴. This study of the rise of women's football in the form we find it today will illustrate this relationship. Thus, as a secondary aim, I hope to critically examine the political geography of the state in the narratives of sport.

The changes I am referring to can be described as cultural. For example, in 1902 the English FA banned men's clubs from playing "lady teams" explicitly to keep a game made for gentlemen pure and to protect feminine culture, today there is a ban on mix-gender competitive matches over the age of 11 for health and safety reasons¹⁹⁵.

Yet, reading the literature on football in any nation, or even globally, we are presented with the rise and increasing length and breadth of one institution, most importantly under the supervision of the world governing body FIFA. This narrative, like most other histories, is laid out across empty and homogenous time as an ordered and causal line, not contextualizing them in the mentioned frameworks of organisational surroundings. Along this path of development, the story of football is one of a movement towards integration and acceptance of an ever increasing following around

¹⁹⁴ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 478

¹⁹⁵ Jean Williams, 2007, p. 114

the globe. Feminist writers¹⁹⁶, whether they argue that this development has had little effect, or whether they write positive accounts of the growth of the women's game, write about an increasing mutual acceptance between the institution of football and women footballers; seeing the bureaucratization of women's football as its progress.

The aim here is not to break from this story by illustrating ruptures and discontinuities, nor does this paper aim to cleanse the history of football from what Foucault referred to as "imaginary complicities"¹⁹⁷. What I wish to highlight here, by re-reading the history of football in Iran, is not to focus on a different model of time but rather a different conception of organisation. We are moving away from the plane of organisation to what Deleuze and Guattari refer to as the plane of consistency, from the stratification and stabilization of FIFA through national Football Associations around the world, *down* to amateur football to the meshworks which make it unstable and heterogeneous¹⁹⁸.

The story of women's football, or football in general, begins at an elite level to promote a certain type of masculinity. Notions of modernity and nationalism then push the sport through official promotion, combined with the simplicity and attractiveness of the sport itself, to the middle and lower classes who through their participation embody the core concepts embedded in the sport. Women's participation is seen as counteracting the sports essential masculinity, its physical nature seen as harmful to the feminine way of being. As women enter wage labour and the so-called

¹⁹⁶ See J. Williams and J. Woodhouse, "Can play, will play? Women and football in Britain" in J. Williams and S. Wagg (Eds) *British Football and Social change*, (London: Leicester University Press, 1991), p. 100 and R. Holt and T. Mason, *Sport in Britain 1945-2000*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 2000), p. 12. See discussion in J. Williams, 2007, p. 5

¹⁹⁷ Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, (London: Routledge Classics, 2002), p. 4

¹⁹⁸ The plane of consistency being the multiplicities of football games as they take place across society. See G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, p. 4

public sphere¹⁹⁹, their participation in the sport is slowly accepted although kept in the periphery. Through the physical and cultural interaction between states and economic systems the game spreads to new territories. The story then begins again, the game spreads from the top of society to the bottom of the social ranks.

Once football has conquered Europe, it begins again in the colonial world via Europe's conquest. The spread of football is therefore linked to imperial violence, based on economic exploitation, military strength and the conquering bureaucracy. Every account of the history of football in Iran that I found published in Iran tells the same story. They begin with illustrating that the country had sports before the Europeans arrived. These are described as traditional sports, described in ancient sources which link them to some authentic Persian experience. Yet, the introduction of football is directly linked with the coming of the British, linked to notions of modernity, masculinity and nationalism. It is not by chance that Goldblatt's words about 1920's English women's football can be related so closely with the state of women's football in Iran. The phrase "odd public and private spaces, parks and municipal pitches" in the quote above might for an Iranian female footballer evoke images of tented pitches in public parks which are both public but also private due to their gender segregation, a familiar site in some parks in the urban centres of Iran. Football's undeniable rise in Europe is thus reproduced in the postcolonial world.

Houchang Chehabi's work on the history and politics of football in Iran illustrates this point. He argues that football, like other Western sports entered the country through the presence of Western military presence,

¹⁹⁹ I say "so-called" public sphere because I accept Navaro-Yashin's claim that categories such as 'public sphere', or 'civil-society' or 'state' "in different ways, assume a distinction between domains of 'power' and 'resistance'". Y. Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey*, (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2002), p. 2

through their ideas of physical education which later translated into the education system²⁰⁰. It was however after the constitutional revolution of 1906 that public sport was discussed as part of the discourse of national progress and modernization. Chehabi quotes a journal from 1921 which writes: “Playing balls with the hands, *but especially with the feet* [...] have a huge importance in the lives of Europeans, and direct connection with their progress”²⁰¹. The importance of football to the progress of the Iranian nation was not simply one of causal reasoning, i.e. Europeans are modern and Europeans play football therefore football means progress, but it was understood according to the organisational metaphor of the European model, particularly that of the European military who taught the sport to Iranian troops in their command²⁰². Football was seen as to promote European notions of discipline and cooperation, it was a tool for educating the male population, facilitating the organisational model deemed most efficient at the time. In the words of Dr. Samuel M. Jordan, the director of the American School,

“Iranian statesmen for year have mourned, “We Iranians do not know how to cooperate.” But how do you teach people to cooperate, how do you teach them to “play the game”? Obviously by playing games, and so we introduced football, baseball, volleyball, basket-ball – all those group games that we are using here in America”²⁰³

Aside from the educational sphere, the popularity of football was also spread across the population through their employment by European and American companies, most importantly the Anglo-Persian Oil Company²⁰⁴. Therefore, when Reza Shah incorporated football into his discourse of

²⁰⁰ H. E. Chehabi, ‘A political history of football in Iran’, *Iranian studies* Vol. 35 (4), 2002, p. 374

²⁰¹ Ibid.

²⁰² Ibid. p. 377

²⁰³ Ibid. p. 376

²⁰⁴ Ibid.

modernization, promoting the sport 'at the highest level of the state'²⁰⁵, he was also accepting and continuing a certain organisational structure. This can again be seen by Thomas R. Gibson who was invited by the National Association for Physical Education, created by Iranian statesmen and educators and placed under the supervision of the crown prince, to reorganize Iranian sports²⁰⁶. Gibson's view of sport in Iran was again shaped around the notion of promoting a certain type of organisational structure seen as lacking in Iranian society. His focus was therefore on team sports, and on one occasion he even refuses a Japanese judo master who offered to introduce the sport to the Iranian public on this very basis²⁰⁷. Thus, we see that although football remained an elite sport, its origins highlight its importance as a facilitator of the dominant organisational ideals of the time, an organisational ideal which also shaped the institution of football.

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated the incorporation of women's football into a seemingly hostile institution of sport cannot be reduced to a resistance/compliance framework. Through a brief glance at the epic history of football we have observed that it is itself dominated by stratification, and it is tempting to think of it as a victorious linear narrative of centralisation. Attempting to step outside this framework, and to do it total justice would require a research of its own into the development of football worldwide. However, we see already here that women's football was not 'included' into a centralised masculinised system, but was rather funnelled into its different. In the same way, football itself, as a popular social activity, was and continuously is stratified into nationalist, masculinist or commercialised projects, these depended and still depend

²⁰⁵ Ibid. p. 379

²⁰⁶ Ibid. p. 381

²⁰⁷ Ibid.

on repeated efforts to capture and isolate certain representations from others. The colonial and modernist projects imagined football as a factory for Men, yet this had to be maintained by active isolation of women. Decades later, football was in Italy a representation of masculine stamina and strength as well as collective effort and discipline. The victories of this system were taken as signs of a superior ideology. Women's football was however being played simultaneously, independently organized and backed by commercial interest. Not only were these independently organized, but were also organized with substantial influence from autonomous clubs and women-only federations with accountable centralism²⁰⁸. The Iranian example shows a similar story, sport as a means to instil a certain masculine culture, following the organisational trends of its time.

²⁰⁸ J. Williams, *Beautiful Game*, p. 180

Chapter 2: Bureaucratic Institution of Women's Football

So far, I have illustrated the history of football as it has taken root in Iranian society, leading up to the development of women's football during the Islamic Republic of Iran. I have also illustrated the importance of conceptualizing women's sports and football outside of secular paradigms which reduce culture, or in our case Islam, as an obstacle to 'free' movement. We do this in order to open up new ways of conceptualizing organisation and lived experience outside of simplistic resistance/compliance frameworks. This chapter aims to do just that, by evaluating the conceptual consequences of the way in which women's football is organized in Iran by those who actively promote its interests. It is this organisational effort I refer to as the rhizomatic response; the nature of the way in which women promote their interest in.

*The state is not necessarily where we look for it (that is, where it silently instructs us to cast our gaze and net), or, more accurately, that its efficacy and effects may be strongest precisely where and when we neither expect nor suspect them.*²⁰⁹

Loic Wacquant

Introduction

The Islamic Republic of Iran has been the topic of many sociological and political studies, most of these focused on the state ideology, its material

²⁰⁹ Wacquant, Loic in P. Bourdieu, *State Nobility* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996) p. xvii

power and the effects of this on issues such as women's rights.²¹⁰ Recently, Iran and its relationship with regional powers, as well as their nuclear deal with the US have become a topic of several publications in the mainstream media. As Wacquant notes, Bourdieu's *State Nobility* chooses a different path in examining the formation and reinforcement of institutional authority²¹¹. The latter analyses the role of the French education system by the *grandes ecoles* in legitimising and in Weberian terms *sanctifying* the rule of the political elite and in fact the social order, by reinforcing and solidifying class division which uphold that order. This chapter will look deeper in the nature of the structures within women's football, and its relationship with hierarchies to create an empirical basis for a later analysis which can follow Brohm's advice of examining the deep structural analogy that "exists between the organisation and the operational mode of a given typical society and a socialized activity which become impregnated with the principle of this functioning; output, as a consequences of pursuit of profit."²¹²

The previous chapter repeated the attempt to avoid collapsing the story of women's football into a narrative with the state as the protagonist. This however does not mean the state is absent, on the contrary, the state apparatus in its reactions against the movement and development of women's football is one of the main shapers of that social activity. The state appears in interventions, in moments of authority as explained below, and in structures that are produced and reproduced by

²¹⁰ See for example, H. Sedghi, *Women and Politics in Iran: Veiling, Unveiling, and Reveiling*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), M. Afkhami and E. Friedl (eds), *In the Eye of the Storm: Women in Post-Revolutionary Iran*, (London: IB Taurus, 1994), H. Moghissi, Women, Modernization and Revolution in Iran, *Review of Radical Political Economics* 23 (3 and 4)(1991), D. Kandiyoti (Ed.), *Women, Islam, and the State*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1991), A. Najmabadi, 'Veiled Discourse-Unveiled Bodies', *Feminist Studies* Vol. 19 (3), Autumn 1993, pp. 487-518 and F. Sadeghi, 'Negotiating with Modernity: Young Women and Sexuality in Iran', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 28:2 (2008)

²¹¹ P. Bourdieu, *State Nobility*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996)

²¹² Jean-Marie Brohm quoted in H. Vaugrand, 'Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Marie Brohm: Their Schemes of intelligibility and issues towards a theory of knowledge in the sociology of sport', *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 36/2 (2001) p. 192

administrators and officials. These structures are not only different sports offices in the country but include those structures that are upheld and reinforced knowingly as well as unknowingly by individuals who work within them. The bureaucracy and through it the state is reproduced by, and through, these 'officials' who in their relationship with each other and with those on the outside create and recreate their organisation. The organisation is thus only a unit in those instances when it is recreated in the relationship between individuals. Furthermore, as noted in the previous chapter, the 'socialized activity' that is women's football is largely the result of the efforts and labour of passionate fans of the sport, yet, its final acceptance as part of the state structure cannot be merely pinned on chance or coincidence.

Certain movements within the state structure and adaptations of the political culture of the Islamic Republic allowed for women's football and other women's sports to be supported by state funds in the name of physical and spiritual health. Moreover, the relative youth of this 'socialized activity', but also the historical context of its development, has led to a hierarchy which an outsider looking to draw a map of the organisation sees as having a clear top, but a vague and shapeless bottom.

The centrality of resistance/compliance, not only implies that those who accept arranged marriages, wear and indeed believe in the importance of hijab and who are seemingly compliant in their domination are reinforcing the structures of their domination more than those who 'resist'. Those who resist are rather moving 'outside' of structures of domination and control of the particular patriarchal norms of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

These 'resistances' or rather 'lines of flight', are never permanent but are brought back into the fold. This is not to belittle the agency of women, but on the contrary, is illustrative of the fragility of systemized structures.

Organisational literature tends to assume certain dichotomies which follow Friedl and other writers' paradigms of confinement/liberation, structure/movement and so on.²¹³ This is particularly visible in feminist organisational studies where hierarchical organisations are seen as patriarchal establishments, versus a feminist organisational structure, often portrayed as democratic or flat.²¹⁴ This dichotomous paradigm seemingly dominates feminist scholarship on both organisation and bureaucracy. Martin looks at the literature on feminist organisations and analyses these clearly in the paper "Rethinking Feminist Organisations".²¹⁵ In that article she discusses ten points that organisations need to have, according to the literature, in order to qualify as feminist.

The literature on feminist bureaucracy, or feminist responses to bureaucratic organisations, discusses this point by first assuming the rigidity of the hierarchical organisation, where policy-making authority predominantly exists at the top "and commands flow downwards".²¹⁶ The most active of the women in the women's football network, however, never discussed their position as one in any 'organisation' as such; their limitations were never described as limitations of 'job' or 'responsibility'. Rather, as mentioned earlier, their place was within a larger network, a rigid rhizomatic network which had grown over the years - spreading its branches throughout the bureaucracy of sport in Iran. The coach was a

²¹³ For a discussion on the dominance of dualistic paradigms in organisational literature, particularly 'gender and organisation' literature see M. Calas and L. Smircich, 'From the "Woman's Point of View" Ten Years Later: Towards a Feminist Organisation Studies' in S. Clegg, C. Hardy, T. Lawrence, and W. Nord, *The SAGE Handbook of Organisation Studies*, (London: SAGE Publications, 2006) p. 291

²¹⁴ See for example A. Baker, The Problems of Authority in Radical Movement Groups: A Case Study of Lesbian-Feminist Organisation, *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 18:323-41 (1982), K. Ferguson, *The Feminist Case Against Bureaucracy*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1984), and J. Freeman, The Tyranny of Structurelessness, *Berkley Journal of Sociology*, 17:151-64 (1972) and a discussion on this in P. Martin, Rethinking Feminist Organisations, *Gender and Society*, 4:2 pp. 182-206 (1990)

²¹⁵ Patricia Yancey Martin, 'Rethinking Feminist Organisation', *Gender and Society*, 4:2 (June, 1990), pp. 182-206

²¹⁶ Noelle Maria Rodriguez, 'Transcending bureaucracy: Feminist politics at a shelter for battered women', *Gender and Society* 2 (1988), p. 221

coach, the director of sports was a manager, but not in any terms given by the larger bureaucracy. For example, in every interview and interaction with the women activists there was a reoccurring image of the authority in power in the bureaucracy of sports, which they did not have access to.

For those in women's football there is no clear formalized connection to the 'top', a top which is clearly gendered. Furthermore, there is a serious lack of communication between the 'departments', in each Ostan for example. The 'job' is therefore nothing apart from a space through which the ambitious footballer can further develop the sport, not one which gives access necessarily to certain responsibilities and not one which automatically connects to different formalized channels to 'power'. This again emphasizes the rigidity of compliance/resistance literature.

Bureaucratic Power

It was 28th August 2008, during Ramadan, when I arrived at the agreed meeting point, where I together with my interlocutor Rouhi were to meet the football players of Club F from Isfahan. We arrived before anyone else and stood in the shade of a tree, watching players arrive one by one, and sometimes in pairs. They were all between 16-19 years old and Rouhi introduced herself to most of them as they arrived.

She described to me hearing the young women making jokes, gossiping and whispering about her behind her back. It did not make her uncomfortable but on the contrary made her feel more at ease in the situation, knowing that her presence did not make the players nervous. For insight into the perspectives of the football players, Rouhi was instructed to interact with them, befriend them, and to note the interactions, which were then discussed at length with me. The deal was

that Rouhi would travel with the team to their training and matches for two weeks, and speak and interact with them in between training sessions.

It was during the first journey with this team that Rouhi came across the Sarparast. The Sarparast position is a kind of institutional guardian. They are not technically part of the coaching staff but nevertheless typically accompany women's teams to and from tournaments or training sessions. They would approach the Rouhi with questions and report back to the club, sometimes overruling agreements made between Rouhi and the team in question. Other times I would be told to provide proof of our intentions. The Sarparast would often ask to be given our questionnaires in advance.

In this case, the Sarparast was a young woman in her twenties, stern and serious, with very little interaction with the players or coach. As the bus drove along Karaj Road and the loud engine drowned out most of the conversation, Rouhi noticed a woman sitting at the back. She is smiling, apparently at the discussions that are going on around her. However, Rouhi told me later "she was staring at me."²¹⁷ Nothing else happened on the bus, and it is not until they reached the training facilities that first verbal contact is made. The Sarparast approached Rouhi, politely asking her to sit down with her and asked her directly, "Who are you? What do you do?" Once these questions were answered, the meeting was over. However, there would be another meeting, which would interfere with our two-week plan with Club F.

"Rouhi sits in the stands to observe the training, preparing some of the questionnaires that we had created and watching the interaction of the players. The players change around her, on the stands, and run onto the pitch in their shorts and jerseys as soon as the whistle is blown. It is then that the Sarparast makes her second and last approach of the day, this time with a phone. "They want to speak to you," she says handing the phone over to Rouhi. The voice

²¹⁷ A Sedighi, *Field Notes*, September 2008.

on the other side of the line was the line-manager of Sarparast who asked her once more to clarify with her the purpose of the research. Once this was described, the line-manager explained that this would be last time any research was done with prior approval from her specifically – despite us having pre-arranged the research with Club F.”²¹⁸

In *State Nobility* Pierre Bourdieu writes,

“The field of power is a field of forces structurally determined by the state of relations of power among forms of power, or different forms of capital. It is also, and inseparably, a field of power struggles among the holders of different forms of power, a gaming space in which those agents and institution possessing enough specific capital (economic or cultural capital in particular) to be able to occupy the dominant positions within their respective fields confront each other using strategies aimed at preserving or transforming these relations of power [...] This struggle over the power to dictate *the dominant principle of domination* [...] is also a struggle over *the legitimate principle of legitimation*.”²¹⁹

The relationships of the rhizomatic response of women’s football with other powers in the field is likewise one of power struggle, and the “gaming space” is the structure of the institution of women’s football. In the early stages of my discussions with a coach of a woman’s team I was asked the question: “what’s in it for me?”, meaning ‘what can my team get out of this research’. We can contrast this with the question “Who are you? What do you do?” asked by the Sarparast at one of the training sessions of a woman’s indoor football team, and by almost all male officials in my interviews. These questions hint at just such a ‘gaming space’ discussed by Bourdieu. They do not simply tell us about the relationship between the researcher and the researched. These questions, versions of which I was asked in every meeting, reveal to us also on what platform the speaker wants to be interviewed and negotiate the market on which the person’s

²¹⁸ Z. Rouhi, *Interview Journal*, September 19, 2008

²¹⁹ P. Bourdieu, *State Nobility*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996) pp. 264-265

own linguistic production has most symbolic value.²²⁰ Thus, the interview does not simply become revealing in what tells us about the person's experiences or understandings but also about what markets, and sanctions, are most prominent in that social space.

The Sarparast, and many others who took me or one of my peers aside to ask where "Which organisation are you from" is, like the hierarchical tree for Deleuze and Guattari, imposing its own shape and structure on the situation in order to establish their authority²²¹. In many cases this was due to a genuine worry, the researcher was often someone unwanted doing something unhelpful and making the day much harder than it needed to be. More frequently however, the bureaucrat asked "where do you come from?" in order to establish a chain of command, a lineage or to know which hierarchy was most helpful for the potential exchange.

Against me as a young male researcher from a European institution, the bureaucrat became apologetic and defensive, pre-empting assumed questions about the hijab and the liberating aspect of sports. For my female peer ethnographers the bureaucrat occupied a paternal role, lecturing them about the situation of women in Iran and exaggerating the importance of institutional efficiency, giving statistical evidence for their success. Their tone became a masculine, loud, lecturing, and they rarely described their *own* role in the institution or their specific institution despite most questions aimed at drawing out those things.

Those active in Women's football on the other hand never asked "which organisation are you from?", and although I was introduced as researchers from the UK they never asked for more clarifications on my background. Their question were aimed at negotiating the outcome, and trying to pin down what they could achieve from cooperating, asking questions such as

²²⁰ P. Bourdieu, *State Nobility*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 77

²²¹ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Continuum, 2004) p. 27

“what is in it for us?”. This question is not aimed at imposing an order, but rather to create a possible alliance, based as it was on the trust between the person and the mutual acquaintance that introduced us (third party guarantees and the issue of trust is discussed below). In one case a coach from Kerman who had travelled into Esfahan for a Futsal tournament with her team discussed her experiences in a highly formalised fashion and reminded us that she had to get back to the tournament and did not have enough time for the interview. However, after the interview the coach returned to my colleague and asked her to not turn on the voice recorder and sat down for thirty minutes explaining her experiences.²²²

For the coach the unrecorded conversation made possible a personal alliance which could be potentially beneficial for her team and women’s football. In instances such as these the coach or player would often make statements with the hope that they would be passed on to the Ministry of Physical Education or the Football Federation, the moment of interview became a possible channel to the managerial offices. For the bureaucracy of Physical Education in Iran these lines of flight are dense with revelation about the nature of the structure and what keeps it together, more than a focus on some institutional centre.

The organisational structure of the Ministry of Physical Education is thus a particularly ‘fluid’ system in its structurally lower levels, with for example over-lapping jurisdictions. Furthermore, the employees at the bottom had very little contact with the managerial levels, which on the contrary were more clearly structured, with more visible and clear jurisdictions and roles. This bureaucratic division of a shapeless bottom from a distant top has established a certain understanding of institutional power within the Ministry of Physical Education. It is worth here to quote Masoud Behnoud, an Iranian sociologist writing on the notion of power in Iran in full:

²²² Z. Rouhi, Interviewed by A. Sedighi, Isfahan, October 16, 2009

“One cannot say that power in Iran is organized properly and consequently power exists in multiple spheres. This multiplicity of power is not necessarily a deficiency, but can rather prohibit despotism and can be an attractive situation. However, the negative aspects of this situation is the invisibility of channels of power and the hiding of these channels in society’s far away peripheries, away from the eyes of people and formal law. This disorganisation is not just in the highest levels of power but its effects are seen in the lowest and most common spheres. The police officer guarding in the middle of the junction for example does not have a clear understanding his own power. The bank clerk, when and if he is tired, closes the desk because he imagines this to be in his power. The man who calls in the radio program which is discussing family relations, and complains about his wife’s nagging which he believes endangers the peace of his family, and asks why the state does nothing to stop her is under the impression that the state has such power – he believes the government can command his wife not to be so demanding. [...] There are a thousand examples. It is as if we locked in a great misunderstanding about our own power and that of others, the power of the state, and the power of the country, about power in general, the roots of which is in the lack of education and rule of law in our society.”²²³

Comical exaggerations aside, what Behnoud refers to is known to any Iranian living in one of the urban centres of the Islamic Republic of Iran. What is interesting here is that even in the examples of Behnoud we see a gendered picture of bureaucratic power; it is men who imagine their own power in these ways. The wife of the man in the example although without voice in Behnoud’s recollection of the radio program, is not imagining such power, she asks for what she wants and in the eyes of her powerless husband, she is asking for too much. Likewise, the women involved with women’s football imagine a powerful organisation and a great bureaucracy above them, and they can merely do what they can with what they have. Statements such as “we’re not asking for much” were oft repeated and point to a feminized relationship with the patriarchal bureaucracy, negotiating by adopting a voice of humility and

²²³ M. Behnoud, ‘On Power’, in *Civil Society and Youth*, (Tehran: University of Tehran Press, 2005), p. 188

modesty.²²⁴ The organisation hence recreates gendered relationships within it.

The rhizomatic response of women's football to this organisational structure exists in this context. I identify four main characteristics of this response. Firstly, this response is not one that takes place, or even begins, outside the bureaucracy or sports. On the contrary, what we are describing here is the day-to-day activities of employees within the sphere of sports and physical education in Iran *at work*. I use the word response for this very reason: the organisational characteristics of this response are both a creative utilization of the bureaucracy as well as part of the organisational culture of it. The rhizomatic response covers up many of the failures and deficiencies of the bureaucracy it is in, for example the over-emphasis on top-level management with no formal connection to the lower levels of the hierarchy and lack of communication and control.

Secondly, women's football is not a single agent but rather the activity of coaches, players and administrators in physical education, private clubs, and national ministries. Formally, these spheres might have no connection with one another and refer to different sources of funding and support, adhere to different contractual obligations and have access to different qualities in terms of facilities. This goes to show that women's football cannot be talked about as one unit with a singular relationship with sources of power and funding. More importantly, not everyone involved in women's football can be included in what we here describe as the rhizomatic response; everyone in women's football is not active in its promotion. Thus, although not everyone in women's football are actively

²²⁴ This is much like the example of the woman principal, given by Erika Friedl, who was ordered by her male supervisor not to let any man enter the school premises. When the supervisor appeared a few days later to check on administrative matters, the principal refused him entry on grounds of his own orders. See E. Friedl, 'Sources of Female Power in Iran' in M. Afkhami and E. Friedl (eds), *In the Eye of the Storm: Women in Post-Revolutionary Iran*, (London: IB Taurus, 1994), p. 154

pushing for its interests, all those who are active in the way we describe here are employees, professionals and contacted as players, coaches or administrators by an organisation.

Thirdly, the response in question is rhizomatically organized. It consists of connections across different institutions and across official hierarchies. These connections are often personalized, based on trust, and extended to others through third-person guarantors in the network. Apart from these alliances, the network is also extended across institutions through multiple employments. All of the most active individuals had several jobs, often at different levels in administrative and coaching, and some were simultaneously also contracted players.

Finally, considering the above points, the rhizomatic response is not a resistance to the bureaucracy of sports in Iran as it is part of it and gives it legitimacy. Nor is this movement one of simply coping with patriarchy, it is a highly creative and dynamic organisation which allows, and has allowed, for women's football to develop despite the limitations of its situation. In this thesis we are approaching sport as a reflex, or a reflection (as stated above) of the state structure, as do most literature on the history and politics of sport. The changes that occur in sports, particularly in women's football, can be argued to mirror changes in the Islamic Republic of Iran as a whole. However, we are not concerned with women's football as a mere analogy and instead looking deeper into the way in which women's football is organized will, it is hoped, illustrate certain particularities.

The Organisation

Whether the whole is the sum of its parts or not, the Ministry of Physical Education in its entirety is like any other organisation made up of offices and positions which functions in both vertical and hierarchical relationship to one another, from management down to clerical staff. I have discussed the ways in which football has been framed discursively, however, it is the way in which these concepts translate to the lower levels which essentially provide the service that is the question, and more importantly how officials and different levels see themselves in relation to the overall structure as stated in the official maps of the organisation. If it is true that the primary goals of the Physical Education and its branches are to provide opportunities for the Iranian people, the youth in particular, to exercise and take part in their sport of choice, what are the different offices and personnel doing to attain this goal – or is this definition in fact a simplified one and the overall character of the institution of Physical Education understood differently by its staff? On paper, an ethnographic study of the Ministry of Physical Education and its branches seems straight forward. The main sporting administration is the Ministry (Sazeman-e Taribyat Badani), whose responsibilities are the ones mentioned earlier. The head of the ministry is answerable to the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran. There are then several sub-structures. The first is its vertical administration from its top national level to the county Heyyats (federation) which administer the sport in each district.

Until 2003 women's sport was administered on this level by a women's Heyyat (federation) which organized all women's sports, including women's football. However, institutional segregation has now been

replaced with international divisions and each Heyyat has a Women's Affairs coordinator who is responsible for the administration of women's participation in their respective sports. Moreover, each sport has its own federation which works at a national level, mostly based in Tehran. Due to international regulations, some of these have broken official ties to the STB, whilst others have continued their positions as government structures. The International governing body of football (FIFA) banned Iran from participation in international competitions for excessive government interference after the Ministry of Physical Education terminated the contract of the president of the Football Federation, Mohammed Dadkan, after the country failed to qualify for the 2006 World Cup.

The ban was lifted after negotiations with the Asian Football Confederation, however, there are still no clear organisational divisions between the Ministry of Physical Education and that of the Football Federation. The latter, similar to the Heyyats, has an internal Women's Affairs coordinators who administers and organizes women's football nationally. It is here that the bulk of the work related to the sport such as competitions in both the urban centres as well as the rural provinces, evaluation of regulations, quality assessments, selecting provincial and national teams and other issues relating directly to the sport.

Physical Education is then divided into several offices with specific duties. Firstly, the public affairs office deals with national and international public relations, and according to the job description work essentially as a press office. Secondly, we find the now disappearing department for the expansion and development of Women's Sports (Daftar-e Tose-e Varzeshe-e Banovan). As mentioned earlier this has technically been replaced by positions within each Heyyat and the federation according to sport. The department still has a few employees with no clear organisational links to those offices. Thirdly, the office of Human

Resources is responsible for staff recruitment and training. However, the appointment of the president of the Ministry is obviously a ministerial position appointed by the President of the Republic. Finally, the Head Office deals with the main responsibilities of Physical Education. The National Olympic Committee is another body with loose ties to the Ministry of Physical Education in terms of natural crossovers in certain sports. However, the committee is not part of the government structure and does its own research and campaigns in terms of appointing the Iranian Olympic Committee, organizing and selecting athletes for the Olympic competitions, and representing Iran in the International Olympic Committee.

The institutional map of the STB starts from the head of the department all the way down to the different offices at Ostan level. Each level between is linked to the next, hierarchically and clearly, imitating the efficiency of a tree-system. The image illustrates the hypothetical institution, with the large head, which includes all the different departments and ever shrinking but shapeless bottom. It is the typical tree/root system of organisation, taken for granted by managers and coordinators in Iran, rooting the President in each county through its organisational tentacles. As we move from the top to bottom of the map the lines between each department become more arbitrary. This shapeless bottom makes the sports organisation in Iran a complex unit to analyse within the paradigms of mainstream organisational theory which sees these as formal structures with clearly marked lines of communication and authority.²²⁵ In organisational theory, including those accepted by high-level employees of the Ministry of Physical Education, there is a temptation to either see it as the result of modernizations, consequences of rationalization of society, or

²²⁵ Blau and Scott's analysis of authority in the Weberian organisation for example only allows for compliance and non-compliance, similar to those of the feminist approach discussed above, and describes the structure of authority as 'clearly circumscribed'. P. M. Blau and W. R. Scott, *Formal Organisations: A Comparative Approach*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), p. 1 and 14

as sites of class struggle or social systems where people and production are organized.²²⁶ Whatever the framework used, there are two important limitations to point out.

Firstly, as Casey illustrates, they often approach organisations with a “singularly privileged managerial gaze”.²²⁷ It is from this point of view that maps such as the one above are drawn, thus affecting the way managerial decisions are made often assuming a natural downward communication based on some assumed institutional authority. Secondly, most organisational theory perceives the organisation as a solid unit, as a facility within which bureaucrats or officials work; the organisational is in these analyses a constant reality. Furthermore, these studies, including many of those who use more critical approaches, are aimed at giving suggestions of ways in which the organisation in question can become more efficient and generate more profit. In the words of C Wright Mills organisational theorists and analysts are mostly “servants of power”.²²⁸

The bureaucracy as a state structure in Iran was a vital source of power and legitimization for the Shah. The organisational theories mentioned above were taken for granted, as not only institutions were overtly hierarchical in their organisation but each institution was seen in some respect linked to the Shah as the ultimate and final manager. Farazmand goes further in his argument and claims the state was the only major

²²⁶ Catherine Casey illustrates that although there are many different approaches within organisational studies there is a prevailing emphasis on functionalist approaches, solving functional systems and management problems. And although “some analysts invoke elements of a Weberian social action approach, and others pursue a neo-rational strategic management approach to analysing organisations” there is a “shared commitment to a singularly privileged managerialist gaze”. See C Casey, *Critical Analysis of Organisations: theory, Practice, Revitalization*, (London: SAGE Publications, 2002), p. 9

²²⁷ Ibid.

²²⁸ Ibid. p. 11

foundation of legitimacy for the regime as the monarchy itself was not a source of legitimacy amongst the population of the country.²²⁹

Consequently, the first few post-revolutionary years saw a large scale de-bureaucratisation process where particularly public institutions opened up from below. The most significant example of this is the confiscation by the newly established state of the largest Iranian industrialists and properties of the Shah and his family which were turned into semi-public foundations, *bonyads*.²³⁰ In the spirit of de-bureaucratisation these institutions severed ties with the state, became tax-exempt. To state that *bonyad*'s are outside state-control demands a very narrow definition of what the 'state' is. As Saedi illustrates, *bonyad*'s have been actively involved in propagating the dominant state ideology through social and cultural activities²³¹. Their work to sustain the ideology of revolution cannot be overstated. In Saedi's words, "these organisations were established in order to assist institutionalisation of the ideology of the ruling class by producing an ideological apparatus for new regime when the revolutionary forces could not trust the old regime's bureaucratic apparatus"²³². This has also allowed the *bonyad*'s to suggest and recommend key people to influential positions, bypassing government quotas and through many other means have significant influence on Iranian society²³³.

As the story of the *bonyad*'s illustrate, the debureacratisation and decentralisation were short-lived and the restructuring that took place

²²⁹ A. Farazmand, 'Bureaucracy, Bureaucratization and Debureaucratization', in A. Farazmand (ed), *Bureaucracy and Administration* (Boca Raton: Taylor and Francis Group, 2009), p. 551

²³⁰ These are para-governmental organisations whose role in Iranian society and economy is discussed for example in A. Saedi, The Accountability of Para-Governmental Organisations (*boynads*): The Case of Iranian Foundations, *Journal of Iranian Studies*, 37:3 (2004) pp. 479-498

²³¹ A. Saedi, 'The accountability of para-governmental organisations (*bonyads*): the case of Iranian foundations', *Iranian Studies*, Vol 37 (3), 2004

²³² *Ibid.*

²³³ N. Habibi, 'Allocation of Educational and Occupational Opportunities in the Islamic Republic of Iran: A Case Study in the Political Screening of Human Capital in the Islamic Republic of Iran', *Iranian Studies* Vol 22 (4), 1989, p. 23

was soon replaced once again with the dominance of the bureaucratic model. However, in the Physical Education Ministry in particular, the bureaucratic model has been applied more rigidly on top of the hierarchy than at the bottom, leading to what appears to be serious communication obstacles both vertically and horizontally within the institution.

The inefficiency, or rather lack of, communication lines makes it difficult for the Ministry of Physical Education to truly assess its function in any other way than to look at tangible results. Aside from results of Iranian teams in international competitions which often lead to a wave of criticism of the institution and calls for reform, facilities are of great importance here. This is also the most frequently referenced issue of contention between athletes or coaches and administrative offices. To some extent the emphasis on building new facilities, and perhaps more importantly the renovation and upkeep of existing ones, can be explained by referring to the fast growing demand for sports, logically calling for more available spaces for organized sport. Furthermore, physical results such as number of working facilities are the most visible role of the ministry to those at the bottom of the bureaucratic chain – what else can they be doing? Officials in Heyyats across the country were keen to discuss this issue, quoting their own success compared to predecessors or other sports in each respective county. At the Football Heyyat in Isfahan one official told us that a nationwide survey of available facilities had led to the building and renovation of several projects. The evaluated survey led to the recommendation of 900 new spaces which were deemed suitable for sporting facilities²³⁴. Of these, 181 were bought or rented by the Ministry between 2003-2004 as public facilities which in turn would be allocated according to sport to each Heyyat. Common criticisms to these policies were the fact that only 11% of sporting facilities are available to the public are in rural areas, and only 4%

²³⁴ *Varzesh va tarbiyat badani dar barnameye sevom tose-e*, (Tehran: Rozanemey-e Iran, 2005), p 45

are indoor facilities. Women's access to sporting facilities is significantly diminished if these are not covered. The Ministry's response to the first criticism was that the urban bias had been around for longer than they had, and that there are channels available to rural areas to inform the central body of any specific needs and demands.

This "build it and they will come" mentality is criticized by many women athletes and coaches, not only because the lack of indoor facilities but also because once the facilities were completed the administrators would divide the schedule of its use according to sports, each active sports in the region would be allocated certain amount of spots per week. These are never sufficient enough time for the athletes and women would have even less access to those hours as they are often side-lined in the allocation. For example, in conversation with the head coach of the women's national team and the Iran Khodro women's team in Tehran she criticized the lack of time allocation on an STB level which meant they were in the mercy of the facilities and had to compete with other football teams and only managed to get two sessions each week.

Office of the Director of Women's Affairs, Iranian Football Federation

I arrived at the Iranian Football Federation offices to interview Farideh Shojaee the Director of Women's Affairs, but before meeting her I had contacted two other important figures for Iranian women's football. I had already met Shojaee's predecessor, Sepanjee with whom I had several phone conversations. The latter was a strict lady, head of the Islamic Countries Women Sports Federation (also known as the Islamic Councils Women Sports Federation) who worked closely with Faezeh Rafsanjani. Rafsanjani is considered the most important person in advancing women's

sport in the country. Daughter of the former president, and representative of the Majlis, former political prisoner on charges of anti-regime propaganda, Rafsanjani has been politically active at the highest levels of Iranian politics and her activism is often aimed at legal reform or larger institutional openings which would aid women's public participation. In Jenny Steel and Sophie Richter-Devroe's article on the development of women's football in Iran, Rafsanjani is portrayed as trying to "find ways of legalising women's sports by making them compatible with the Islamic laws".²³⁵ She was mentioned by all those who were interviewed for this study as the person I needed to talk to, and the person who had done the most for women's sports in Iran. After many attempts, I managed to locate Rafsanjani's assistant and phoned to organise a meeting. The meeting was organised but then cancelled and, in the end, I never managed to meet her – and as time went by her participation became less and less important as the focus of my study move further and further away from a centralised traditional organisational study.

I had not heard of Farideh Shojaee when I booked an appointment for the first time to meet her at the offices of the Director of Women's Affairs. The office was in the main building of the Iranian Football Federation. The first time I arrived at the office I saw a large group of young women who were clearly footballers exiting the Women's Affairs offices. I later realised that the offices were open to young footballers that come for help with finding sponsors, organizing tournaments and other activities they could use the offices for. It was a source of legitimacy for the sport and strength for women footballers, and those working in the office, all female, were all highly ambitious and active participants in the sport. Dr Shojaee's office was at the end of the office, where she sat surrounded by medals won by the Iranian women's national team, photographs of different tournaments

²³⁵ J. Steel and S. Richter-Devroe, 'The Development of Women's Football in Iran: A Perspective on the Future for Women's Sport in the Islamic Republic', *Journal of the British Institute of Persian Studies* 41, 2003, pp. 315-322, at p. 316

organized by the Iranian Football Federation and on her computer she showed me a slideshow of the recent success of the national team who played in a Futsal tournament, pointing out the Iranian men's youth team who were cheering the women on from the stands. She was eating rice and kebab and apologised for eating in front of me during the interview. Her demeanour was relaxed and our day there was interrupted several times by people who brought mobile phones in with a different person on the line every time, or a letter to be signed or read.

The Women's Affairs office is located inside the Football Federation offices in Ararat district in the north of Tehran. It is reached via Seoul Street, a street named after the South Korean capital city after the two cities decided to exchange names to promote better relations and cooperation in 1976 (there's a Tehran Street in the Gangnam district of Seoul). The building itself is unassuming, apart from the black exterior, and walking in you are met with a security guard who told us to go to the top floor. The location of the Women's Affairs office inside the Iranian Football Federation is seen by many active footballers as a symbol of women's integration and acceptance into male dominated spheres of society. The office is in constant movement to keep up with the rapid growth of women footballers around the country, and the increased budget allocated to them by the Iranian Football Federation. The positive attitude was palpable in the overcrowded office, and I was showered in hope for the future and statistics of the speed of the women's sports movement since the revolution. Women's football, I was told, was only a decade old, and it had only been a proper serious institution since 2005. However, women's football is not carried by the charisma of leaders but on a certain organisational structure.²³⁶

²³⁶ A Sedighi, *Field Notes*, August 2008

The rhizomatic response of women's football in Iran cannot be limited to the formal architectures made up of departments, ministries or offices. Yet, the architecture of the formal top of the women's football hierarchy illustrates the field's reliance on both short and long term links across the official bureaucracy. Examining the office of the Director of Women's Affairs (DWA) illustrates the relationship of those women who are employed in institutions with their positions. Once I reached the top floor of the Football Federation building, I reached an open glass door entitled "The Director of Women's Affairs". The office is an open-plan one, a design which, by avoiding apparent physical barriers, allows for a greater flow of functional communication. Apart from the floor-to-ceiling cover delimiting the office of the Director, the DWA office lacks any form of barriers, whether in the form of screens or other physical borders, in the main office space. From a social relations perspective the open-plan design creates, or rather allows, for trust to be established as a vital organisational foundation²³⁷. This trust is not necessarily limited to the employees regularly in the office but is extended across the bureaucracy and indeed beyond it. Furthermore, the links which are created by both short term and long term trust are not extended to anyone who enters, but rather, it will be argued here, are the foundation of the rhizomatic response of women's football to the bureaucratic structure in which it finds itself.

A group of football players are gathering around the receptionist, who I find is herself a player at a club. They are trying to locate the phone number of an organizer of a tournament they are meant to participate in. One of the players goes to an empty desk to use the phone once the number has been found. There seems to be little space for privacy or set job specifications. The removal of physically designated offices, which are

²³⁷ M. D. Zalesny and R. V. Farace, *Traditional versus Open Offices: A Comparison of Sociotechnical, Social Relations and Symbolic Meaning Perspective*, The Academy of Management Journal, Vol. 30, No. 2 (Jun., 1987), p. 241

thought to make identification of different roles more clear, allowing for privacy and defensible work areas, consequently diminish these specifications²³⁸. The relationship between the occupants of the DWA office and specific job roles and personal identification with these roles goes even further than these mentioned discussions. The organisation of the relationships within the office not only allows for a closer interpersonal connection at the expense of personal attachment to specific job roles, but in fact the interpersonal relationships, based on trust, constitute the rhizomatic response as a movement and the 'offices' and job-specific means (phone-lines, photo-copying machines, computers etc.) are utilized by the employees according to the needs of the specific projects rather than according to notions of ownership through position²³⁹.

In an environment where the bureaucratic lines are clear, or are made clear, and where personal accomplishments are visible and/or encouraged these break-downs of private works spaces might lead to dissatisfaction as it emphasises the work of the whole rather than the individual. The organisation of the DWA however exists in an underpaid, in fact often unpaid,²⁴⁰ sphere where ambition and determination fuels those active within it. The outside is seen, not as a field of potential growth or potential power, but rather as a blurry but nevertheless impenetrable and explicitly gendered domain. I met one player, Nima, from a division two football club outside her training facilities. Like many others, after hearing what my research was about and that I was there to simply listen to her story, about how she feels about football, about the organisation of football in Iran and about her relationship with her club and the sport the interview

²³⁸ Ibid.

²³⁹ A discussion on how architecture and office space can be physical representations of social relations, as well reconstructing material and physical structures of power through dividing particular activities across space see J. Boys, 'Is There a Feminist Analysis of Architecture?', *Women and the Environment*, 10:1 (1984), pp. 25-34

²⁴⁰ Many coaches described to me how they were unpaid for long periods at a time whilst many players who were to be contracted described how clubs avoided signing the contracts.

quite instantly became a place to vent frustrations. I was seen as someone who could take the frustration of the players and administrators to higher positions in the blurry and elusive hierarchy. Her frustrations were often prefixed with “it is different for you [in the west]” as her own troubled experiences were put down as cultural and educational backwardness in the country. Nima explained:

“We are left to fend for ourselves. For men there are rules, players are picked on quality because they have been seen to play well in a certain position. Women are left to their own devices and there are therefore no rules. The best player is not necessarily picked by a higher club, in fact sometimes the worst player is selected. It becomes about who you have standing next to you, it’s all corrupt. [...] A coach has little role to play in this mess, on her own that is. Coaches need to work together, not compete against each other. The players need to see that there is a structure, it needs to be clear.”²⁴¹

Her tone when saying the above was almost patronising, as if the solutions were known to everyone but the authorities refused or simply did not care enough to do them. Similar quotes fill my notes from interviews, and those of my peer researchers, with women active in football. In Esfahan my peers attended a tournament for young women and spoke to many footballers and coaches. One of these was Rahele, a young coach in her early thirties who spoke with the same passion as the player above, and with the same tone of frustration:

To get anything we have to we have to go back and forth, from this person to that office. Each one gives us problems, ‘how much money do you need? How much have you spent? How much do you have left?’. The men always get what they want.²⁴²

The image of institutional and specifically bureaucratic incompetence is common in Iran but the image of the ‘outside’ as corrupt, inefficient and

²⁴¹ Nima, Interviewed by A. Sedighi, Tehran, October 10, 2009

²⁴² Rahele, Interviewed by Z. Rouhi, Shahreza, 19 March, 2009

unjust is a common one amongst those active in women's football. The hierarchical top of women's football is not perceived or experienced as part of this outside or as the 'actual' top of the bureaucracy. The open-plan design of the DWA offices is therefore one way of allowing those active in promoting the needs and demands of women's football to maximise their exposure and consequently their identity as part of the rhizomatic organisation, as a response to the bureaucratic roles, and utilizing the few formal potentials and identifying these as not part of official roles of individuals but gateways to opportunity. Trust becomes a necessary foundation of the organisational culture of the DWA, making these links physically visible at the expense of any potential bureaucratic attempts to define each job against the parameters of its own strategies.

The rhizomatic response is thus shaped and regulated internally through the creation and break-up of links based on trust and necessity, but also defined against what is seen as an impure and inefficient bureaucracy. To précis Ardener's paraphrasing of Goffman, the spatial organisation reflects the social organisation.²⁴³ Ardener develops Goffman further by arguing that "once space has been bounded and shaped it is no longer merely a neutral background" but rather "exerts its own influence".²⁴⁴ Looking at DWA however the division of spatial organisation and social organisation seems misleading and unhelpful, and thus we need to look beyond the question of whether it is the space that influences those within it or vice versa.

The open-space design of the DWA office is not what produces the rhizomatic organisation of women's football, nor is it the case that the organisational structure of women's football is simply reflected in the office design of the DWA. The bureaucratic structure of sports in the

²⁴³ S. Ardener, in J. Rendell, B. Penner and I. Borden (eds), *Gender Space architecture: an Interdisciplinary Introduction* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 112

²⁴⁴ Ibid.

Islamic Republic of Iran do not limit or define women's football, as has been repeated here. The DWA office functions to some extent as a "centre" of the rhizomatic response, but the latter is nevertheless rhizomatically organized. It functions not according to the official bureaucratic map but moves beyond and across it through a network of trust between those who share the aim of increasing its access to funds, exposure, sponsorships etc. In fact, the inclusion of women's football into the Football Federation is a fairly recent in relation to the overall history of women's football in the IRI. Yet, the design of the DWA office is not merely a reflection of the structural organisation of women's football either.

The space of the office never becomes part of the rhizomatic response. A football coach will enter the office in order to speak with the Director in order to confirm the planning of a tournament. If the latter is not in the office they will use her phone registry to contact another coach or administrator personally, and if this is unsuccessful they will ask those around if anyone has heard anything about the tournament. A third person, perhaps another coach, explains they are also trying to confirm their participation and that they know another person involved with the organisation in a different Ostan, and so on and so forth. The officers in this case are defined by situational characteristics, not according to formal subjectifications. Each station, whether the phone, desk, or computer is merely part of a perpetual movement of a larger structure.

What is outside the network of women's football becomes a territory in space "consolidate[d] by the construction of a second, adjacent territory" and if the enemy is the gendered impenetrable domain of the Football Federation, or the Ministry of Physical Education, it de-territorialises this space from within by "renouncing, by going elsewhere"²⁴⁵. Consequently, we should not look at the relationship between the articulations of the

²⁴⁵ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Continuum, 2004) p. 390

movement in the space it finds itself in but rather see the relationship between it and that space as an impression of the organisation in question. The rhizomatic response cannot be defined by the DWA offices but its function there is a useful starting point in an attempt to understand it.

Cross-Institutional Alliances

The formal divisions of offices have situational importance; offices provide more stable access to specific privileges. Yet, it is precisely because these privileges are not efficiently provided that the rhizomatic response is reinforced. The position of director of women's affairs at a private football club is in itself not a position of power, it has no access to funding negotiations, sponsorship deals or other important aspects needed for the development of the team. More importantly, the woman's team in question, apart from the league it participates in, has little opportunities for competing in tournaments, whether local or national, or even less international. The position of director of women's affairs at the biggest private club in Iran, has no authority in any of these spheres. The rhizomatic response is however not dependent on officers per se, each is utilized according its privileges and accesses. In fact, the most active coaches and administrators had several employments. The head of the heyayat, was also a coach and a player for a second division team. The head coach of one major university team was also the head coach of two private clubs, the director of women's affairs at one club, and a lecturer at the Physical Education department of another university. Amirshaghghi, the head coach of the women's national team, replied to an email asking for a clarification on her professional positions:

“Head coach of: Hijab, Esteghlal Tehran, Saypa, Peykan, Azad University, University of Tehran, Balgostar, Alzahra University, Alame University, head coach for Team Tehran, National Team,

Director of Sports at Iran Khodro, Director of Sports Technology at the Physical Education Department in Tehran (Ostan level), Lecturer at Alzahra, Tehran and Shahid Beheshti Universities, and Lecturer at Coaching classes for the Football Federation.”²⁴⁶

These were positions held during Amirshaghghi’s career over the period of a decade, nevertheless, it illustrates the nature of employment within women’s football. For many the numerous employments were due to the temporary status of employment within sports and the lack of financial stability. However, those with several jobs were often more active within the sport, and to a large extent it is my suspicion that as long as there were no conflicts, more work would be taken as long as it allows for better access to funding, tournaments or talent.

During the fieldwork of this study, the coach was the head of the national team, head coach of Iran Khodro women, a lecturer at the Football Federation as well as a lecturer at Tehran University. Amirshaghghi was a particularly active person in the development of women’s football, and I will return to her work below. However, others, who had not dedicated their lives to football were still employed in several different positions within the sport – often using their access to the different institutions to aid in their overall goal of furthering the opportunities for women’s football. One of these people was Roya, a coach who I met but who spoke in more detail to one of my peers inside a football tournament in Rasht. The coach was of the same generation of Amirshaghghi and knew her personally and spoke at length about the development of women’s football in the periphery of Iranian sporting institutions. Regarding her own career she said,

I was the head of the Football Heyyat in the Ostan, and because of lack of opportunities I was also a coach and a player at the same time. In the field of track and field I was the champion of

²⁴⁶ Amirshaghghi, Email to A. Sedighi, I received February 9, 2009

Iran in 100m, 200m and 400m, won gold in all three. [...] Apart from this I am also active on Amozesh Parvaresh level and I work here on grassroots levels, working with the youth. What we do is provide opportunities for them to do the sport...because the schools do not always provide the space for these players so we have to move them to these indoor arenas. And depending on their age we train them and have them compete in competitions. [...] This you see today is the fruit of a lot of work, before we didn't have this kind of success and the opportunities in our town weren't there for us.²⁴⁷

Officially the bureaucracy of women's football is divided between the professional and the educational. Yet, the employment patterns of those active in women's football, as illustrated by the quote above, do not necessarily follow these distinctions. University football teams often have coaches who also coach at private clubs or hold other significant positions there. Players find themselves therefore often playing on both the educational as well as the semi-professional level. The cross-hierarchical response of women's football, or some involved in women's football to the bureaucracy of sports in Iran, is thus not only one of informal inter-agent links (which will be discussed below), but also one which is formalized through appointed bureaucratic positions but which nevertheless are linked through a single body. These positions are paid positions, mostly in the 'public' sector, i.e. higher education or within the federation, but also, as mentioned earlier, in the form of coaches or administrative positions in private clubs. What is most important to note is that the employment patterns of these individuals are all within the sphere of women's football.

The rhizomatic response de-territorialises the formal hierarchy of each station, it makes use of it within its own network; a position at the Heyyat allows a coach to more efficiently negotiate the budget, organize Ostan level tournaments and so forth. Thus, the de-territorialisation is a

²⁴⁷ Z. Rouhi, Interview Journal, September 2008

reterritorialization in the network. In this respect we are speaking of something different than what organisational theorists refer to as Network Embeddedness which describes connections regardless of geographic location.²⁴⁸ I am not describing a 'fluid space' in which the boundaries are never clear, and where the inside and outside are difficult to identify²⁴⁹. Each activist is embedded in the spaces they reside, be it that the football pitch, the club, or the DWA office in Tehran, and each space provides a different set of possibilities. In fact, the rhizomatic response does not counteract the bureaucratic role of each member. To put it in crudely functional terms, if my job is to best serve my clubs/university teams/women's football, the network of other activists whom I have access to through contacts and acquaintances who I trust is the best way for me to do so.

Trust

Women's football in Iran has within it a rhizomatic network in response to the perceived and experienced inefficient and corrupt bureaucracy of Sport and Physical Education. This network is partly built up through personal connections, or alliances, which are based on trust. I would like to mention briefly that this 'trust' is different from that described by Giddens²⁵⁰. For Giddens, what I am describing here the element of familiarity in pre-modern societies, which here is illustrated by the lack of efficient bureaucracy. Giddens argues that with the growth of 'modern'

²⁴⁸ M. Hess, 'Spatial' Relationships? Towards a Reconceptualization of Embeddedness, *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2004) pp. 165-186

²⁴⁹ A. Mol and J. Law, as discussed in M. Hess, 'Spatial' Relationships? Towards a Reconceptualization of Embeddedness, *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2004) pp. 165-186

²⁵⁰ See discussion on Giddens in M. Hess, 'Spatial' Relationships? Towards a Reconceptualization of Embeddedness, *Progress in Human Geography*, Vol. 28, No. 2 (2004) pp. 165-186 at p. 175 and A. Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 33

societies, and the “development of abstract systems”, there is a slow decay of (traditional) “institutionally organized personal connections”²⁵¹.

In the case in question, there is no connection to the abstract system, the bureaucratic state has not achieved its own invisibility, women active in football do not trust the official channels of communication and protocol. Following Giddens argument, it is only natural therefore for the women to ‘return’ to organized personal connections, characteristic of pre-modern societies, or at least move towards that form of organisation. Yet, the women are not replacing the formal channels with their own personal connections, nor can their response be described as existing outside the parameters of the official bureaucracy. Coaches, administrators and players are all employed (the nature of the employment will be discussed in the next chapter), and have often several positions within women’s football but across different bureaucratic spheres; the described rhizomatic networks and the official bureaucracy are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, the former can be seen as social capital for the Ministry of Physical Education and, due to its invisibility and by not being an organized social movement against the official bureaucracy, can be described as working as a cover-up for the inefficiencies of the bureaucracy, thus help legitimize its function and continued state sponsorship.

In this respect what I am describing here is closer to a ‘corporate culture’ than a ‘social movement’ of any sort. There are similarities between the rhizomatic response of women’s football and the concept of “networks of practice” which Yeung, in the context of the ways in which different social actors determine the growth of firms, describes as “social actors in the firm form specific networks of practice that socialise other actors into their

²⁵¹ A. Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), p. 33

networks on the basis of shared representation, purpose, norms, and values”²⁵². Although in Young’s analysis, these networks of practice are part of the firm’s management strategies and not, as the networks described in this thesis might be seen, ‘grassroots’ organizing which not even acknowledged by the institution much less part of official strategies of the institution. Nevertheless, the latter’s function does not take place outside the bureaucracy, nor can be said to be organized from the ‘outside’ aiming to be further included in the ‘inside’.

The rhizomatic response *is* a part of the sports bureaucracy in Iran. In contrast to this analysis, Jenny Steel and Sophie Richter-Devroe in their study on the development of women’s football in the Islamic Republic of Iran, describe the sport as moving from a status of ‘outlawed’ to being ‘enthusiastically encouraged’ through the manipulation of superficial elements of the women’s football into a “face acceptable to Islamic culture”.²⁵³ What this form of conclusion presents is once again a binary situation between the resisters and the state, with the bureaucracy being the field of battle. Women’s football is here banned from the bureaucracy, and denied official legitimacy, and their struggle is one of acceptance by the state and thus an inclusion into the bureaucracy. Furthermore, their inclusion is seen purely in cultural (Islamic) terms. Through all of this, the bureaucracy comes out scot-free, as neither tainted by the misogyny of the state nor by any other authority, and remains an abstract space. A sociological examination of the bureaucracy in question however shows a different picture, one which does not rely on an a priori division of people and bureaucratic space and which does not rest on resistance/compliance dichotomies whether culturally or politically phrased.

²⁵² H. W. Yeung, *The Firm as Social Networks: An Organisational Perspective*, Growth and Change, Vol. 36, No. 3 (July, 2005) , p. 314

²⁵³ Jenny Steel and Sophie Richter-Devroe, *The Development of Women’s Football in Iran: A Perspective on the Future for Women’s Sports in the Islamic Republic*, Iran, Vol. 41, (2003), p. 315

From the point of view of those active in women's football it is the activities of football fans that further women's football, not institutional integration. At the tournament in Shahreza, Rahele, a young coach, describes the relationship of women within the game from her point of view. She says,

If we women don't support each other nothing will happen...If I wouldn't have come here, for example, I couldn't have done anything to help these children in our town, because there are no opportunities there. And if it wasn't for the women who have organized this competition... Parisa is always here, she helped organize this competition. And Isfahan is supported in turn by Tehran, and we are happy that this support is there and it is also a support for us...it allows us to come from our corner and develop ourselves and our team. And in a way we are supporting them, and we are giving them energy.²⁵⁴

In this case Rahele was from Shahreza in the County (Ostan) of Esfahan, a town with a population of just over one hundred thousand. The organisation of football in this town officially comes under the jurisdiction of the Nayib-Rais (Deputy Head) of Shahreza Shahrestan (Sub-County), who in the hierarchical division is beneath the Heyyat (Federation) on the county level which in turn works beneath the Federation, as well as the Ministry of Physical Education, both of which work on a national level with offices in Tehran. The Nayib Rais' position is thus fundamentally that of an extension of the Heyyat of the county in question, in this case Esfahan. In the case above however, the coach of the team in question had been contacted by the organizer of the tournament in Esfahan, Sarah a twenty five year old administrator and football player herself, who works within the Heyyat, informing them of the tournament and organizing their funding through the Ministry of Physical Education in Tehran. The Nayib Rais in Shahreza is therefore not involved in the above example.

²⁵⁴ A Sedighi, *Field Notes*, September 2008

The contact in the Heyyat also helped the team receive a grant subsidising their entry fee of 600 000 Toman by 300 000. The issue of funding and sponsorships will be discussed elsewhere in this thesis, however it is important to note the relationship between the coach and her 'contact' in the Heyyat. It is not simply the case of the actual relationships within the bureaucracy being different from those set out officially, but that the horizontal lines of communication are personalized; the coach was contacted by the Heyyat personally and was helped in her application for funding and transport. This type of relationship does not bypass any formal bureaucratic lines, it is the way women's football is organized today within the bureaucratic space it is in. Ali, one of the managers working in the Ministry of Physical Education in Shahreza explained it more clearly,

Competitions are organized by each Heyyat, together with the federations, and the budget then at least, around 30% of the budget for each sport goes to women. I mean when it doesn't it depends on their level of activity. They need to be able to organize. Luckily women have been able to organize their activity, despite the limitations.²⁵⁵

One of the formal interviews I managed to organise was with the Head of the Heyyat in Esfahan, Farhad Sistani, who in a short meeting in a closed office described a similar relationship between the organisation of sports competitions and the Heyyat, stating,

"Each Shahrestan has a Nayib Rais who organizes the sport in question. Competitions and tournaments are organized by the Heyyat on a county level and the teams register with us. But we also inform the Nayib Rais of this and they in turn inform any clubs or coaches that they know"²⁵⁶

In both these descriptions there is an organisational dependency on personalized relationships outside the formal channels of communication

²⁵⁵ Ali, interviewed by A. Sedighi, Shahreza, September 16, 2008

²⁵⁶ Farhad Sistani, Interviewed by A. Sedighi, Isfahan, September 21, 2008

and hierarchy. There are no clear lines of communication between clubs, coaches and players, and the administrative offices, but rather an expectation by the latter of the formers ability to organize outside of formal channels. As I have mentioned earlier however, the organisation which the Deputy Manager of the Ministry of Physical Education in Shahreza proclaims has been successful amongst women, has not taken place outside of the bureaucratic sphere, but has been organized within it and across its formal hierarchies.

To describe this organisation as one dependent on inter-personal trust is, however, problematic. This is mainly due to the extensive usage of 'trust' in academia without qualifying the term leading to many different uses which are not compatible²⁵⁷. Weber claimed that the very existence of economic interactions and the exchange of goods in society "is possible only on the basis of far-reaching personal confidence and trust"²⁵⁸. Larue Tone Hosmer's article entitled 'Trust: The Connecting Link between Organisational Theory and Philosophical Ethics' discusses the various applications of the concept²⁵⁹. He concludes that "the interpersonal literature on trust in management appeared to be focusing on superior/subordinate relationships and the personal characteristics of specific individuals within those relationships"²⁶⁰. Furthermore, it becomes evident in his overview that there is often an underlying assumption of the rational agent in the literature on trust. For example, Deutsch argues that the trusting person, "perceives that he will be worse off if he trusts and his trust is not fulfilled than if he does not trust"²⁶¹. Leaving aside the post-structural criticism of the 'rational' which one could deconstruct Deutsch's argument with, there is in Deutsch's argument an insistence on individual

²⁵⁷ L.T. Hosmer, *Trust: the Connecting Link Between Organisational Theory and Philosophical Ethics*, *The Academy of Management Review*, Vol. 20, No. 2 (Apr., 1995)

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p. 379

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.* pp. 379-394

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. 385

²⁶¹ Deutsch discussed in *Ibid.* at p. 381

trust which does not apply to our study. In the case of women's football in Iran I am describing a social system, a collective response.

Here our usage of trust is closer to that of Lewis and Weigert who discuss the concept as a 'collective attribute' amongst people existing in a social system.²⁶² Zucker goes further than this and states that trust is a 'social expectation', based on social rules by those involved in the economic exchange. She divides these social rules into three fundamental sections: Process based, Person based and Institution based trust.²⁶³ It is the latter which is most interesting in relation to the networks which are under scrutiny in this thesis. For Zucker, institution-based trust is impersonal trust which is tied to formal social structures, within mediated environments²⁶⁴. This again relies on a division of 'social structures' or bureaucracies from the agents in question. However, Zucker's model specifies 'third party insurance' as one of the formal mechanisms which trust is bound with, thus not necessarily relying on the mentioned division. In fact, the rhizomatic response, which is neither an informal extra-bureaucratic system nor a managerial strategy per se, is self-regulated through 'third party insurance' which therefore can be said to act as a [self] mediating mechanism. Thus, as in Zucker's description of institution based trust, the rhizomatic response is limited to those with access to third party guarantees²⁶⁵.

Third Party Guarantees and Gatekeeping

It is to the third party guarantee which Zucker discusses that the question "who gave you my number?" refers, and it is through this we gained access to the various coaches and administrators involved in women's

²⁶² see Ibid. p. 389

²⁶³ Ibid.

²⁶⁴ Ibid.

²⁶⁵ Ibid.

football. And it is particularly through mobile-phones that connections between coaches and administrators and some established players are made. Within this network, each individual can theoretically reach any other. Here again we see similar things in Deleuze and Guattari's principles of rhizomes when they write: "any point of a rhizome can be connected to anything other, and must be".²⁶⁶ Some of these relationships are not necessarily organized through 'third person guarantees', some are based on old friendships or professional acquaintances. Nevertheless, to gain access from 'outside' the network one needs some form of introduction from a third person. Moreover, the difference between the rhizomatic response described here and bureaucratically organized organisations is that the former does not come together in any 'management office' or at any point in the top of the hierarchy. As we have seen in the description of the DWA office at the Football Federation, what could be seen as the 'top' of any potential hierarchy of women's football, the formal divisions of stations do not necessarily apply to the office workers. There are those who have access to more phone-numbers and contacts than others, but these positions do not follow any formal bureaucratic stations. Some of these people are secretaries, others are themselves coaches and even players. During my research, I came into contact with one of these women. It was a brief meeting, as many of my meetings were, but which I made a detailed note of in my notebook as I felt even at that early stage that this was a phenomenon that seems to characterise women's football in Iran. Here I quote my own notes from 2009,

I reached the fifth-floor office where I was supposed to meet Ms. Dara. I sat down in the waiting room. It was busy and seemed to have a couple of groups of footballer players there trying to organise something. I didn't want to interrupt and sat there observing the events around me. A woman was sitting behind the desk not far from where I was, she was talking to one of these groups of young football players. After a few minutes, she looks

²⁶⁶ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 7

up and sees me waiting and asks the young players to wait and asks me, “what can I help you with?”. I explain that I have come to see Ms. Dara with whom I have an appointment. Her face became one which I had seen before, Ms. Dara must have left the building or wasn’t there that day – I knew that face well. I explain that she had promised me a list with all the names and numbers of the football coaches in the region. The lady then looks around her and sighs. She starts looking through her drawers and asks: “why do you need these numbers?” I explained that it was for a PhD thesis on Women’s Football in Iran, that I am from a university in the UK and about all the difficulties I had been having locating people, organising meetings that never materialised and trying to call numbers that were out of service. The lady stopped looking and picked up a blank piece of paper and began writing a list of names and numbers on it, she did this without hesitating and without looking any of them up. She knew the numbers off by heart. “You must have a good memory” I joked. “I have to know these numbers because I work with them every day”, she replied seriously. I asked her whether she could explain her position in the office. “My position is not important”, she said, “talk to these coaches, they’re the ones you need to speak to”.²⁶⁷

The experience was almost surreal, and thinking back on that it was a turning point in my research – but I would meet many more like that lady behind the desk. Points such as the one described above can be found all across the network of women footballers and although they can be valuable for obtaining numbers and addresses of active coaches, they are not as valuable in themselves as third person guarantees. “My position is not important”, specifies this very quality. Once we call a coach, if we are not immediately recognized and trusted we need to specify our guarantor and answer the question “who gave you this number?”

It is in cases like the one above, when we as researchers become involved in the rhizomatic response, that we can better understand its characteristics. In fact, one could divide the progress and development of the research for this paper into two categories, contacts and

²⁶⁷ A. Sedighi, *Field Notes*, November 2009.

developments which progressed along 'third person guarantees' and those which followed formal bureaucratic lines of appointment booking. Throughout the research in Iran I made regular attempts to reach football coaches and teams with whom I, or one of my peers, could spend time with during training and competitions, and these attempts often led us through both the bureaucratic lines, booking appointments with directors, managers and high level administrators as well as through introductions by third person guarantors. Yet, even this division becomes problematic once we come across instances where our connections did not directly link us to the coaches we wanted to interview, but instead introduced us to the relevant departments within the bureaucracy in question. At one point one of my interlocutors was given a letter of introduction in a closed envelope to take to the Director of Physical Education at a university, in order for us to gain contact with one of the coaches there through his office. In her diary she describes her experience,

I am asked into his office [...] after greeting me politely he asks "I'm sorry they have told me, but I have forgot: what is the aim of your study?" I would like to talk to some of the footballers here..." Like a patient teacher he repeats the question, "I know! But I would like to know what you would like to talk to them about.", he looks at the letter my contact has written. I explain that I don't have any particular aims but that I simply want to talk to them about their experiences. [...] He interrupts again. "Do you have any questions written down?" I give him a sheet with questions I have prepared. As he looks at them he begins writing up a multiple-choice sheet based on my questions. "See. Instead of wasting your time and going back and forth and asking questions you can just spend some time handing these around and then come back and pick them up." [...] I explain calmly "I am very grateful for your help, but I have used this type of questionnaire before in my study and was hoping to talk in more detail with the players..." [...] Without any disappointment he puts the paper in the bin and picks up another paper and begins writing a new introductory letter for me to addressed to someone in the Women's Football. The letter simply states,

“Sarkar Khanom, Please co-operate and report and inform me of any progress.”²⁶⁸

The first letter of introduction was written by Azita, the Director of Physical Education at a different university. She was in her late forties and had been very active in women’s football since its post-revolutionary comeback. Azita was one of those contacts I came back to several times during the two years I spent collecting data. She would often tell me about tournaments, coaches who were willing and keen to talk or invite me to speak to their teams. She would also continue contact with my peer ethnographers once I was back in the UK. Her letter of introduction to us was an interesting one. She wrote:

Dear Doctor __

Director of Physical Education __

Greetings,

My name is __, and I am a member of the Central Department of Physical Education at __. I am introducing you to Ms __.

Sincerely yours,

[Signature]

Through these introductions such as those described above, women’s football manoeuvres through the bureaucratic field of sport in contemporary Iran. We see in this specific example that the original letter of introduction is on the surface vague and unrevealing, both of the position of the person being introduced but also of their purpose and project. Instead, what it includes is the name and title of the author, who vouches for the researcher and claims legitimacy through their own position of authority. This letter was received by us through a third person

²⁶⁸ Z. Rouhi, *Interview Journal*, October 2008

guarantee as described above, an acquaintance of the author in question. My own access is thus not based on formal authority but rather as part of the rhizomatic response I am describing. The recipient of the letter however, a Director with no connections in this network, trusts, not the researcher, but our guarantor or rather her position and extends our access to the women's football team of his university. Although this the process of gaining access to football teams for the purpose of research is in itself rare in Iran, this particular experience reveals the relationships between the different institutions which can be said to participate, to some extent, in facilitating, developing or promoting women's football, such as the different universities in the case above.

Institutional Thickness

As illustrated here, women's football in Iran is an organized activity which includes a variety of institutions. Furthermore, the connection between these institutions do not follow any formal bureaucratized processes which are experienced as inefficient and corrupt. Hence, women's football is described here as a *response* to the bureaucratic organisation of its institutions. This response is rhizomatically organized, both through formal means through contracted employments, but also through personal alliances and networking, extended through institutional trust through third person guarantees. The rhizomatic response is not women's football, but rather the way in which those who participate within it, through their relationship with the bureaucracy, promote their interests. The relationship of those who work in the DWA office further illustrates the character of this process. Here I illustrated how the bureaucratic legitimacy is reinforced through the utilization of official stations and privileges. The example of the introduction letters given to the Director of

Physical Education, also highlights the utilization of official, bureaucratic references, here in the form of the guarantor who claims legitimacy through her position. Women's Football cannot by any stretch of the imagination be described as having a strong institutional presence; the institutions involved do not show any active engagement or communication with each other. In fact the opposite is true, since there are very low, in some cases none whatsoever, levels of cooperation or information exchange between the institutions.

This is not only true for communication between coaches and their respective employers but also between those highly active in women's football. For example, during the fieldwork for this paper the Iranian national Women's Football Team was planning a friendly game against the Norwegian National Women's Football Team. Not one person I spoke to, apart from the Head coach of the women's team and the Director of Women's Affairs at the Football Federation, knew about this (and I made a point of asking). Due to this lack of communication and interaction through formal channels, there is also a very weak understanding of the definitions of structures of domination.

Amin and Thrift refer to the growth of institutional norms and values which lead to the understanding between the different institutions that they are working towards the same goals. The structures of domination are constantly negotiated, between trusting personal networks claiming legitimacy through alliances and the formal bureaucracy which refers to the formal hierarchy, which in itself is not clear-cut. Rather than a common understanding of one set of structures of domination, we see in the case of women's football and the overall bureaucracy of sport the 'reproduction strategies'. Despite these significant and fundamental differences between what is referred to as the thickness of institutions and what we perceive in women's football, there is in both a nourishment

and establishment of trust as an organisational element. In the latter case, it is not the result of a mutual understanding but rather the result of a perceived alienation from a gendered (masculine) and corrupt institutional culture.

Conclusion

This chapter has argued that the so-called rhizomatic response of women's football is an intra-bureaucratic 'movement', made up of employees within what we categorize as women's football, indoor 5-a-side football, in Iran who are nevertheless identifiable as a network through personalized alliances based on trust, and multiple employments in different institution. It is therefore also an inter-institutional network which through its links increases its reach hierarchically and geographically. The rhizomatic response is also highly gendered, a way in which women manoeuvre through institutionalized patriarchy. I have shown that this view of the masculine bureaucracy is an explicit one in the perception of women footballers, and despite the recent incorporation of women's football into the structure of the Football Federation the 'top' is seen as the 'outside'.

Even the Director of Women's Affairs office in the main offices of the Football Federation is not experienced directly as the 'top' of the hierarchy. The DWA is simply another station, within the movement of the rhizomatic response, albeit one with more authority and legitimacy than low-level offices. The bureaucratic space, experienced as inaccessible and a masculine 'outside', has led to the creation of a parallel territory – a de-territorialisation and a consequent reterritorialization in the rhizomatic network. The question now is on the one hand what is the relationship between this network and the rest of women's football? How do new players and coaches experience women's football? On the other hand, we

need to ask, what is the response of the bureaucracy to this rhizomatic response? I have already pointed out the formalized spaces for informal organisation within the bureaucracy. Nevertheless, there is a process of professionalization of women's football which through the demanding of formal education, work permits and other means is reforming the organisational structure of sports and football in Iran. Apart from examining these changes and the consequences of these on women's football we need to examine the existing relationship between women's football and the state and the private sector. These are mainly in terms of funding, sponsorships and insurance policies.

Chapter 3: Marginalisation, segregation and limitations – spatial dynamics in Women’s Football in Iran

The previous chapter looked at the socialized activity of women’s football, with a particular attention to the organisational character of the bureaucracy of women’s football. It showed that the actual networks that uphold the organisation to function are not [de]limited by the official bureaucratic map of sports in Iran. In this chapter I suggest that a spatial perspective allows us to see the relationship between the activities involved in women’s football and their immediate location, both symbolically and what Lefebvre refers to as practico-sensory realm of social space.²⁶⁹

An understanding of how women’s football functions organisationally cannot be complete with merely looking at the way in which it interplays with the bureaucratic reality which provides its context and within which it is located. The re-organisation of formal bureaucracy, something we looked at in the case of the head office of the women’s affairs office in the football federation in the previous chapter, is not simply a utilization of officially designated spaces. The rhizomatic response, through already described ways of inter-connection, creates new socialized spaces. The redefinition of bureaucratic space is not counter to the formal sports bureaucracy, to see it in this way would presume a fixed space on which the State battles women’s football. Instead I argue for a more complex understanding of the spatial aspects of women’s football and its organisation.

²⁶⁹ H. Lefebvre, *The Production of space*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) at p. 15.

Introduction

It could be appealing to argue that women's football represents spaces of resistance and freedom, Foucauldian heterotopias²⁷⁰, in a society where the socialization of women's experiences demands, or enforces through regulations and surveillance (both by individuals through self-reflexive acts and by the state), through visible codified symbols of clothing and manners. Similarly, one could argue that the very same actions and socialized activities legitimize a particularly Iranian-Islamic cultural value both domestically and abroad. A postcolonial feminist temptation would

²⁷⁰ Foucault's concept of heterotopias signifies places that "are outside of all places", he calls them "counter-sites" in which "all the other real sites that can be found within the culture, are simultaneously represented, contested, and inverted" (p. 24). I mention its relation to that of spaces of women's football in the Islamic Republic of Iran as these too can be seen as containing "individuals whose behavior is deviant in relation to the required mean or norm" – although Foucault himself gives prisons, and psychiatric hospitals as examples. Likewise the Fifth principle of heterotopias which describes these as both opening and closing is also reminiscent of the closed spaces of women's football that allow openings for what we here refer to as a rhizomatic movement of footballers. Yet, Foucault's concept is one which privileges the symbolic and the sign. He writes that we still (in the 60's at least) have not managed to desanctify space as our institutions and practices still rely on binaries such as "private space and public space" or "family space and social space". This is true in our knowledge production, in our representational work, as the rigidity of these categories seem to only allow at its best for problematisations of the mentioned dichotomies into compromised concepts such as the 'multi-scalar', the 'hybrid space' and so on (see the discussion on Datta and Legg in this thesis. Daniel Hjorth correctly sees Foucault's notion of heterotopias as consistent with De Certeau's analysis of everyday life as a manipulation of given situatedness which as the concept of lines of flight as used in this thesis are never permanent, but re-incorporated into the strata. Thus De Certeau writes regarding these tactics of everyday life: "What it wins it cannot keep. This nowhere gives a tactic mobility, to be sure, but a mobility that must accept the chance offerings of the moment (pp. 36-37). Hjorth sees in a combination of heterotopias and De Certeau, the former as widening of "cracks in the official version [...] through actualising subversive-transformative ideas for how to make use of the strategic." Hjorth retains De Certeau's explanation of these strategies as the opening of 'temporary spaces'. The concept of heterotopias seem irrelevant however, as Hjorth admits "these spaces are created everywhere". In fact Hjorth's analysis is consistent with this thesis in that these are understood as responses or "tactical replies" to the apparatus (the heterogeneous composition of discourses, institutions, administrative measures) [...] that is often brought about by a managerial strategy (p. 393). Here again however, the primacy of the signified space reverses the experiential to a secondary "disruption". It is the argument of this paper that disruption or reinforcement are events in the semiological sphere (see next chapter) and that Hjorth's own research illustrates this order. For example it isn't true that creativity is lost when managerial practices prioritise "predictability and control" (p. 397), merely that the former aren't directed or tapped into the institutional. See M. Foucault, 'Of Other Spaces', *Diacritics*, 16:1 (1986), pp. 22-27 and D. Hjorth, 'Organisational Entrepreneurship: With de Certeau on Creating Heterotopias (or Spaces for Play)', *Journal of Management Inquiry*, 14 (2005) pp. 386-398

probably combine the two arguments; women's football is a subversion of both international patriarchal and secular norms of female experiences and domestic patriarchal and Islamic demands for modesty and female roles in society.²⁷¹

Fundamentally, all of these arguments contain an understanding of space, either as a background to the struggles they highlight or they refer to it directly through their discussion of these struggles as essentially spatial negotiations. The football pitch often becomes a metaphor, both a carrier of symbolic (specifically patriarchal) meaning and a site of reproduction for gender norms. Assmann and Gulker's study of the German amateur football club BSV Al-Dersimspor match against the Iranian women's national team in 2006 illustrates this issue clearly²⁷². They describe the football stadium as, generally speaking, a 'site of masculinity'²⁷³, and referring to Marina Low's concept of 'atmosphere' they describe this masculinity as an implication of the relation between things and people in the stadium²⁷⁴. But here Assmann and Gulker, like Low, move away from structure based arguments and do not argue that the spatial configuration in question is structurally determined but instead claim that these relations that traditionally make the football stadium 'encourage' "male rapture and female alienation"²⁷⁵.

²⁷¹ See Jayne Caudwell's review of *Football Studies and Gender* where the relationship between women's football studies as on one hand critical of the exclusionary nature of the politics and organisation of the sport to the detriment of women, but also the relationship of these with race and ethnicity. Caudwell writes, "women are not only oppressed by men, male dominance, patriarchy and phallocentrism, they may also be oppressed by other women". J. Caudwell, 'Gender, feminism and football studies', *Soccer and Society*, Vol 12 (3), 2011.

²⁷² C. Assmann and S. Gulker 'Football under cover in Tehran's Ararat Stadium', in S. Steets (ed.), *Stadium Worlds: Football, Space and the Built environment*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010)

²⁷³ Ibid. p. 213

²⁷⁴ Although Low's concept of *atmosphere* will be used in this chapter in a different fashion that it is in Assmann and Gulker's study where the representational value of the concept is seen as dominant in the production of the stadium as a site of masculinity which women footballers then challenge.

²⁷⁵ C. Assmann and S. Gulker 'Football under cover in Tehran's Ararat Stadium', in S. Steets (ed.), *Stadium Worlds: Football, Space and the Built environment*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010) at p. 213

From this the mentioned authors extract questions regarding the consequences of women occupying 'sites of masculinity' and draw two hypotheses: "By playing and watching football, women change the game" and "playing and watching football changes women and also society's expectation of women"²⁷⁶. Essentially, what the authors do here is assign the stadium in question with representational value, i.e. they emphasize the representational elements – the symbolic value of the football stadium as a male dominion. Thus the representation of the space of the football stadium as a stage of male competitiveness and measurement of masculinity, as well as a literal exclusion of female participation, is sidelined as the representational spaces of re-imagining football, and women for that matter, in new counter-hegemonic ways is stressed.²⁷⁷

But the authors' depiction of these spaces as possibly altering the representations of the football stadium is a conceptual leap, ignoring the dominating role of representations of space – in this case that of the state, football federations, and other dominant societal pressures involved in the conceptual as well as material construction of football and football stadiums. As Lefebvre observes,

"Ethnologists, anthropologists and psychoanalysts are students of [...] representational spaces [...] but they nearly always forget to set them alongside those representations of space which coexist, concord or interfere with them; they even more frequently ignore social practice"²⁷⁸

Spatial assumptions fall on two categories: those who see spatial configurations as purely relational and those who overlook space as a background, or container of bodies. Although the latter sometimes refers

²⁷⁶ Ibid.

²⁷⁷ H. Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), pp. 42-43

²⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 41

to spatial limitations, or constrains, that push, or as above encourage, agents into certain repetitive acts which reinforce and reproduce hegemonic ways of being, these references are made superficially, and moreover abstract agents into limitless potentiality if it were not for the societal, and spatial limitations and sanctions; space becomes a background, a mere metaphor for a site of power which could either limit or liberate processes of becoming²⁷⁹. Spatial representations are in this study also abstract, connected to issues of sexuality, homosociality, divisions of labour and gender norms. Yet these abstractions dominate society, they determine spatial possibilities, and although inconsistent and dependent on political and social power relations, are materially represented reproduced, and made real, through the spatial practice of those who repeat its patterns through in their daily lives. Spatially therefore, women's football is a social activity which is practiced within clearly demarcated lines. These lines are both spatial (gender segregation) and embodied (hijab, feminine bodily modalities) and cannot be fully appreciated if we reduce these experiences to that of free agents on a limiting and constraining space.

To put it simply, the football pitch does not constrain the women footballer, it is part of her experience and at simultaneously shapes and is shaped by that experience. More importantly for this study, spatial practices tell us not as much of resistance as they do of "the clandestine forms taken by the dispersed, tactical and makeshift creativity of groups or individuals already caught in the nets of 'discipline'".²⁸⁰ It is here Martina Low protests what she calls 'a structure theoretical perspective on space' which she argues cannot conceive of escape, of agency outside the

²⁷⁹ See David Harvey's discussion on Foucault in, D. Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity: An Enquiry into the Origins of Cultural Change*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 213

²⁸⁰ De Certeau quoted in Ibid. p. 214

recreation of the “state-capitalist logic”.²⁸¹ Low writes, “the only line of flight to follow appears to be spaces of representation, imaginings, memories, or manipulated perceptions that point beyond the existing capitalist space, and which make space conceivable as ‘something different’”²⁸². To Low, the line of flight or, a better term perhaps, resistance, becomes impossible in the Lefebvrian ‘trialectic’.

Low’s search for ‘something different’ is reminiscent of Foucault’s heterotopias. In the words of David Harvey, “the theme of ‘escape’ underwrites Foucault’s essay” and so it does it for Low’s²⁸³. In this study I have adopted a different approach, and as it has been shown in the previous chapter, that lines of flight do not signify resistance or counterbalance to dominant structures, but rather they are part of the organisation of women’s football. Personal and/or cross-institutional alliances keep the organisation together, and it is through these lines of flight from the formalizing and codifying central institution of sport, that women’s football grows.

As Deleuze writes: “in effect, what holds an assemblage together is not the play of framing forces or linear causalities but, actually or potentially, its most deterritorialization.” Lefebvre’s representational space, which is where Low assumes these escapes from structure happen, is the symbolic avenue – lines of flight are those lived spatial practices that although rupture the formal hierarchy, creates new ones and essentially reinforce the dominance of those hierarchies (at least in our case here). Thus this chapter aims to avoid the ‘yawning gap’ between mental space and social space that Lefebvre notes in Chomsky, Derride and Kristeva, however

²⁸¹ M. Low, ‘The constitution of space: the structuration of spaces through the simultaneity of effect and perception’, *European Journal of Social Theory*, 11:1 (2008), p. 29

²⁸² Ibid.

²⁸³ D. Harvey, *Spaces of Hope* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), p. 183

rather than close the gap I suggest to focus on the social and when appropriate discuss the relationship of this with the mental.²⁸⁴

3.2 Contradiction of gendered bureaucratic spaces

“If It wasn’t for the individuals involved, women’s football would get nowhere”²⁸⁵

This is the description given by Shirin, a professional women’s football player of the bureaucratic realities facing women’s football in Iran today. This was one of the brief meetings I had with many female footballers. Shirin was in her mid-20s, determined to remain in professional football despite its many faults. Her analysis of women’s football was a relative one, she kept comparing it to men’s football in the country, as well as football in the West. Shirin wanted to play for the national team and according to her coach she wasn’t far from it. She played in the midfield and had an excellent vision on the pitch, and although her club played indoor football, she preferred the outdoor 11-a-side grass pitch. When I spoke to her she had just finished her training and she spoke confidently, as if she had said the things she was saying before. She continued her analysis,

“All doors are closed to us, we have to get in by force and take anything we get. For men it’s different, they have difficulties too but the whole football organisation is for them.”²⁸⁶

Shirin’s comparison of women’s football to that of men was an oft-repeated one, and it was always given in a similar fashion. It maintains the notion that women footballers are institutionally, not physically or mentally, underprivileged. The bureaucratic field is experienced as

²⁸⁴ Lefebvre argues that this gap not only leaps across an entire field but also fetishizes and consequently privileges a particular theoretical practice whereby mental space, the space of language and signs become central reference points of Knowledge [capitalised in original]. See H. Lefebvre, *The Production of space*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) at pp. 5-6.

²⁸⁵ A. Sedighi, *Field Notes*, November 2009.

²⁸⁶ Shirin, Interviewed by A. Sedighi, Karaj, September 25, 2008

something outside of their activity, not as something they are part of. There is an oft repeated image of the organisation working for itself, and consequently not for women footballers or women's football. The insufficient supply of facilities, staff and equipment within sport is a common one in the discourse surrounding sports in the country.

In the year 2000, there was a national survey by the Ministry of Physical Education of the availability of facilities in the country. It was to be the beginnings of a new program to reform the organisation to respond to criticism of this lack of support. The results were evaluated and led to several new facilities created across the country, most of which were indoor facilities. According to the Ministry's data, the evaluation led to the identification of over 900 spaces which were deemed suitable for the building of sporting facilities²⁸⁷. 181 of these were bought or rented between 2003-2004 by the Ministry as public facilities which in turn were planned to be allocated by the respective Heyyat of that region to different federations²⁸⁸.

Still however the criticism continued, a common feature in news programs when athletes are interviewed (particularly after the Beijing Olympics) openly criticising the Ministry of not doing enough, doing it too slowly or being biased towards urban centres where facilities are already available. Only 11% of the publically available facilities are in rural areas and only 4% are indoor facilities, the latter statistic particularly important for women's sports²⁸⁹. In my interviews with officials within the Ministry the urban bias was always admitted as existing, but was said to be part of a larger issue of in all aspects of Iranian society, some even comparing Iran favourably to other countries. Some also linked these issues to an organisational

²⁸⁷ *Varzesh va tarbiyat badani dar barnameye sevom tose-e*, (Tehran: Rozanemey-e Iran, 2005) p. 45

²⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 46

²⁸⁹ Ibid. pp. 46-48

structure which were being reformed during my fieldwork, or so I was told, giving more power to county level officials to inform the central organisation of specific gaps in the distribution of sporting opportunities. However, the experiences of the player quoted above, and many like her, is somewhat different from an overall support of the sporting bureaucracy. It points to a spatial distance and disconnect between their own activities and that of their overseers.

Women footballers and coaches interviewed for this paper experienced the bureaucratic field of sports, whether in the corporate private sphere or in the public Heyyats or ministerial sphere, as one they had merely nominal links with. "They are good with talking", one coach told me a year after our first meeting "but when it comes to doing nothing we hear, whether it is about a certain percentage of facility hours going towards women's sports or an increase in funding we see no changes". I met another footballer Sarah, a player from a Division 1 team in Tehran after her training. She was described by her coach as particularly gifted technically and was keen on talking to us about what she believed were inconsistencies in the football federation and their demands of players. Sarah described her experiences in similar ways adding,

"I have for example filed injury reports for five different injuries in the past two years but have yet to see any money. And insurance is compulsory for us. At the same time we're still waiting for our wages for six months ago and now my contract has expired, how are they expecting us to continue playing?"²⁹⁰

What is interesting here is that the private club, the ministry of physical education and public insurance companies are all seen as part of one bureaucratic field, separate from the activities of the player, the coach or the administrator active in women's football.

²⁹⁰ Sarah, Interviewed by A. Sedighi, Tehran, August 12, 2008

Our subject of study is a vast and changing one, from young women who play football in university teams, to active football coaches who have been in the game for over a decade. Consequently, to say the bureaucratic field of sports is experienced as a distant one by many is stating the obvious. However, this feeling of separation and marginalisation is a common one even amongst those who come in contact with officials in the field, for example in the Football Federation in Tehran.

Marginalisation of women's football is also quite literally a spatial issue. Those active in the field of women's football see two issues as the main limitations to growth, namely the availability of facilities to train and compete on, and the issue of sponsorship. Both of these directly relate to a spatial configuration which women footballers find themselves in in post-revolutionary Iran, and to some extent both can be reduced to the issue of the politicization of sexuality and gender segregation. The first issue is the most common in the mainstream media (sports news in broadcast and print media, women sports magazines, academic writings, activist lobbying etc.). The lack of sports facilities is an oft repeated matter amongst sportsmen and women, not limited to women's sports. Internal reports by the Ministry of Physical Education also emphasize these demands, not only in terms of sanctioning of new facilities, but also the question of renovations, upkeep, and even completion of already confirmed sports facilities. The issue of the availability of facilities is also an important matter for apologetic reports, quoted by for example ministers or other officials, both in reports and in interviews with us, who wish to illustrate their efficiency in office, who use quantitative statistics to highlight complete projects by their sporting administrations.

The building of these facilities, often indoor multipurpose sports facilities as these are seen as the most efficient, are done through co-operations

between Heyyats, who work within the Department of Physical Education together with City Planning offices and the Mayor. From the point of view of women's football teams, they either have contracts with private clubs and are then allocated time slots in that clubs facilities, or in the case of university teams, they have either contracts with private clubs or they use university facilities, or they are funded through the university's Department of Physical Education and rent time slots in other facilities, both private and public. The Football Federation, or more specifically the office of women's affairs within that federation, does not directly get involved in lobbying for the building of specific football facilities for women. Thus, spatial limitations of women's football means that the struggle for more space becomes one of more allocated time in already existing indoor sports facilities. Women footballers have to negotiate and compete for these limited time-slots against both men and women.

However, as clubs often set allocated time slots for women sports, women's sports groups often find themselves competing against each other for these slots, and more often than not tend to share these with other teams. The Isfahan university football team practices in one of these multi-purpose facilities, simultaneously with a volleyball team, an aerobic class and a group using the climbing wall at the end of the hall. Tahere, a division one player remarked, after a training session where they shared their pitch with other teams,

“We have to take any slots we get; it's a volleyball pitch, and a gym, so we have to share. Some men are in similar situations. There just aren't enough facilities for us, and getting more is expensive”²⁹¹

The spatial seclusion of women's football also affects their access to private sponsorships. Coaches and administrators face challenges in convincing companies to sponsor teams or tournaments with any significant amount of funds directly due to the lack of public visibility.

²⁹¹ Tahere, Interviewed by A. Sedighi, Tehran, August 12, 2008

As discussed in Chapter 2, women's football, and indeed women's sports in general, is seen by the centralised institutions of sport at all levels as one which 'seems to be doing just fine with what they have got' much more than something that is actively fought against. Although the history of women's football in the Islamic Republic is on the surface one of a slow but steady institutional integration it is one that is experienced as distant. For example, the division of women's sports into separate sports and consequent integration into the respective Federations is described by female athletes as a distancing of women from the decisions making processes. Similarly, the organisational culture helps produce spatial practices that not only reproduce gender differences but keep those active in women's football at a distance.

A common organisational feature is the practice of leaving office doors open when a woman and a man are having a meeting. In part this is a precaution by the occupier of the office of any gossip in the office regarding the relationship between the two. This practice is in turn linked to a general de-sexualisation of organisations and organisational practice in post-revolutionary Iran. As Sadeghi writes, referring to Bourdieu, "a practice does not necessarily signify actions on the basis of rational strategies but can simply be 'learned' or internalised way of doing things" and thus point towards a larger structural phenomenon which is reproduced and legitimated through repetition.²⁹² Sadeghi discusses the de-sexualisation of public spheres as having resulted in the creation of more tolerant private spheres where sexualized activities are more prevalent, earlier than in previous generations²⁹³. However, these so-called public spheres are not only desexualized but promote or are conducive towards, at least within women's football, homosocial alliances.

²⁹² F. Sadeghi, 'Negotiating with Modernity: Young Women and Sexuality in Iran', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 28:2 (2008), p. 252

²⁹³ Ibid. p. 254

The open office door of a meeting thus creates a feeling of separation, a non-inclusion. My own interview with the head coach at Iran Khodro women's football team was conducted with the door open. The meeting with Amirshaghghi began formally. I explained that the study was not clear to me at the time but that I was interested in the way in which women's football is organized, admitting that it was vague and general at that point. The office was at the corner of the building, which faced the football pitches and I had some difficulty finding the coach's office as no one (male) seemed to know where the offices of women's football were. As we spoke I soon realised that the coach had lived in Sweden, where I grew up, and had a short footballing career there. As we got to know one another, the interview became more informal. At one point one of her assistants, or a player, interrupted by using the fax machine in the office. At that point the coach turned to me and apologized for not serving me any tea or drink as it was Ramadan. When the player left, the coach got up and closed the door behind her and sat back down, rolled her sleeves up and continued describing her experiences.

“Right now I'm the head coach of the national youth team, and I should be at the pitch training the girls. But I'm stuck here because I don't get paid for that job, I'm supposed to but I don't. It's the same story for everyone involved. So in the end we're in it for ourselves, we use anything we can. I prepare the trainings for my other teams while I'm here if I have time...that's the situation they create.”²⁹⁴

The closed door allowed for a different relationship between myself and the coach, one wherein she could roll her sleeves up and begin talking what seemed a more frank and detailed discussion. This pattern was repeated in other interviews. A football coach did not agree to be recorded during an interview between matches at a tournament in Isfahan,

²⁹⁴ Amirshaghghi, Interviewed by A. Sedighi, Khodroo Sports Club Tehran, August 10, 2008

but later discussed at length her experiences in private in an empty locker room. The issue here is not fear of revealing sensitive information, on the contrary criticising the organisation was common practice amongst both women and men, rather it was a question of trust and alliance discussed in the previous chapter.

Even when not sharing facilities with other sports, the spatial requirements of women's football (and some other women's sports) create certain contradictory conditions. For women to have places to play football, spaces need to be closed off, either physically through tented areas in public parks, or through allocated time slots where men are excluded in existing indoor facilities as mention above. Many female sporting activities are in this way different from other 'public' activities for women in Iran. Whilst in the latter women's presence in public spaces is desexualized by enforcing hijab, in sports the movement is thought of as potentially sexual in itself, regardless of clothing, and thus it has to be kept closed from male view. In this respect there is a very present dual character to these spaces where women's bodies are engaged in athletic practices, to gain places to play spaces need be closed off.

If we look at the Heyyat of Public Sports in Isfahan we see the spatial arrangement for women's sports more clearly. The Heyyat, which calls itself the mother of all heyiyats as it is in charge of all sports done in public, often mainly exercise related sports such as walking, jogging or cycling, administers and organizes spaces for sports for the public in parks and other designated sporting areas. The Heyyat however has very little control over what is and is not built, and has a limited, and in some cases non-existent, budget. Instead it is the Mayor of each county that decides and which can be lobbied by the Heyyat in question, although even this relationship is not clearly and efficiently demarcated in any real way, at least these were not clear in the eyes of officials working in it. In relation

to women's sport some officials simply point to the fact that whenever someone walks out of their house it is technically exercise and in this respect many women are and have the ability to exercise in public.

Moreover, women's football is not a sport that is particularly emphasized by the Heyyat, although it is one of the most popular team sports for women. The difficulty to arrange for women to be able to play football in public is that the movements involved are felt to require, as mentioned earlier, a closed space. The simultaneous contradictions between a public sport which in order to be allowed need to be private and hidden becomes clear here, and it is a contradiction which creates a potential dilemma for an organisation which supervises Public Sports. In fact, for those in the Public Sport Heyyat, women's sport that require specific facilities are not really public sports. I met a Coordinator in the offices of Public Sport Heyyat in Isfahan, in an interview which was more formal than I had wished. Payam, a young man in his mid 30s, spent most of the time defending his job and the work of the heyyat despite the open and vague questions I offered. He said to us:

“We try to promote specialized sports that are included in our category, like Darts for example, [...] but in more demanding sports like football or basketball, for women, there are limitations. This is because we don't have the facilities we need, I mean it's just not something we have”²⁹⁵

In 2006 the county of Isfahan together with the Heyyat of Public Sports began a campaign to promote families to exercise. According to the President of Public Sport the campaign was based on reports that said men leave the house and go exercise on their own, leaving their wives and children at home. But here again the sports involved were walking and hiking, particularly for women and children, and football for example was

²⁹⁵ Payam, interviewed by A. Sedighi, Isfahan, October 6, 2008

not included in those being catered for by the Mayor's office and the Heyyat.

Nevertheless, sometimes young women do get together and play football in public, often early in the morning, and sometimes in tented areas in parks. The latter are tents purchased by the Park which are set up by park-keepers in the morning and taken down in the evening. These allocated tents are the only physically designated female sporting spaces, other facilities have allocated female-only times. With the tents up, women can part-take in activities they are not permitted to perform in public, or more precisely in heterosocial spaces. Women of all ages use these to play badminton, aerobics and sometimes they play football with small goals. The scarcity of these public tents make them too unreliable as spaces for university or semi-professional women's football teams and they are not used by teams for practice. But thinking about these designated spaces of women's sports highlights certain characteristics of women's football and its relationship with official bureaucracy. Saraye, a female footballer from a university team in Isfahan observed:

"A group of boys or men with a ball only have to scout a large enough area, and then put two goals down and start playing. If it's reasonable enough area people won't interrupt their pitch, it's theirs until they have finished playing. We can't simply walk into a park and scout a location, our locations are already decided. That must affect our sport."²⁹⁶

Whilst male players occupy a space in the park through their practice, their movements and their demarcation of goals, women have to wait for the park-ranger to bring the tents and place them on the designated spaces before they can play (one player described arriving in the park one day expecting the regular tent but having to turn back when it had failed to be put up). The de-stratification of women's football, its cross-

²⁹⁶ Saraye, Interviewed by A. Sedighi, Isfahan, October 7, 2008

institutional links and utilization of personal networks is here tied to the institutions of the Mayor's office and the park authorities. The postrevolutionary desexualization of heterosocial spaces, like parks, create a dependency on these spatial markers, both what Moallem refers to as "corporeal inscription of citizenship" but also gendered physical barriers which demarcate a protected zone for women's sports²⁹⁷. The tent can be argued to be an extension of the scarf or chador, or of the embodied modesty of clothing or hijab. Although, inside these tents many continue to wear the veil for example perhaps due to the potentiality of male intruders, many remove their veils and jackets when they exercise. The dominant representations of space are thus not only those of state officials and town planners, but also certain revolutionary ideologues, and it is under the authority of these that the park ranger's tent is erected.

The role of the park-ranger is a reoccurring one in other contexts involving women's sports. The role of the bureaucrat observer who protects the demarcated space, and more importantly defines the space of the inside as a protected site, is an important one as well. Not only because the space of the inside as a protected place where women can avoid male observers, but also because the role of the bureaucrat reproduces the role of the official bureaucracy as the signifier, and once again defines and codifies a social activity which is sustained through lines of flight and rhizomatic organisation. Thus, the indoor multi-purpose facility, and the most common spatial context when we talk about women's football in Iran becomes in itself a space which allows the rhizome to pass through,

²⁹⁷ Moallem's notion of the civic body is particularly useful here, and will be discussed elsewhere in this thesis, as it is not an embodied marker but a signifier which is abstract and defines and demarcates what is inside and what is outside the collective citizenry. It is important to not however that the 'civic body' is an empty body as Moallem writes, it is "an abstract body that is made public and politicized in a way that displays the connections between individual and collective identities, and that is marked as a place of inclusion or exclusion". The importance of signification will be discussed in a later chapter. See M. Moallem, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), p. 29 and p. 78.

negotiate for time and space, but also forces it to take root in the bureaucratic field.

The closed door, the closed off section of the park or the indoor pitch are all places along the pathways of women's football and it is in and through these places that it grows and develops. On the other hand, there is a complicated relationship with the outdoor and a distrust of the open door in meetings. This is not simply a discursive, or strategic consequence of the above, but also a habitual one. For instance, the outdoor football grass pitch is for many women a different and distant spatial configuration, one which requires a different relationship to the sport, different muscle groups and requires different strengths to those of indoor football.

Mariam, a player at a division two team remarked:

“Because we are more involved with Futsal and not outdoor football, we feel very free when we do come outdoors and play football on a grass pitch. At least we get the feeling of freedom, as if it's a release, like the walls have been taken away. But I don't really like it as much. I personally prefer Futsal to Football [because] in football you run less [...] and you have to play in the heat of the sun”²⁹⁸

Soad, a university football club player explained her opinions on the issue,

“Firstly in our society...if women want to play on grass in the first place they need so much clothing that it makes it harder to play. Because we can't play in shorts and t-shirts as we can indoors, we have to wear jackets and trousers and it becomes an obstacle to the game [...] therefore playing outdoors is harder and requires more energy.”²⁹⁹

What both these players are expressing is a comfort with the spatial configuration of the indoor pitch. Although both players, and most others made similar remarks, express a sense of freedom in relation to the

²⁹⁸ Mariam, Interviewed by A. Sedighi, August 20, 2008

²⁹⁹ Soad, Interviewed by A. Sedighi, October 7, 2008

outdoor pitch, they both prefer the indoor pitch. Taken at face value, statements like these above (and most comments on outdoor versus indoor football are similar to these), see the walls around an indoor facility work as barriers to the movement of women similar to the way in which jackets and veils work as obstacles to movement on outdoor grass pitches.

Furthermore, there is a perceived hierarchical relationship between the outdoor and the indoor, those who master the outdoor have to 'run more' and adapt their bodies to 'open space' whilst those indoors are comfortably hidden, their movements specified and delimited by physical barriers. These sentiments are commonplace amongst women football players and are often used as proclamations of the humility of their cause. "All we want to do is play inside these walls, and yet at every turn they place obstacles in front of us", a coach told us. The limitations of the embodied movements will be discussed in the next chapter. Here I would like to discuss the spatial dynamics between indoor and outdoor football as I believe it is vital in the discussion of the organisation of women's football in Iran.

Outdoor versus Indoor football

Futsal is a version of football which is played indoors with five players in each team, and thus often referred to as five-a-side football. Futsal dominates Women's Football in Iran, and female players, even those who play 11-a-side regular football, spend most of their footballing time playing Futsal. Amongst women in Iran the sport is referred to as football and even though the dimensions of the pitch, the goal, the ball, and even the rules differ, it is considered a variant of association football, not only amongst players but also amongst coaches, administrators and fans. It is also the sport most similar to that which female fans of the game play

independently of institutionalized clubs and organisations, in tented spaces in public parks, in privately rented indoor facilities or sometimes, albeit rarely, in streets and alleys. It is in these contexts women footballers gain their physical education in football. Importantly, female players are introduced to football in their mid-teens and often much later than that through Physical Education departments and university teams. By the time they begin regular training, learn about tactics and specific movements, they are already deeply embedded in a certain embodied relationship with the football pitch. Coach Amirshaghghi pointed to the fact that many coaches do not see this phenomenon and focus instead on fitness and superficial tactical training which does not recognize the need to unlearn certain bad habits picked up 'on the street', and instead solidify them through allowing their repetition. One of the aspects of small pitch football is the natural proximity of all players to the ball and to the goals. On pitches smaller than five-a-side pitches players spend most of their time sprinting, and similarly five-a-side football is much more demanding of an anaerobic capacity than 11-a-side football. The spatial configuration thus affects the way the game in that it increases the speed and demands a sense of urgency, a goal opportunity is always moments away. Similarly physical contact between the players is a frequent occurrence, and many players talked about the importance of upper body strength, an aspect of their game they often worked on independently in gyms (to be discussed in the next chapter).

The indoor football pitch thus demands certain movements and inhibits others, for example sprints and frequent physical contact with the upper body over 'time on the ball' and tackles which dominate in 11-a-side football. Similarly, the configuration of the smaller pitch promotes certain tactical outlooks over others, the creation of empty space through movement between lines of players, and an ever present immediacy of the

assist³⁰⁰. Women's footballers rarely stand still, or walk, but are instead constantly in movement into space, although the success of the latter depends on the ability of the player in question and end up more often than not as movements in the direction of the ball. These characteristics are then reproduced on the 11-a-side football pitch. In conversations with Coach Amirshaghghi I noticed a reoccurring frustration with the background of players and the relatively old age they begin training. During a conversation at Iran Khodro she said,

“Players should begin at an early age. Here they decide to play football around the ages of fifteen to twenty. This can't work. [In order to develop] we need to improve this. Let's leave the higher leagues alone for a while, are these even important right now? the federation needs to spend the money it uses to develop the higher leagues, in vain, on the under twenties. [...] Use that same money to send these players to sports camp. Instead we dispatch our teams, who go and become nothing. [...] We have players come at later ages, in love with football, who tell us they have never trained before in their lives.”³⁰¹

In fact, it is not the age the coach has issues with here but the embodied understanding of football prior to entering club football that is the problem. The football pitch, both the indoor pitch which in itself is larger than most places where women play football informally, but more importantly the 11-a-side pitch, is approached by players with a pre-conceived understanding of their role on that pitch. The urgency and immediacy of physical contact for example is expected by many women football players who therefore for example get rid of the ball immediately after receiving it despite the relative distance to any challenging opponents. Prior to a training session with the women's national team, Coach Amirshaghghi commented once again on the habitual baggage of new players:

³⁰⁰ Assist is the pass which leads to a goal.

³⁰¹ Amirshaghghi, August 13, 2008

“These fresh players arrive and proceed to run around on the pitch without any real aim, and with no real technical understanding either. In no way is this person susceptible to any tactical training; they have never had any training before. They’ve been told: ‘here’s the ball, run towards those two posts and put the ball in between’. This is how they play the game. Now, you try and tell this person that the game is much more than that. If you do she won’t recognize the pitch. She has got used to a certain way of playing and seeing the pitch. And this happens in the National Team!”³⁰²

As implied by Amirshaghghi, the 11-a-side pitch demands completely different projects from the positioning of the player than the smaller pitch. The player’s movements across the field does not necessarily follow the trajectory of the ball for example, in fact more often than not it does not. In the case of a player who plays on the ‘wings’ they are often told to ‘go wide’ towards the edges of the pitch when the team has possession. Many football players with a the habits of smaller pitches, have a difficulty with this and move towards the ball or inwards towards the centre of the pitch and thus crowd the middle of the pitch making it harder for the team to keep the ball in the team. We are talking about what Merleau Ponty calls an *already acquired spatiality*³⁰³. The footballer who is used to the smaller indoor pitch recognizes the larger one as yet another variant of the same football pitch, and therefore does not find herself immediately thrown into a new world, but rather it appears as a repetition of previously learnt and agreed upon relationships between the player, the ball, and the outline of the pitch. The larger football pitch simply appears as a more open Futsal pitch without walls.

It is this that is mistaken for freedom, or rather, it is the conceptualization of the outdoor 11-a-side football pitch as larger Futsal pitch with no walls that lends itself to a certain understanding of ‘freedom’. There are two

³⁰² Amirshaghghi, Interviewed by A. Sedighi, *Telephone interview*, September 16, 2008

³⁰³ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, (London: Routledge Classics, 2003), p. 295

elements to this notion of freedom in this example. Firstly, it is the common ‘misconception’³⁰⁴ of freedom as an abstract and ahistorical state of infinite deliberation in a field with no obstacles. The walls of the Futsal pitch can for example be described as walls which block any movement beyond them, which hinder a free movement outside the designated area of the pitch. Thus, the indoor pitch can be seen as a field which limits freedom of movement and the open-air football field by extension one which allows for its infinite possibilities. It is a misconception because the walls of the indoor pitch are only obstacles to freedom if there is an imagined project of moving beyond it. For players during a match or during training there no such significance given to the wall, or the roof, which gives it significance in sense described by Merleau Ponty – “there is no action of things on the subject, but merely a signification (in the active sense)”³⁰⁵.

Secondly, and perhaps more importantly there is the gendered element. The outdoor is in the recollection of female players often given a masculine characteristic. The 11-a-side football pitch, the open field (open to the public), is give more value by female football players who in this view reproduce the very dominant representations of space which keep women’s football within the private sphere, separating it from the public and professional male football which moves beyond spaces of leisure into the realm of work. Here again we see the production of social divisions of labour where the gendered significations of spaces define agency within

³⁰⁴ By misconception I mean experientially each consciousness, in the words of Merleau-Ponty, “can never objectify itself into invalid-consciousness or cripple-consciousness” and like the old man who complains of his old age, the complaints or descriptions of the outdoor grass pitch as ‘free’ is only so through a “statistical and objective view” that are never in this sense genuine. This does not mean that we are here ignoring, or even sidelining, the significations and values placed upon a gendered spatial organisation. But I am merely highlighting, contrary to Iris Marion Young’s analysis of gendered spatial experiences, that on an experiential level the walls of the indoor pitch are part of the game, to put it simply and not immediately experienced as limitations. This will be discussed in greater detail in the chapter titled Body. See M. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, (London: Routledge Classics, 2003), pp. 504-530.

³⁰⁵ Ibid. 507

the discourse of protection³⁰⁶. This discourse automatically assumes a notion of freedom, the protector is free in his movement, he stands outside the walls whilst the protected is hidden, inside, and domesticated and thus limited in her freedom. Some conversations with players recalled similar illustrations, although as mentioned earlier these are often adopted strategically to strengthen the case for women's football which even considering it being 'locked in' and 'hidden from view' is not sufficiently supported.

Martina Low's concept of atmosphere is useful here. She defines atmosphere as the external effect which is "realized perceptually" by social goods and people in their spatial ordering³⁰⁷. These atmospheres are the 'tunes' of spatial orderings, and have their own externality, and are not purely projections of agents onto respective spaces³⁰⁸. Yet, these atmospheres are not universal, but contextual within a certain set of relationships. In our case the indoor pitch similarly is 'tuned' to certain emotions in relation to female football players. The indoor pitch allows not only, as discussed above, a closer projection of previously agreed relationships with the sport itself, but it also creates an atmosphere of gendered autonomy. The allocated space and time for female only participation works as mentioned earlier to reproduce the patriarchal discourse of protection. But here, it also not only symbolizes but constructs an atmosphere where women can move, dress and make noise in a way that would not be socially sanctioned in public. Moallem writes,

³⁰⁶ M. Moallem, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005) at p. 74

³⁰⁷ M. Low, 'The constitution of space: the structuration of spaces through the simultaneity of effect and perception', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 11:1 (2008), p. 44.

³⁰⁸ Gernot Böhme sees social goods and generating what he terms atmospheres. This is particularly true, he argues, in capitalist societies where commodities are infused with atmospheric functions which improves sales – this Böhme argues is where their value lies. Bohme thus refutes the notion that atmosphere is purely that which is projected onto space by agents which presupposes a notion of emotions as located within bodies separated from their being-in-space. See Martina Löw's discussion of Gernot Böhme's *Atmosphäre*, (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1995) in M. Low, 'The constitution of space: the structuration of spaces through the simultaneity of effect and perception', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 11:1 (2008), p. 44

“the discourse of protection relies on the process of abjection of the urban space and the systematized criminalization, separation, and isolation of perverse and transgressive bodies”³⁰⁹. However, if we see the forceful and determined movement of women’s bodies as transgressive bodies, by containing women’s football behind closed doors and thus to what can be called the private domesticated realm, women footballers reinterpret that space in the representational sphere as part of a deliberate and purposeful project. One example is the view of clothing, which in indoor football consists often of a shirt and shorts. The private and familial spaces that have arguably become open spaces, according to Fatemeh Sadeghi as a response to the closure of public alternative³¹⁰, are extended to include spaces of women’s sports and by extension women’s football. In this sense the indoor football pitch is not a public space as much as it is a reimagining of a domestic sphere towards a collective project.

Nomadic Space

It has been shown that the availability of spaces for women’s football depends on a domestication of public spaces. Contrary to those who see women’s football in Iran as a subversion of masculine spaces, women’s football materialises only within gendered spatial configurations, rearticulating notions of protection and domesticity. The closing off of spaces, and the open doors of male offices during meetings with a woman, both are structural phenomena linked to gendered discourses or protection prevalent in Iranian bureaucratic culture³¹¹. As I have shown

³⁰⁹ M. Moallem, *Between Warrior Brother and Veiled Sister: Islamic Fundamentalism and the Politics of Patriarchy in Iran* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

³¹⁰ F. Sadeghi, ‘Negotiating with Modernity: Young Women and Sexuality in Iran’, *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 28:2 (2008) at p. 254

³¹¹ This discourse of protection is discussed by Moallem as the umbrella discourse under which the civic body is defined, thus creating an abstract gendered division of the protected and protectors. She writes “this positioning is defined by the gendered metaphors of the private and the domesticated in opposition of the public and the political”, In our case, as in Moallem’s, “the female body both as civi body and as national landscape

above, these are interpreted by women footballers and those active in women's football as exclusionary moves which reaffirms their allegiance to women's football as a network of alliances which exist despite the central bureaucratic organisation of sport in the country. The homo-social consequently becomes a character of the negotiation process within women's football and the bureaucracy is seen as a patriarchal male entity which slows it down. Spatially therefore, women's football consists of multiple lines of flight contrary to Martina Low's critique of lack of faith in these within a Lefebvrian paradigm.

One aspect of this re-articulation is the road itself as teams often travel collectively to training and tournaments. Teams do not always have secure 'home grounds' and we found that teams more often than not had to relocate to new facilities as they become available, either because the new one was a qualitative improvement or because they were offered longer hours. A team in Tehran had their Thursday practice in a multi-functional indoor facility in Karaj, just over an hour drive west of the capital. They had previously played in a university sports hall but shared this with other sports team so they chose to relocate to these new facilities and their own two-hour slot between three and five o'clock in the afternoon. The team travelled together with bus from a bus stop in Tehran. These players were between 16 and 19 years old and contrary to more senior players were not as curious about the research conducted for the purposes of this study.

The bus journey was around one hour and was anything but silent as the players' conversations increased in volume to compete with the ancient bus engine as it screamed across the Tehran Karaj highway. Amongst the players there is a woman who is older and who is not participating in the

becomes the site of immanence and domestication with respect to which the male citizen-soldier achieves social agency as a self-sacrificing moral agent". See M. Moallem, 'Universalization of Particulars: The Civic Body and Gendered Citizenship in Iran', *Citizenship Studies* 3:3 (1999), p. 321

conversations, but who is nevertheless smiling together with the players as they participate in what can be best described as general banter. Once at the facilities everyone gets off, the coach walks into an office with an open door as the players stand outside the thick curtain which divides the pitch from passers-by. The coach is signing her team in with the man behind a desk as the players continue their discussions while waiting. The signed sheet is a confirmation of the use of the pitch by the team during the allocated hours.

A young woman in her early twenties was discussing an upcoming chemistry exam and the difficulties in remembering everything for it whilst the others begin poking fun at her stress and anxiety. The girl who was anxious laughs at the jokes. There was a visible security and trust created amongst the travelling players, a feeling which was expressed vocally by many football players when asked why they played organised football. Once inside the pitch the players proceeded to the stands on the side where they changed into their football gear. The changing rooms were not used as these were located outside the curtain. The older woman who was present on the bus tour then approaches our interlocutor, Rouhi, and asks her what her business there was. Rouhi explains the details of the study and that she was there after an agreement with the coach. Nevertheless, the woman, who introduces herself as the sar-parast or guardian of the team, makes a phone call and in the end tells Rouhi to leave the pitch and return with an official invitation letter from the Football Federation. Here we see once again the relationship between the rhizomatic and the stratified, a reoccurring theme in the fieldwork for this paper.

It is my argument here that the spatial dynamics of women's football in Iran is one of flows. Women's football is connected through different means discussed above, were so before their integration into the state and have continued to grow ever since. Coaches and administrators move

across delineated spaces, both public and private/domesticated to arrange tournaments, find funding and develop new opportunities for women's football. Footballers move across counties, cities and towns to play in football teams that will have them and move with these teams across the cities to play in facilities that might become available. However we look at it, the picture is one of lines and pathways. I have even discussed this in relation to the body, with players moving across masculine and feminine bodily modalities in their journey along women's football. The anecdote of the bus journey above tells the same story, it is quite literally a pathway along which the footballers in question travel. The space of women's football is in effect is a smooth space, or deterritorialized space. It is nevertheless re-territorialised in and through regulatory spaces such as protected areas in public places which feed into gendered discourses of protection and domesticity as well as through signifying bureaucrats such as the book-keeper at the facility, the park ranger or the sar-parast.

Importantly these pathways are not disconnected from either architectural design or gendered discourses and dominant representations of space in the Islamic Republic of Iran. On the contrary, it has been argued in this thesis that women's football has been integrated into the central institution of sport but only enough to tie it to the bureaucratic field, organisationally those active in women's football have to fend for themselves. Furthermore, the fact that these teams have to travel significantly to get to tournaments and football facilities is a consequence of the lack of availability of spaces to play. Furthermore, the physical space itself contains laws which determine movement and experience. Women's football, indeed women's sports in general (excluding here the statement that walking itself is exercise and therefore sport), is hidden from public view and regardless of the codification of this law, whether it is the articulation of it as a rhizomatic response or the re-articulation of it within

the discourse of protection by the state, it is already separated³¹². The rhizomatic organisation is a response to marginalisation. Nevertheless, I have here reversed the order of articulation from many commentators; it is not footballers who rearticulate dominant state discourses, if anything it is the State apparatus that re-articulates through stratification and overcoding the flows and lines that make up women's football.³¹³

This thesis goes against the paradigms of interscalar politics and notions of hybrid space. Similar to the relationship between the closed space of activism and open space of marginalization here, Ayona Datta looks at the political activism of working class women in Subhash Camp in New Delhi as on which blurs the boundaries between public and private by rearticulating the home as a place of meeting and activism³¹⁴. Although Datta importantly highlights the ways in which the negotiations of politically active women arise out of both a spatial situatedness and a social one within cultural and normative constraints. However, the paradigm of the 'multi-scalar' limits the analysis, even on an experiential level, into fixed spatial categories (scales)³¹⁵. When the interviews and observations illustrate flows and lines of flight, the rigidity of the paradigm of scales allows only for 'blurring', 'jumping' and 're-articulation', or

³¹² Lefebvre argues that physical production of space arrives first in the genesis of space itself, although "the reading of space [...] comes first from the standpoint of knowledge". Lefebvre's point on the readability of space is that it is overcoded, and over-inscribed and we avoid here also the simplification of the message of gender separated sports. See H. Lefebvre, *The production of space*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) pp. 142-143

³¹³ Here I would like not to overstate the relationship between lived space and that of the dominant representation of space. I am not arguing that the spatial experience of women footballers is one of infinite potential which is then harnessed by the signifying state. I am merely arguing that the articulation of lived experience through discourse comes after the experience itself. However, this articulation is not a one way stream, it is not for the State to extract meaning as it pleases, nor is it a pure top-down phenomenon. As we will discuss in the next chapters, following Judith Butler's analysis of the production of gender, it is through a dialectic process between the body and pre-existing discursive formations that for example gender comes to be and repeated. In the final chapter we will discuss this as a process of inversion and consumption. For inversion see T. Ingold, 'Against Space: Place, Movement, Knowledge' in P. Wynn Kirby (ed) *Boundless Worlds: An Anthropological Approach to Movement* (Oxford & New York: Berghahn Books, 2009), pp. 29-45

³¹⁴ A. Datta, 'Samudayik Shakti: Working-Class feminism and social organisation in Subhash Camp, New Delhi', *Gender, Place and Culture* 14:2 (2007), pp. 225-226

³¹⁵ Ibid.

“bodily experiences of the ‘multi-scalar’”³¹⁶. Similarly, Stephen Legg’s analysis of anti-colonial struggles in the home is an important discussion of women’s activism through gendered spatial organisation. Legg illustrates how networks of activism flowed through the home, for example by educating children. Legg writes:

“the home is constituted by embodied practices while the body is nurtured and disciplined with the home. However, the body is mobile and deployable whereas the home is not”³¹⁷

Yet, the rigidity of spatial constraint leads to a problematisation of women activism as Legg notes that the examples of political activities in the home might just as well be read as the chores of dutiful wives of political active husbands³¹⁸. He asks: “did women, as wives, have any choice in these circumstances?”³¹⁹. The question is important but only as far as the conceptual paradigm selected for the analysis superimposes the coded domestic/public onto the immediate spatial experiences of the ‘wives’ in question.

Ingold argues that the transport mode of movement, opposed to that of the wayfarer’s is the way we inhabit our world experientially³²⁰. We are supposed to, or architecturally bound by places, dots, cars, train, office, home, but people’s own ways of being and moving through space, always in movement but always somewhere, breaks that down. It works as a resistance, as some break the rules and make their own lines, connect and

³¹⁶ Ibid. p. 222

³¹⁷ S. Legg, ‘Gendered Politics and Nationalised Homes: Women and the anti-colonial struggle in Delhi, 1930-47’, *Gender, Place and Culture*, 10:1 (2003), p. 21

³¹⁸ Ibid. p. 22

³¹⁹ Ibid. p. 22. Similarly Deborah G. Martin writes about the Block Club’s activism criticising the arbitrary division of public and private spheres. Here again, although using the concepts conceptually, the conclusion falls on a blurring of the two of bringing one sphere into the other. See Deborah G. Martin, ‘Constructing the Neighborhood Sphere: gender and community organizing’, *Gender, Place and Culture*, 9:4 (2002), pp. 333-350

³²⁰ Tim Ingold, ‘Up, Across and Along’, *Creativity and Research Papers*, (Dundee: Creativity and Practice Group, 2005), pp. 21-35

disconnect causing these to break down and disintegrate. As Lefebvre explains,

“Space commands bodies, proscribing gestures, routes and distances to be covered. It is produced with this purpose in mind; this is its *raison d’être*. The ‘reading of space is thus merely a secondary and practically irrelevant upshot, a rather superfluous reward to the individual for blind, spontaneous and *lived* obedience. So even if the reading of space [...] comes first from the standpoint of knowledge, it certainly comes last in the genesis of space itself”³²¹

My argument is that the experience of the bus journey shows that this is not necessarily so, that in fact it is those same moments of inversion that solidify bureaucracy, dot making, stratification, or Lefebvre’s representations of space. Lived space is subject to a process of inversion. Women footballers travel across the cities and regions, lines across the country, even in the country side to the cities, play football exercise. But rather than disintegrate the discourses of protection, gender difference, they affirm these through their legitimisation of bureaucratic organisation (by signing that book). It is not either lines or dots, but lines are appropriated, by a process of stratification into dots, into legitimization where there is none intended³²².

Deleuze and Guattari write, “It is a vital concern of every State not only to vanquish nomadism but to control migrations”³²³. This is the relationship between the spatial dynamics of women’s football and that of the bureaucracy of sport, and thus of the state apparatus in Iran. Women’s

³²¹ Henri Lefebvre, *The production of space*, p. 143

³²² Mark Bonta and John Protevi describe this as an apparatus of capture which they define as “an assemblage that captures localised territories by overcoding them and channelling their flows into a centralized organism or system [...] Through the process of overcoding, pre-existent regimes of signs (in mixture) are decoded and subjected to the ends of an organizing, centralizing, hierarchizing machine that turns activity into work (labor), territories into ‘the land’, and surplus value into capital”, see M. Bonta and J. Protevi, *Deleuze and Geophilosophy: A Guide and Glossary* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), p. 52

³²³ G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A thousand plateaus*, (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 245

football is quite clearly a migration, ideologically speaking at least. Rochelle Terman uses Mino Moallem's concept of the civic body to illustrate how the development of the Islamic Republic of Iran relies on the public presence of women conditioned on their hijab, contrary to explanations of women's domesticisation in post-revolutionary Iran³²⁴. Women's football on the other hand forces the separation of the nationalist meanings of the civic body from its protective discourse. Football players are active bodies in a social activity and despite President Ahmadinejad's attempts to assign cultural value to the veiled sporting female body³²⁵, these are hidden from the public view. Women's football in Iran does not produce anything of value, it is not socially feared as destructive, nor is it deemed fitting of revolutionary subjects as per the civic body. It is a leak, a line of flight, and does not appear to those involved as the result of strategic jumping of scales or hybridization of spaces but rather a movement (in the literal sense). In the words of Paul Virillio, "the political power of the State is *polis*, police, that is, management of the public ways, the gates of the city, its levies and duties, are barriers, filters against the fluidity of the masses, against the penetration power of migratory packs" and so it is in relation to the rhizomatic response of women's football³²⁶. Consequently, we can say that women's football was never integrated into the institutions of the Islamic Republic, the latter attempts and succeeds to direct it into and through its 'levies'.

Conclusion

³²⁴ R. Terman, 'The Piety of Public Participation: The Revolutionary Muslim Woman in the Islamic Republic in Iran', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions* 11:3-4, p. 291, fn. 8

³²⁵ President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad referred to Helen Sepahi as triumphant in the 'field of values' after she refused to remove her hijab in the World Karate Championship in Tokyo in 2008.

³²⁶ Paul Virillio quoted in G. Deleuze and F. Guattari, *A thousand plateaus*, (London: Continuum, 2004), pp. 425-426

Lefebvre points to the dangers of what he calls “the predominance of the readable”³²⁷ in relation to architecture. Similarly, there is a danger in sport sociology to overemphasise the subversive role of representational acts, such as cheering on a women’s national team in an otherwise male dominated football stadium, or even playing a male dominated sport as a woman. This chapter has challenged the notion that spaces encourage certain behaviours and any other theoretical foundation that divides the setting from the characters like the stage directions of a play. This I have critiqued, despite Low’s caution against structure-theory paradigms that limit the opportunities for lines of flight which might work against dominant structures. Finally, the ways in which women’s football is a deterritorialised social activity which takes place across different fields, cities and institutions – often rearticulating new spaces for their own consumption. Yet, these lines of flight are temporary, and return territorialised through gate keepers and nodal points that stratify and re-assign the activity within bureaucratic lines and within expected gender norms.

³²⁷ H. Lefebvre, *The Production of space*, (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991) p. 146

Chapter 4: Tuning the body – embodiment as a line of flight

In the previous chapter I discussed the spatial aspects of women's football in Iran. Aside from the central role of physical spaces for training and competing, I discussed and dismissed the theoretical assumption of spaces as containers of bodies. I also questioned the notion of spaces 'encouraging' certain behaviours as some have argued³²⁸. The main issue in the debate on space is the role of agency within what some call the structure-theory perspectives³²⁹; the role of bodies in recreating and reinforcing dominant structures through their lived experiences. The argument in this thesis is that there is a rhizomatic reality which blurs the lines of resistance and compliance in the organisational structure of the institution active in women's football in Iran.

Where Low imagines the existence of 'lines of flight' necessarily working against dominant structures, I followed Deleuze and Guattari's argument that these are not a necessary condition of extra-structural practices and that these can, and in our case do, reinforce those very boundaries that they cross. Similarly to Deleuze and Guattari, Lefebvre's concept of representational space allows us to conceptualize reimaginings and renegotiations with dominant spatial and societal configurations which do not necessarily replace or significantly change the latter. Rather the day to day lives of individuals, their daily routines for example, whether conscious or not, reinforce the representations of space which are both discursive and material.

³²⁸ C. Assmann and S. Gulker 'Football under cover in Tehran's Ararat Stadium', in Silke Steets (ed.), *Stadium Worlds: Football, Space and the Built environment*, (Abingdon: Routledge, 2010)

³²⁹ Martina Löw, 'The constitution of space: the structuration of spaces through the simultaneity of effect and perception', *European Journal of Social Theory*, 11:1 (2008), pp. 29-30

Introduction

The organisation of women's football has immediate spatial concerns (see previous chapter). Availability of spaces to train and compete is central to how footballers relate to their clubs, federation and representatives. During our interviews and discussions with both players and coaches it was this that was the biggest worry for the future of the sport. The issue of gender segregation in sports is also an immediately spatial issue; women cannot share the same space as men when doing sport – regardless of their clothing or hijab³³⁰. Furthermore, the distance of what women footballers perceive as the 'bureaucracy' is most evident in the perceived inconsistencies in regards to gender segregation. "Why can we sit next to men in a taxi and we can't have male coaches even if we are in full hijab?", asks one player.

One answer to this question would be to point to the difference in relationship between the male and female bodies in these two contexts. The taxi the player is referring to here is the shuttle-taxi's that drives between major landmarks in urban centres of Iran – particularly visible in Tehran. These can be hailed down on the side of the street and can be taken anywhere that is on the route of that particular car, resulting in strangers sitting in close proximity - sometimes (although this happens much less) two strangers in the front seat. In this case the woman who sits next to a man is not involved in a project which counteracts or directly hinders her modesty (*sharm*). On the other hand, the athletic body of the female footballer is engaged in movements that can be perceived as crossing boundaries of feminine modesty, and thus not only counteracting norms of gender performance, but can be seen as even crossing the

³³⁰ This is not a general rule but is implemented on case by case basis. Some sports, like shooting for example, does allow mixed gender audiences. To try and generalise here would assume some kind of centralised and consistent application of law which is not applicable as explained in this thesis.

boundaries of gender norms; what is necessary to embody as a footballer needs to be spatially divided along gender lines.

There is however something fundamentally unsatisfying with this explanation. Firstly, gender segregation is not consistent across Iranian urban society. For example, women and men are completely separated on busses, whilst male football is televised nationally and women fandom of male football is discouraged (and banned) not on grounds of embodied sexuality but on the basis of foul language in the crowds. Secondly, explaining the 'reasoning' behind specific interpretations of gender segregation assume a centralized and coherent state actor which interprets and makes judgments on what is and is not permissible according to the Law. This in turn assumes a centralised bureaucratic apparatus which correctly and coherently translates State judgments into localised action. This thesis attempts to avoid such assumptions and instead examine the way in which women footballer's themselves interact with bureaucratic, spatial and here embodied contexts and through these interactions produce them.

As in the previous chapters, I will keep a particular focus on the way in which women footballer's take part in the production of their bodily modalities in relation to the game of football and how these in turn affect them as women and as footballer's. To put it simply, as much as women's football has actively a directly spatial focus, this in turn is defined across understandings of embodiment. Being a *woman* footballer is after all defined according to the players' bodies. It is claimed women footballer's in Iran value particular projects in the sport that are coded masculine/male. This signification is not assumed as given by some Islamic or revolutionary discourse from an ever-present State apparatus but is retrospectively given qualities from within the organisation. I say retrospectively as the dominant culture within women's football in Iran is one which accepts the

alterable body which can be tuned to certain projects – similarly male bodies are tuned towards authoritative and forceful movements and a certain spatial understanding that are seen as important in the game of football.

Tuning the Body

Many of the players of a university team in Isfahan had all begun playing organized football in their late teens. Early attraction to the sport came from having played on the streets and in parks, often with brothers and other boys. Coaches often repeated this late entry into organized football as an obstacle to improving their abilities as players as they had certain ‘bad habits’ which they had developed playing with small goals, and for leisure purposes. When we speak of women’s football therefore, we are not only talking about a new and growing sport in contemporary Iran institutionally, but also in terms of the high proportion of relatively ‘new’ players. Habits such as positioning during the game, stance, ways of moving around the pitch, all affect the way in which a player can develop and the young women’s already established ways of being on the football pitch is not easily unlearned. However, as one of the coaches of the national team explained,

“there is a serious issue with these girls and how late they begin training, but there is a clear ambition to change and improve. It is accepted for example that girls should work on their bodies outside of training in bodybuilding facilities or by swimming – they know they can improve and they don’t blame anyone else.”³³¹

Women footballer’s in Iran have a conscious understanding of their bodies as alterable and fluid tools which are constantly tuned towards specific projects. When discussing the difficulty expressed by some coaches in

³³¹ Fatemeh, Interviewed by A. Sedighi, Tehran, August 21, 2008

training women to embody certain authoritative movements or stances which are more easily attained by male players, such as tackles and physical challenges, defensive stances, or headers, many distanced themselves from what they perceived as apologetic rhetoric which referred to cultural inhibitions and even more clearly any notion of natural difference between sexes. “I had problems with headers because it was difficult for me to jump and keep my eyes open”³³², one player said but continued, “I don’t buy into excuses”³³³. If you want to be better at something, you train yourself and work on your body”. Thus, many players are active members of bodybuilding clubs and fitness centres. Although during these sessions the cardio-vascular training forms an important part of the training, and perhaps a naturally important part of a footballer’s training, women players also work on their legs, abdomens and general physical strength sometimes through weight-lifting. These fitness centres, just as football facilities mentioned above, have specific times allocated to female athletes away from male participants and spectators. Notably, this ‘body training’ is done individually outside of football practice and organized coaching of clubs and university teams.

Coaches have little say in what and how players train outside of training hours, but are aware of it and largely encourage it. “We expect that players have different needs and expectations from the sport and physical training outside of practice can be useful – it’s up to the players’ themselves”, a coach explained. There is however a noticeable difference in the focus of some players on individual strength of their bodies and the

³³² A. Sedighi, *Fieldnotes*, September 2009

³³³ Ibid. See also Mariah Burton Nelson’s discussion on the difficulty of keeping a defensive stance, and ‘being big’ in American football training for women. The stance which “requires a player to squat, low to the ground, her legs wide open” like certain bodily movements required in football are difficult because they do not simply require a ‘learning’, or an addition to already existing bodily capabilities but necessitate a certain way of holding oneself that is ‘out of tune’ with how women otherwise are, at least as far as these coaches experienced. See Mariah Burton Nelson, *The Stronger Women Get, the More Men Love Football: Sexism and the American culture of Sport* (London: The Women’s Press Ltd, 1996), p. 35

coaches' emphasis on teamwork and tactical knowledge, particularly positioning, and fitness in training. Some even see this difference as a symptom of a misunderstanding of the sport, stressing that football is essentially a team sport. One player who did not herself focus on strength said "girls focus too much on [their bodies] and don't see that what they need is more tactical awareness and ball control". Nevertheless, there is a shared prioritization amongst women footballers of physical strength and individual power, which shows an understanding of the bodies ability to be 'tuned' to specific projects, in this case projects which demand physical strength. To put it simply, women footballers tend to place value on physical strength in order to become better football players.

The focus on certain bodily abilities, particularly strength, illustrates a specific view and value system in relation to football as a sport. There is a clear understanding that to be a good, or better, footballer certain ways of being, described as 'weak', 'modest' and so on, have to be undone and replaced with forcefulness and authoritative bodily modalities that women players are seen as lacking in comparison to their male counterparts. To some extent there is a rational aspect to physical strength as it gives the upper hand in a sport in which many new players participate and thus a sport in which physical strength could give an immediate upper hand in specific situations. It should be noted however that we are not talking about physical strength necessarily as a material reality, often the training brings with it certain ways of 'holding oneself' which allows for more forceful challenges rather than simply physical strength in a given situation.

For example, working on their thighs, players also train to lift their knees when running which allows for greater speed and acceleration even before any physical muscle strength has been achieved. Nevertheless, the rational aspect is a limited explanation as the explicit reference to 'badan saazi', or body-building, which does not necessarily contain the connotations of

increased muscle size, illustrates something more than simply a rational search for advantage in the game. Players also described their training outside of football as 'working on their bodies' (roo badan kar kardan) which again shows a direct awareness of bodily capabilities as changeable and fluid which in turn raises questions about an immediate self-regulatory reflex that controls female bodily modalities which limit movement³³⁴. The value system of forcefulness and authority in movement suggest a value judgment on masculine ways of being, or body modalities that are 'read' as masculine or unfeminine. Working on the body, tuning it to specific projects seen as more valuable in football (ways of standing and moving), thus also continues outside of those projects as the body techniques in question are both reflexive and non-reflexive, i.e. they continue outside of the projects they are 'tuned' for. In interviews with players I often came across movements and patterns of behaviour that would be seen as unfeminine in Iranian society, for example some would roll up their sleeves or un-cross their legs once the initial unfamiliarity had faded.

What I here call 'tuning' does not happen outside of heterosexual imperatives that stratify and materialize sexual difference in society, but rather reinforce them as ways of being despite doing so by making visible the 'act of gender'. Projects involved in football are not seen by women football players as abstract or natural movements in society which they are less capable of performing due to their gender. Rather specific projects are identified and certain movements are deemed more useful and efficient and these demand certain ways of being and holding oneself. There is a difference here to what Young states as the 'handicapped' nature of able bodied female bodies in sexist society – in the latter 'sexist society' is a container of abstract projects, and in which female bodies

³³⁴ See Iris Marion Young, 'Throwing Like a Girl: A phenomenology of Feminine Body Comportment Motility and Spatiality', *Human Studies* 3 (1980), pp. 137-156

have less ability to function whilst in our case specific projects are identified and the body tuned towards these³³⁵. To put it simply, sexist society does not ‘handicap’ female bodies, as some argue, but generally tunes female bodies and male bodies differently towards gendered projects which are valued differently. Here again some might object to another example of observers repeatedly attempting to assign gender to the lived body thus stabilizing it within those same heteronormative imperatives I am trying to expose.

Yet it is important to point out that these phenomena are not occurring in a vacuum and, although they escape the stabilization of gender/sex norms and notions that masculinity is naturally male, they do not offer pure or absolute lines of flight. Hence, although we are talking about female bodies embodying movements, read as male/masculine, it is not an escape from sexist society let alone a renegotiation of gender dualism on which patriarchal society rests. This does not mean that women footballer’s are bodies locked within a gendered dichotomy from which there is no escape, but as I have argued earlier whether it is lines of flight from the institution, rhizomatic relationships, re-tuning of bodies, these are not movements from the fixity to the fluid but rather ways of being that do not counteract the dominant forces in society. Similarly, the physical authority of women footballers, or the movement towards what are assigned as masculine ways of holding oneself, the re-tuning, are events in their own right. Susan Bordo, or to a lesser extent Iris Young, move to assign feminine or masculine ways of being where one is limited whilst the other free, and do

³³⁵ Young puts it plainly, “women in sexist society are physically handicapped”. Feminine bodily comportment, motility and spatiality are significations that in Young’s analysis exist pre-experience as limitations, inhibitions, confinements – she writes “as lived bodies we are not open and unambiguous transcendences which move out to master a world that belong to us, a world constituted by our won intentions and projects”. This is concluded by Young’s prioritization of the discursive over the experienced/physical. This follows the logic of inversion as discussed by Tim Ingold (discussed in the next chapter). See *Ibid.* p. 152

so rigidly³³⁶. Although both remain vague on the movements between these two dichotomies by sexed bodies, or avoid a debate on the relationship of the sexed body and its gendered embodiment, their conceptual framework remains rigid. The reshaping the female body by the football player towards projects that are tuned to the masculine body and masculine ways of being is however a state in itself.

Women football players who are actively engaged with making their bodies more efficient tools in relation to football are engaged in the act of working on their bodies. These workings involve movements and body building towards ways a-signed as masculine. However, this does not mean women football players are masculine or male in their bodily composure – it is not a move from Young’s concept of feminine body to masculine body. In the words of Deleuze & Guattari, “a becoming is not a correspondence between relations [...]but neither is it a resemblance, an imitation, or, at the limit, an identification”³³⁷. Rather than project these movements as progress or regress along a series we can see them in relation to the projects they are explicitly engaged. Azita, the goalkeeper of a division 2 club describes her experience of improving her skills,

“We’ve learnt nothing from the coach. And whatever I’ve learnt I’ve learnt from my husband, he’s a footballer too...he teaches me and works with me on certain things. He tells me that when there is a corner I should be there and do this...none of this I’ve been taught by any coach. He knows because men get more time, they get more coaches, more funding.”³³⁸

She continues later on,

³³⁶ See Iris Marion Young, ‘Throwing Like a Girl’ and Susan Bordo, *Unbearable weight: Feminism, Western Culture and the Body* (Los Angeles & London: University of California Press, 2003). Both of these set out to describe the internalisation of patriarchal cultural norms and societal pressures, but do so at the expense of the primacy of experience as delimited by spatial representations but nevertheless but containing lines of flight and flows in all directions, across the delineations discussed.

³³⁷ Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A thousand plateaus* (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 262

³³⁸ Azita, Interviewed by Z. Rouhi, Tehran, August 20, 2008

“Women are thinner, they are more delicate, more sensitive of course, and a sport like football is a contact sport, things happen and it’s violent, lots of injuries. [...] But we don’t get any time spent on us, to work on certain things, to improve so we don’t get injuries.”³³⁹

The disproportionate support, both financial and otherwise, for male football is an issue of which the women footballers are aware. The topic came up frequently in conversations and discussions, and like in the quote above, the reasons for male superiority in football and other sports is often linked to this disproportionate support. Both coaches and players refer to the ‘thin’ or ‘fragile’ female player, and the ‘strong’ and ‘fast’ male player but like the player’s husband in the above example, it is explained as the result of better training, facilities and gear. Not only are female players not supported financially and logistically as much as men, but they are also hindered from gaining experience from those who are. As much of their fitness training is done outside of their team training sessions, players do not see their female coaches as sufficiently experienced to train them. Their training is said to lack tactical awareness and is instead focused on generic fitness training as well as passing and shooting. Most teams also intensify training before big tournaments, which often leads to players feeling tired and stiff, often picking up injuries. At a tournament in Isfahan, Hanieh, a player, noted,

“We’ve been working on fitness up until this tournament instead of working on tactics and skill. 20 days before competition we start heavy training, running up and down stairs...they expect us to play after that training? No discussion about tactics whatsoever...we’re playing according to our own knowledge and according to our own tactics.”³⁴⁰

³³⁹ Ibid.

³⁴⁰ Hanieh, Interviewed by Z. Rouhi, September 25, 2008

Many players had stories of male coaches or players who shared their experience with them. Some also had stories of male coaches, particularly foreign ones, being brought in to help their team (or the team of someone they knew). These stories often ended in similar ways, with resistance being met from university staff, club officials or others, leading to an abrupt end. Darya, a player who had first hand experience of this said,

“We agreed to play with hijab [in front of the male coach], I don’t understand why they didn’t agree. Even the few sessions we had were fantastic, [the German] coach knew so much. Why can we be squeezed together in a cab but not be allowed to be together on the pitch?”³⁴¹

Similarly, many referred to the mixed match between Esteghlal’s men’s youth team and their women’s team which led to fines and the team penalizing three officials, including the women’s coach and the men’s youth team coach:

“How do they expect us to improve when we can’t learn from those can play better? The male youth team won 7-0, that says a lot about our difference in quality. What do they do, they go and fine them?”³⁴²

There is a culture of improvement amongst women footballer’s, particularly those who played in professional clubs. Rather than discuss their positions in respective leagues, or results against other women teams, they emphasized their own improvement as players. Often this would be connected to obstacles to their learning from officials outside of the sport. Administrators, whether university administrators or Federation officials, are seen as bureaucrats with either no personal experience of the difficulties of football or as unsupportive. The notion that women’s football is played and organized independently from the larger institutional system is something that returns here. ‘We are left to our own devices’, some say as they quote examples from their own experience

³⁴¹ Darya, Interviewed by A. Sedighi, Tehran, August 13, 2008

³⁴² A. Sedighi, *Fieldnotes*, September 2008

as players of when heads of Physical Education Departments for example not giving them new shin-pads or socks. I have discussed the way in which women footballer's experience their bodies as changeable tools which they attempt to tune for specific projects. We also see that women footballer's see training and improvement not only in absolute terms in terms of strength and speed, but often highlight the importance of playing against and learning from those who 'know more'. The knowledge of their female coaches is not seen as sufficient, male players and male coaches are seen as more knowledgeable, and not because of some romanticized 'masculine' essence, but because of their bodily knowledge which they in turn have learnt through experience. As we discuss players' gear and the lack of what some see as 'proper' gear (such as new shin-pads) we arrive at a point where the players directly refer to their own bodies and the consequences of the lack of support on their own bodies.

Injuries

Injuries are common amongst women football players, and it is rare to find a football player who is not or has not recently been injured to some extent. The injuries I came across were varied, from broken fingers and scars to muscle injuries and joint problems. The players, particularly seniors, often continue playing with injuries if possible. Some university players however give up football after long term injuries, and focus instead on their studies. Saraye, a player who played in a university team as well as a division one team explained,

“Futsal is very injury prone...and in these facilities where the quality is very low, lots of injuries happen...especially for women...lots and lots of injuries. Someone is constantly injured, knee, ankle, legs, back...everywhere. I have myself had injured in my knees even though I am aware of the risks, I wear supports. It's very bad, so bad that I will never play without the supportive gear

and I've seen a lot of injured and I won't get into it without the gear."³⁴³

Injuries are seen as results of lack of support in terms of equipment and facilities as well as proper training. Furthermore, they further reinforce the isolation of women footballer's who are left to 'their own devices'. A goalkeeper explained how her injuries do not stop her for continuing to play,

"I don't care about injured, because everyone else is killing themselves and fighting on, so if I quit because of injuries it's selfish. I need to stay on for their sake, for the sake of the team. No one can give them moral support like me, I'm the best at giving them that kind of support from behind...it's not just my goalkeeping skills. If I leave there is no one else who can do it, so it's my responsibility and I have their trust"³⁴⁴

Having to buy their own equipment is seen as another example of the unsupportive institutions. Although clubs do offer players clothes and sometimes protective gear, such as shin-pads, there are always examples of how they do not provide sufficient help and sometimes the wrong kind of help. The goalkeeper for example explained how the equipment given to her is not the right equipment, the gloves are generic gloves given to amateur and junior keepers. Other players raised similar concerns, Soad, a university player told us,

"It's important for me to have the right gear, I need to be able to stand without slipping...but [the university] doesn't care, they say it's all cosmetic differences and that all shoes for example are the same. They treat us all the same regardless of what sport we're playing. If you're playing volleyball you need a certain type of shoes, if you're a basketball player another, but they give all of us the same boots"³⁴⁵

Although many male teams do not receive shin-pads or new equipment, and despite the fact that it is not common practice for all clubs to give all

³⁴³ Saraye, Interviewed by A. Sedighi, Isfahan, October 7, 2008

³⁴⁴ Azita, Interviewed by Z. Rouhi, Tehran, August 20, 2008

³⁴⁵ Soad, Interviewed by A. Sedighi, October 7, 2008

necessary equipment to players, it is a repeated concern for players. The framework of this issue illustrates the awareness of players that the obstacle to improvement is not a natural result of female bodies carrying out masculine movements. Rather, the concerns raised of not having the 'right' protection, or the 'correct' training and rest, shows an understanding of the relationship between the embodiment of certain projects and the bodies of players. The many injuries are not due to the sport itself, but incorrect training and insufficient protection.

All football players have to sign up to the obligatory national Sports Insurance (Bime-ye Varzeshi) which at the time of fieldwork cost around 3000 Toman. Rarely does this insurance pay out to players, many of whom therefore continue playing despite injuries, and whenever serious often end up paying for their medical costs themselves. Claims are sent through the club or university and many players see this as yet another example of corruption amongst those who are supposed to support their sport. Mahin, a player who had made several claims, explained in a phone interview with Rouhi,

"I have sent claims, again and again through our team. The club has to pass it on to the insurance company and they give the money to the club, who is supposed to pass it on right? Someone here is taking the money, either the insurance company is taking it, or the team, or they're not even taking the claims further. You have to always show your insurance card, which costs 3000 Toman. It's so they can take more from you, because I've played for a long time, made a few claims, and never seen a penny."³⁴⁶

Another player who had recently been paid 70% of her claim for a broken finger explained how she was only able to do this because of the kindness of the organizers of the tournament she was playing in. After she broke her finger during a game, the organizers, themselves sportswomen, helped

³⁴⁶ Mahin, Interviewed by Z. Rouhi, *telephone interview*, January 27, 2009

her by taking photographs and making sure her claim was taken seriously: “The made sure I got most of the costs of getting me fixed. They said they knew someone who could help me out”. Once again, the importance of third party guarantees and the internal support system within women’s football is emphasized. The injured player who continues to play for the sake of her team, does so because there is no support system. Despite mentioned attempts to centralize women’s football, players and coaches continue to rely on cross-hierarchical relationships and see it as the only way since they experience themselves as being ‘left to their own devices’. This rhizomatic response to the institutional experience of women players, does not however unify them, but rather isolates each player who in turn depends on knowing the right people, be that husbands who can give footballing advice or people within the Sports insurance who can help them get compensation for injuries.

Women footballer’s tuning of their bodies towards what are coded masculine bodily modalities might seem to further confirm Young’s understanding of embodied femininity as limited in sexist society. However, I believe that the identification of specific projects within football that require certain ways of holding oneself and movement illustrates a different reality where the body can be shaped and tuned towards these without necessarily immediately falling back on reflexive notions of masculine or feminine codifications. The perceived inability to fully integrate their bodies to these projects is linked instead to insufficient time, training and equipment. Hence, I am not discussing female players’ futile attempt of being male/masculine. Furthermore, these experiences do not escape from the gendered matrix and should not be seen as simple renegotiations or resistances against dominant understandings of feminine ways of being.

As the experiences above clearly show, this inability to fully train the body towards the projects involved in football is the result of sexist society and gender politics. We therefore turn to Judith Butler's concept of materialization, which avoids fixing bodily experiences as male or female, but rather emphasizes the materializing processes which solidify male/female differences. Women footballer's are in this paradigm already sexed bodies repeating and acting out masculine acts.

Playing Like a Man

Farideh Shojaee's predecessor, Sepanjee, said in a discussion about the value of women's football in Iranian culture,

"One expects that when an athlete tries their best at something they will be rewarded. Now I don't mean financially but culturally [...] Football is a sport that needs cultural reworking [farhang sazi]. Even in terms of the clothing, with which is truly difficult, it really is, to play well on a grass pitch, but they play. Because they love the sport. Maybe in volleyball or basketball athletes wouldn't play under these conditions"³⁴⁷

In the last two years Sazeman-e Tarbiyat Badani had initiated professionalization schemes whereby coaches and administrators within each sport were demanded to have university diplomas in their respective subjects to be approved into the institution. The scheme which was seen as a victory for the acceptance of women's sports by the leadership in the IRIFF was met with cynicism by one of the initial founders of football in the Islamic Republic of Iran in the 1990's. Amirshaghghi, was a young woman, she had played professional football in Iran and in Sweden and had dedicated her life to the development of women's football. When I

³⁴⁷ Sepanjee, Interviewed by G. Rouhi, *telephone interview*, July 27, 2008

interviewed her for the first time she was the head coach of the Daneshgah-e Azad women's football team in Tehran.

She was also working as a coach and administrator for Iran Khodro women's football team. We spoke in great detail about football, about women's position in Iranian society and about the development of women's football in Iran. Before meeting her I had heard a great deal about her history, she was mentioned by every coach I came across as the main inspiration of women's football in Iran and as the most active and capable coach. Yet, her enthusiasm was not as positive as that which I experienced in the IRIFF offices.

Amirshaghghi's stories about the development of football began on the streets of south Tehran where girls and boys play football in the streets with plastic balls which can be found in any corner shop. "we have never been short of players in this sport, we lack in quality", she said during our phone conversation. One of her players recalled finding used plastic footballs in the gutter, which had washed down from uptown rich areas of Tehran, having been played with and neglected by the more privileged children. She explains,

"Because of this background, many of my players see football as an escape, as a way out. There is so much enthusiasm and with all our limitations and lack of support and funding, it is only because of this dedication that we have managed to come this far."³⁴⁸

After one of the earlier training sessions with the team, I raised the issue of the position of the coach and the effects of the professionalization schemes that have been initiated. She explained how the changes might be positive but that these were merely short term solutions to deeper

³⁴⁸ Amirshaghghi, Interviewed by A. Sedighi, Tehran, August 24, 2008

problems with the sport. I sensed a great division between the vision of the coach and that which I saw in IRIFF. For example, she constantly played down the notion of struggling against a patriarchal and male dominated institution explaining that she did not want to martyr her players for the greater good.

“There is no future in the sport, why should they spend all their time on it. If I had a daughter I would enrol her in computer or language classes, these things matter. Sport has no value in our society.”³⁴⁹

Despite this cynicism which is clearly born out of frustration with the lack of support for women’s sport in general and having dedicated most of her adult life to its promotion, Amirshaghghi saw her role as a coach as vital in the lives of the young women she coached. She described the importance of being a role model for the athletes in helping them achieve success in Iranian society and therefore described what she referred to as the “cultural work” as one of the most important jobs which is neglected by most new coaches coming up in the ranks through the recent professionalization of the sports industry. One of the aspects of this cultural work was the importance of academic achievements,

“I ask my players to each year bring me proof of their academic achievements, whether this is from university or language course or computer course. I am very strict on this issue and believe it is an intrinsic part of coaching a woman’s football team.”³⁵⁰

Linked to this however, was a more interesting aspect of the cultural work Amirshaghghi was describing. Aside from the academic achievements she saw her role as a leader and a role model important to keep the women players from “acting like men”. Many of the players refused to shave their

³⁴⁹ Amirshaghghi, Interview by A., Sedighi, Khodroo Sports Club Tehran, August 13, 2008

³⁵⁰ Amirshaghghi, Interviewed by A. Sedighi, Tehran, August 24, 2008

legs and under-arms and generally “acted male”. It is worth here to mention Jeff Hearn and Wendy Parkin’s term “organisational sexuality” which describes the process whereby institutions and sexuality are created and maintained concurrently,

“Not only do organisations construct sexuality, as does sexuality construct organisations, but more importantly, the very occurrence of “organisation” invokes “sexuality,” and the very occurrence of “sexuality” in the public domain at least, frequently invokes “organisation,” so they are no longer separable”³⁵¹

Amirshaghghi explained on several occasions the difficulties involved with her cultural work, in convincing the players they do not need to act like men to get by and that in fact this harms them in their professional and social life. She explicitly explains her duty to prepare her players for life after football and in this the coach shapes and constructs their sexuality according to societal norms.

The training of the women’s team in Azad University is also affected by the coach’s understanding of her understanding of “duty of office”. The willingness to expose her players to physical risk, both in training and in tournaments, was particularly noticeable. Although I did not notice any difference between the attitude of female players to aggression and that of the male, the coach was determined to avoid injuries and bruises for her players. It was here that I noticed the problems of simply reducing the mentioned “cultural work” to that of organisational sexuality.

Amirshaghghi explained,

³⁵¹ Hearn and Parkin’s work on organisations and gender uses a broad definition of the former, seeing organisations as social processes that are always in a state of becoming. Their work is counterhegemonic in that it seeks out to deconstruct the way in which gender and sexuality is ‘neutred within neutral language of organisational writing. Particularly useful for us here is their focus on what they call the ‘gendered processes between the centre and margisn of organisations’. See Jeff Hearn and Wendy Parkin, *Gender, Sexuality and violence in Organisations*, (London: Sage Publications, 2001), pp.9- 12

I myself avoid training that emphasises physical contact. I try to work on speed and tactics so as to minimize physical contact. The players themselves do not want to have extreme and dangerous physical contact and want to avoid, god forbid, any injuries. And why should they? Even in the national team they receive around hundred and fifty to two hundred toman per month, so they don't want to get injuries which make them regret to ever have chosen football in the first place [...] We are careful and why shouldn't we? A broken leg and you're left at home with no one to take care of you."³⁵²

The tactical choices of the coach are thus not simply based on heterosexist beliefs or that of an impersonal bond as that explained by Weber, but conscious economic decisions. She continues,

“Do you think our medical institutions support us? I was injured, and received four hundred thousand toman. The total cost of my injury was over ten million. The [Iranian football] federation gave me only four hundred thousand. Of course I also received forty thousand from my insurance policy [...] so why should we dedicate ourselves to the sport professionally? [...] Why should we try to do better?”³⁵³

Amirshaghghi's struggle is one which illustrates the complexity of many women's experience in patriarchal society. In a situation where her gender limits her access to institutional support, she does not admit defeat nor does she sacrifice her own and her family's economic wellbeing to resist it, but rather finds alternative ways of going 'forwards', in this case by strengthening the speed and tactical knowledge of her players while at the same time comply to societal demands both sexually and in other ways. Thus, by asking her players to prove academic achievements and to meet the terms of their role as women, Amirshaghghi is not a victim nor is she a hero, but an agent who consciously and (lacking a better word)

³⁵² Amirshaghghi, Interviewed by A. Sedighi, Tehran, August 24, 2008

³⁵³ Ibid.

subconsciously makes “choices”. Here I use the concept of embodied ‘choice’ as explained by Merleau-Ponty³⁵⁴.

Muslim Bodies

Based on interviews, observations and discussions with players, coaches and peer ethnographers the discussion in this thesis has led us to a closer look at the relationship between the body and structures bodies are engaged with on a day to day basis. However, the study of sport in itself invites us to this approach as it very clearly and apparently engages with the question of the relationship between the embodied activity and society at large. As Martha Saavedra notes quite simply, “in the practice of sport, the body is central”, and despite the connection of the body’s engagement with the task at hand being simultaneously connected to different political, economic, social and cultural paradigms “the body remains pivotal to the practice”³⁵⁵. Furthermore, studies of sport highlight a practice in which dominant conceptions of physical abilities, particularly those of sexual difference, are magnified³⁵⁶. In this respect this chapter, after having discussed in previous chapters the structural aspects of women’s football in Iran (chapter 3 on organisation and chapter 4 on space), will now move to a discussion on the bodies which uphold those

³⁵⁴ Societal pressures, discursive norms and dominant forces in society push or indeed force action still requires a recognition of those by the body in question. Merleau-Ponty writes regarding the concept of freedom, “what misleads us on this, is that we often look for freedom in the voluntary deliberation which examines one motive after another and seems to opt for the weightiest or most convincing”. It is the value we place upon projects which in turn reinforces ‘limitations’, to quote Merleau-Ponty again, “an unclimbable rock face [...] [has] no meaning for anyone who is not intending to surmount [it]”. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, (London & New York, Routledge Classics, 2005), p. 507

³⁵⁵ Although I again hesitate to share the power of representational politics when Saavedra writes, “In a milieu where sport occupies an important social role and the normative for sport is heterosexual and male, an athlete who deviates poses a critical challenge”, the author is correct in the emphasis on the body’s representational centrality in sport, which therefore is good starting point for the analysis of gender relations, norms and construction. See Martha Saavedra, ‘Sport’ in P. Essed, David T. Goldberg (eds) *A Companion to Gender Studies*, (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2009), p. 437

³⁵⁶ Ibid.

institutions, spatial configurations and sex/gender norms. The image of female athletes immediately forces at least a consideration of mainstream notions of heroism as embodied in the muscular male body³⁵⁷. Female athletes are therefore almost by definition an immediate counterbalance to biologist notions of masculinity, and create ruptures in the neat division between masculine men, and feminine women³⁵⁸.

When it comes to female sport performed by athletes identified primarily as “Muslims women” the paradigms seem to change, particularly if the athlete is a hijabi. In her analysis of Muslim female athletes, Hargreaves highlights the difficulty of Muslim women to negotiate between ‘Western culture’ and ‘modernity’ and ‘Islamic tradition’ and ‘Islamic fundamentalism’³⁵⁹. This cultural conflict model is common elsewhere too, Muslim women are seen to have to overcome traditional and cultural barriers in order to ‘freely’ take part in sports in a secular setting³⁶⁰. Nawal El Moutawakel’s victory in 400-metre hurdle at the 1984 LA Olympics highlights therefore for Hargreaves, and many others in the field, a double victory³⁶¹. Firstly, it is a victory shared between all women, as it poses a challenge to patriarchal and heteronormative paradigms that ‘limit’ the movements and possibilities of women in society. Hence, athletes do not only alter their own bodies, and allow them to respond to what is deemed ‘unfeminine’ projects such as track and field, or football, but also through their efforts they also renegotiate or at least shed light on the un-fixed nature of gender divisions, they question the notion of the natural. Secondly, the victory of a Moutawakel is a victory over tradition and religion, which again limit the already limited body, quite literally when

³⁵⁷ Ibid. p. 402

³⁵⁸ See for example the discussion on the creation of ‘slippages’ due to female masculinity in sports and the responses by football authorities such as FIFA in J. Caudwell, ‘Gender, feminism and football studies’, *Soccer and Society*, Vol 12 (3), 2011.

³⁵⁹ Ibid.

³⁶⁰ See Benn, Tansin and Dagdas, ‘The Olympics Movement and Islamic Culture: Conflict or Compromise for Muslim Women?’, *International Journal of Sport Policy and Politics*, Vol. 1 (1), 2012, pp. 1-14

³⁶¹ Ibid. p. 46

the hijab is a factor. Before we move onto discussing Butler and Young's discussions on gender and the body, I will briefly assess this view of the Muslim hijabi woman. The latter discussion follows similar lines of argument as that of Young's view on the female bodily experience as a 'limited' one arguably implying true freedom and access to 'transcendence' being masculine traits, and Hargreaves's argument is Muslim women are held back by in the squeeze between Islamic modernity and fundamentalism and thus implying bodily liberty as an essentially secular phenomenon. This notion of secular/masculine freedom forms a misleading paradigm for understanding gender and the body, seeing liberation in purely liberal terms and fully within the patriarchal capitalist system.

Samie illustrates how South Asian discourse on Muslim women and their participation has further strengthened the notion of Muslim women's victimhood in the eyes of Western audiences, looking at the example of Sania Mirza who was criticised for her choice of Western/Secular sporting attire³⁶². Samie writes,

"the discursive sporting body of Muslim South Asian women is a blatant victim of male derision, theocratic cultures and religious mis/interpretations, and has thus come to epitomise powerlessness, passivity and subordination."³⁶³

He goes on to write that these women are therefore symbolically said to be 'trapped' between two competing discourses of traditionalism and modernisation³⁶⁴. Positioning women at the centre, this narrative of the woman, squeezes the athletes between societal and civilizational schisms. Although this portrait of athletes primarily identified as "Muslim women" is a spatial one, what is interesting for the purposes of this study is the

³⁶² S. Samie, 'Hetero-sexy self/body work and basketball: The *invisible* sporting women of British Pakistani Muslim heritage', *South Asian Popular Culture*, Vol 11 (3), 2013

³⁶³ Ibid.

³⁶⁴ Ibid.

imagining of the 'woman' who is positioned at the centre, negotiating between different societal powers. Hargreaves analysis of Moutawakel's victory is that of a woman allowed to grow and reach her potential bodily capacity because of the secular attitude to Islam by her parents.

Hargreaves writes that Moutawakel made it because her background from a "formatively liberal, secular Arab state that gave her psychological and financial backing and nurtured her as a symbol of nationhood and progress"³⁶⁵. Although these statements are true, and the state of Morocco's backing of their heroine could be and probably was a way for them to portray a 'modern' nation victorious on an international arena, there is a fundamental understanding of the secular body here that needs to be identified. Hargreaves also writes, "the anxieties experienced by Muslim women about their bodies arise from the coupling of Islam and politics"³⁶⁶. Moutawakel's success therefore is not purely out of financial and psychological support from family and government, but the fundamental basis of that support is one of 'freedom' to move beyond this 'anxiety' that is imposed by the religious society.

Bodies in Sexist Society

To go even further into this debate, and structurally closer to the football players themselves, we arrive at a similar debate taking place over the body and the role of the embodied experience and hegemonic 'ways of being'. Although, the discussion surrounding masculinity and femininity as embodied by both male and female bodies is substantial and growing, I will focus here on the relationship between two differing views, that of Judith Butler and Iris Marion Young. Both of these have from different perspectives suggested way in which bodies participate in the reinforcing

³⁶⁵ Jennifer Hargreaves, *Heroines of Sport*, p. 47

³⁶⁶ Jennifer Hargreaves, *Heroines of Sport*, p. 53

and renegotiating heteronormative and gendered norm that is thought to materialize as Sex/Gender differences. Each of these also, if taken to their logical conclusion, suggests ways of liberating bodies from this dominance and assumed fixity, rigidity and societal limitations and will therefore highlight some the arguments in this thesis, and clarify the theoretical contribution contained herein.

Young, although denying the notion of the body as an empty vessel or *tabula rasa* which simply carries society's dominant discourses, nevertheless retains a sense of separation between the structural and the embodied. Her essay "Throwing Like a Girl" begins as a criticism of the reductionist work of Erwin Straus³⁶⁷. He argues that a girl throwing a ball does so without full use of her body because of a feminine essence. He arrives at this conclusion after removing the possibility of any fixed physiological explanations, but assuming thereafter that it must therefore be the result of some 'feminine essence'³⁶⁸. However, through the paper, as well as in Young's other work (discussed in the Introduction and below), she essentially rests on a basic understanding of a phenomenological difference between women and men in general in their primordial approach to everyday tasks. For this Young relies heavily on Beauvoir's understanding of the tension between immanence and transcendence as the paradigm of a woman's existence in patriarchal society, within which a woman lives a contradiction between being a free subject who participates in 'transcendence, but who is situated as a 'woman' within a framework that denies this very subjectivity and thus ability towards transcendence³⁶⁹. Judith Butler's work, which Young mistakenly sees as

³⁶⁷ Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience: "Throwing Like a Girl" and other essays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), pp. 27-60

³⁶⁸ Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience*, pp. 27-28

³⁶⁹ De Beauvoir writes "Every individual concerned with justifying his existence experiences his existence as an infinite need to transcend himself. But what singularly defines the situation of woman is that being, like all humans, an autonomous freedom, she discovers and chooses herself in a world where men force her to assume herself as Other: an attempt is made to freeze her as an object and doom her to immanence, since her

not addressing the way in which gendered subjects are constituted, moves away from conceptualizing the notion of culturally construct imposing itself on bodies. Contrary to Young's argumentation, Butler does not see gender as a limiting factor imposed on subjects³⁷⁰. The latter rather sees subjectification itself as a process through which the 'I' assumes a sex which then reinforced and reproduced through reiterating practices. Young's argument ironically assumes male existence as one which allows transcendence and freedom and therein lies liberation from the imposed contradictory paradigm of female existence.

For Butler, the heteronormative and exclusionary matrix is reiterated and made material by the actions of already sexed bodies and liberation lies in the empowering of those deemed outside of these borders, in the 'unlivable zones'³⁷¹ and hence for Butler liberation is in the hands of individuals. The works of Butler and Young have been hugely influential in this debate and will therefore be discussed in depth below before looking more closely at the relationship between women football players and the embodiment of gender in sport.

transcendence will be forever transcended by another essential and sovereign consciousness" see Simone de Beauvoir, *The Second Sex*, (London: Vintage, 2010) p. 17
³⁷⁰ As discussed here, Young's critique of Butler vis-à-vis Tori Moi is essentially that the latter, by sidelining the axiomatic notion of gender, recognises the body of the individual is a constructive agent in her relation to what surrounds her "situation, then, is the way that the facts of embodiment and social and physical environment appear in light of the projects a person has. She finds that her movement are awkward in relation to her desire to dance". Here, Young imagines Moi's analysis as allowing us to historicise and understand bodies and subjectivity without relying on the sex-gender distinction of Butler. Here I suggest Young has misread Butler's thesis as one that relates to the embodied *reality* of 'women' in relation to earthly projects, rather than the reproduction of sex-gender as materialised ways of being through subjectification – gender signifies the 'lived body' according to Butler much like Young later admits when stating the importance of institutions and structures in individuals' lives. It is interesting here to note Young's view of structure as the social structures which are experienced as giving them opportunities or limiting them in their options to "set and enact goals for themselves", i.e. structures are containers of bodies within which the latter navigate their life (see chapter Space on a discussion of this). See Iris Marion Young, *Lived Body Versus Gender*, in Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience*.

³⁷¹ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of 'Sex'*, (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 3

The question remains then, what is this body that is at the centre, that so many authors quote 'negotiates' between societies different pressures, and that searches for 'freedom' from limitations imposed by the religion, society and gender. This brings us to the debate between Iris Young and Judith Butler. I believe a thorough understanding of this debate is crucial when dealing with women's football in Iran, as the latter is, as mentioned earlier, a particularly potent imagery with heavy connotations of negotiation with societal pressures, resistance against gender limitations and opposing nature/culture dichotomies. For Young the female body, in performing masculine tasks is retraining her body to perform those tasks which prior to that training was awkward because of that person's facticity. In her critique of Tori Moi's notion of 'lived body' as a replacement for 'gender', Young argues that although the theory of lived body rightfully refuses the distinction between nature and culture, it does not take into consideration the institutional and sociocultural contexts that in general unifies the female body by denying her participation in transcendence³⁷².

Young writes, "the modalities of feminine bodily comportment, motility and spatiality exhibit this same tension between transcendence and immanence, between subjectivity and being a mere object"³⁷³. Here one can already see similarities between Young's woman, at the centre of a battle between immanence and transcendence, and the Muslim female athlete in Hargreaves's analysis. There is essentially a bodily capacity which is denied through conditioning and/or sociocultural pressures that are imposed on the body, either directly or through Foucauldian self-disciplinary performances³⁷⁴. For Young this position for women comes from a fundamental contradiction in their social existence, one which

³⁷² Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience*, p. 16

³⁷³ Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience*, p. 32

³⁷⁴ For a discussion Foucault's notion of the Panopticon's construction of self-discipline which replaces torture as the 'paradigmatic' method in relation to bodily construction in relation to self-starving, see Liz Eckermann, 'Foucault, embodiment and gendered subjectivities: the case of voluntary self-starvation', in Alan R. Petersen, Robin Bunton (eds) *Foucault, Health and Medicine*, (London: Routledge, 1997), pp 151-172

contradicts Merleau-Ponty's understanding of the body as belonging to the individual as much as it is a person's connection to the world, i.e. the body cannot exist as an object³⁷⁵. This contradiction in Young's eyes, stems from being both a subject in the phenomenological sense, and an object in the gaze of others; the feminine body is both "spatially constituted and a constituting spatial subject space"³⁷⁶. For Young, there is an implied masculine essence to freedom, one which women are denied. For her able bodied female bodies are "physically handicapped" in sexist society³⁷⁷.

There are two issues here. Firstly, Young does not fully qualify her understanding of 'feminine bodies' which clearly is not a distinction based on any fixed or 'natural' differences between sexes as that is explicitly refused. Thus, Young misses masculine bodily movements and projections by those same people that society sees as women, and who therefore would according to Young's analysis be forced to admit the gaze of others and discipline their own behaviour accordingly. Furthermore, these masculine bodies can come and go within the same Body, i.e. one body can assume masculine bodily 'tuning' towards specific projects, for example football, and become feminine bodies at other times, perhaps when that infamous gaze is present or felt. Secondly, the immediate and primitive relationship between bodies and the world, as they both constitute each other, and as explained by Merleau-Ponty is not fully true of women according to Young, and thus by implication she accepts this as the case for masculine bodies.

Consequently, masculine bodies are more free, or free to use their bodies in any project and as receptors and projectors in the world, than feminine

³⁷⁵ Merleau-Ponty sees the body as a source of actions in a surrounding that he refers to as 'manipulanda' and importantly without essentialising the body or the environment/space as objects in the Kantian sense "as systems of qualities linked by some intelligible law, as transparent entities", see Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 120

³⁷⁶ Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body Experience*, p. 41

³⁷⁷ *Ibid.* p. 42

bodies. This latter assumption is based on two fundamental notions. Firstly, the assumption is that the world is an open space, open to be engaged in by bodies, where all bodies have ability to learn and adapt to engaging and manipulating it, albeit different abilities (not according to sex/gender lines). Secondly, what holds women back from this open engagement with the world is imagined as a constant and near-internalized gaze of sexist society. This latter notion has an implied radical understanding of reflection, as a phenomenon in the primordial social existence of a body, prior to consciousness. Young's study of female bodily experience is not one limited to so-called conscious acts -acts in which bodies think before they act - but include habitual experiences and "basic modalities of feminine body comportment"³⁷⁸. Thus, these reflexive acts Young speaks of are not conscious acts, but embodied reactions to a *situation*³⁷⁹.

This is a radical view because it admits that the reflection is itself a reflection of an unreflective experience; the experience itself arises prior to the reflexive act which denies that body the intention to act on it. However, Young's reflection cannot be a conscious act, as that would mean women are constantly thinking about what they are doing in each moment of their daily lives. This image of women as eternal victims is one which Young attempts to move away from, but logically it is a corner she backs herself into. If we agree that lived experience is unreflective, then reflection can only be what Merleau-Ponty calls a "truly creative act, of a changed structure of consciousness" and thus reflection is aware of itself as an event³⁸⁰. For the purposes of this chapter, this clarification is crucial as it bears heavily on the way we then see women footballers in relation to their *situation*.

³⁷⁸ Ibid. p. 30

³⁷⁹ Situation is defined by Young as the set of structures and conditions that delimited being a woman in a particular society, see Ibid. p. 31

³⁸⁰ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. xi

Butler's views are nuanced version of Marcel Mauss' notion of 'reflexive body techniques'³⁸¹. The latter sees body techniques as both social and pre-reflective embodiments. Mauss argues that these 'dispositions' are acquired through a gradual process of inculcation, similar to Merleau-Ponty's understanding of bodily acquiring of knowledge. Inculcation logically means that these dispositions are socially differentiated, or rather they reflect the social condition within which they are acquired. Moreover, they are also generative and transposable, "in the sense that they are capable of generating a multiplicity of practices and perceptions in fields other than those in which they were originally acquired"³⁸². Thompson is here talking about Mauss's notion of Habitus, a concept further developed in a sociological way by Pierre Bourdieu. For Butler however, the generative and transposable aspect of body techniques are essentially performative. Here there have been many misunderstandings of Butler's concept of performance, particularly in the influential *Gender Trouble*³⁸³.

Notions of performance have been seen as assuming an actor prior to the performing act, and consequently a pre-sex/pre-gender body, and the concept of repetition which for Butler is crucial in the creation of what Mauss refers to as the structured aspect of bodily techniques as well as both the generative and transposable elements, seen as assuming a moments of non-repetition as free from structure. In her book *Bodies that Matter* however Butler gives a more nuanced explanation of her theory and one that is useful for this study³⁸⁴. Contrary to Young, Butler refuses the notion of discourse or cultural construct imposing itself on the body³⁸⁵. For Butler, there is no materiality of the body without sex and hence there

³⁸¹ Marcel Mauss, *Sociology and Psychology: Essays*, (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 97

³⁸² John Thompson, 'Introduction', in Pierre Bourdieu, *Language and Symbolic Power* (London: Polity Press, 1991), p. 12

³⁸³ Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York & London: Routledge, 1999)

³⁸⁴ Judith Butler, *Bodies that Matter: On the Discursive Limits of Sex*, (New York: Routledge, 2011)

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.* pp. x-xiv

is no pre-sexed body³⁸⁶. She argues that the misunderstanding comes from the suspicion of grammar, which assumes an 'I' that acts and performs the gender act, which in turn seems to imply a pre sex/gender body. But Butler insists that to claim a subject is constructed as what she calls a gendered matrix of relations is not to do away with the subject, but merely highlighting the conditions of its emergence and operation³⁸⁷.

It is here that Butler's performance comes in. The sexed body is materialised in the course of reiteration and repetition that naturalises sex differences. Women footballers in Iran can be seen as part of those who expose the materialization process, by women taking up arguably masculine bodily techniques and manoeuvres, which according to Butler reveals the holes and gaps which "are opened up as the constitutive instabilities in such constructions, as that which escapes or exceeds the norm"³⁸⁸. These escapes from the norm, or lines of flight, are not continuous as I have discussed in previous chapters, and are even according to Butler part of the heterosexual imperative which stratifies and invites/forces them back in to the "exclusionary matrix"³⁸⁹. Hence, I am not talking of masculine and feminine bodies in the implied fixed way of Iris Young.

Despite the above, Butler identifies these "unlivable zones" outside of the exclusionary matrix of heterosexual imperatives as the critical point of departure in a struggle she explains as a "struggle to rearticulate the very terms of symbolic legitimacy and intelligibility"³⁹⁰. She remains critical of these sites and does not see them as "permanent contestations of social

³⁸⁶ She calls it a 'grammatical fiction' that individuals precede the identification of a body. Ibid. p. 99

³⁸⁷ Ibid. p. 7

³⁸⁸ Ibid. p. 10

³⁸⁹ Ibid. p. 3

³⁹⁰ Ibid.

norms”³⁹¹, but repeats throughout her work the importance of reimagining and reinventing terms of legitimacy. What Butler gives us is a way to understand bodily techniques and modalities without fixing them to certain positions within power relations. Bodies can move out towards the ‘unlivable zones’, or to uphold abject modalities, but will be invited/forced back into assuming a sex within the heterosexual imperative. On the one hand, this image is useful as it allows us to see movement and social existence in more fluid ways, with lines of flight and stratification both taking place as bodies are brought back into the fold. We can see examples of this when a football player is told by her coach that she should shave her legs and not ‘act too manly’ saying “the girls think they have to act like men to be forceful”.

Butler’s conception is compatible with Merleau-Ponty, as the materialization of sex is structurally separate from our body as a means of communicating with the world where the world is “the horizon latent in all our experience and itself ever-present and anterior to every determining thought”³⁹². It is after this – by before and after I am speaking structurally, these can happen simultaneously in temporal terms – the body is constructed as natural through what Anna Cutler and Iain MacKenzie call “repeated attempts to know the nature of (sexed) nature”³⁹³. The latter authors illustrate in their essay *Bodies of Learning* that although Butler’s rejects Descartes’ imposition of the soul onto nature as a false dichotomy, she replaces this with a different imposition. They write “as long as the body is situated as a problem of knowledge, that which is said to be known about the body will tend to be imposed upon the lived and physical bodies”³⁹⁴. Although useful for the purposes of seeing sex as a process of

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, p. 106

³⁹³ A. Cutler and I. MacKenzie, ‘Bodies of Learning’, in L. Guillaume and J. Hughes (eds) *Deleuze and the Body* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2011), p. 61

³⁹⁴ I have chosen to ignore the authors’ critique of Merleau-Ponty along similar lines as I believe they fundamentally misunderstand the latter when stating that his construction of

materialization rather than a limiting factor on bodies, Butler's formulation of the 'known' body, does like Cutler and MacKenzie state privilege knowledge over lived experience. What is lost is a deeper understanding of the 'stabilization' of sex as matter. It is this stabilization that Young takes too far, and explains as a physical limitation on feminine bodily movements, and although Butler's conceptual framework is more nuanced, it does not fully capture this phenomenon. I believe that a notion of 'tuning' is therefore more helpful as it incorporates for example the female footballer's training of her body towards movements and postures that tune it towards the projects involved in the game of football.

Conclusion

This chapter has illustrated that although women footballers can from the outside be perceived as crossing boundaries of feminine modesty, thus not only counteracting societal gender norms but also contradicting their 'own' bodily modalities, this analysis is both reductionist and prescriptive as the athletes themselves see no such contradictory behaviour but merely tuning of the body towards specific tasks. The notion that masculine behaviour leads otherwise feminine bodies to reach some confusing point of contradiction is perhaps true of some athletes but importantly not during football games or during football training.

This chapter has also illustrated how open and clear footballers are to the 'tunability' of their own bodies towards certain tasks, like running fast and shooting hard. This does not mean that I am arguing for some extra-cultural interpretation of women's football where women are not bound

the "pre-reflective horizon as the de-subjectified and de-objectified condition of intelligibility of subjects and objects [...] prefigures what can be known of the body by overdetermining the process of interaction between bodies in and of the world as an intelligible process with knowledge of the horizon itself as its end" (2011, 61). The authors' see a division between body knowledge and what they call the lived, organic body, and state the Merleau-Ponty privileges the former over the latter. In my opinion this is wrong, and body knowledge is how the lived lives and such a division is utterly impossible within the paradigms set by Merleau-Ponty. Ibid. p. 62

by gender norms, like the conceptual experiments of Tori Moi. But rather I am arguing that there is no real subversion of dominant gender norms as these continue to be closed and fixed ways of 'reading' bodily behaviour, regardless of the fluidity of the tuning.

Chapter 5: The return of the lines of flight

The previous chapter tackled the subject of assumed divisions between the 'structural' and the 'embodied'. The contradiction that some feminist sport sociologists see in many women athletes who participate in masculine coded sport, although meant to highlight patriarchal pressures ends up misrepresenting the athletic body involved in an activity of choice. The women footballers I met were all of mixed ability and strength, but they were all active in their attempts to improve in the skills they, together with their coaches, deemed important for their sport. Some were working on their speed, while others- many others - worked on their strength. Their bodies were with time better tuned to those tasks, whether they did this efficiently or not has not been discussed here. The phenomenological fallacy of assuming these women consequently entered an embodied contradiction is not only side-lining these women's own experience but also assumes that freedom, the truly liberated body, to be that of a man and therefore values tasks tuned for male bodies as the epitome of freedom.

Introduction

In this chapter I aim to move away from experience to discourse. The spatial and embodied experiences of women have been examined in previous chapters. In these this thesis has rejected notions of transgression of gender norms and of notions of challenging or negotiating with patriarchy through women's football. However, I have also described the process of 'tuning', which shapes bodily modalities towards certain projects. For example, women footballer's worked on their strength, even upper body strength, and speed in order to improve their game. I will argue here that these moments of self-discipline are part of the same

mechanisms as when bodies are *read* by others or by institutions. In order to demonstrate this argument, I have to contextualise my case study within a broader theoretical discussion. What has been a study based on the experience of women footballers and coaches will now be firmly placed within gender and feminist literature.

The difference between women and men

Until now this thesis has discussed organisational, spatial and embodied aspects of women's football in Iran. One metaphor has repeatedly been used in relation to all three of these aspects, which although structured separately have been conceptually linked as per the given metaphor – rhizome. As I have previously explained, the strength of this term is that it refuses a binary distinction, for example, between informal/formal, or between centralised/decentralised. Furthermore, it implies a certain movement and fluidity that other concepts – such as *network* – do not have, and as mentioned earlier this fluidity and non-fixity of the rhizome does not necessarily contradict a static or fixed bureaucracy.

Organisationally this was illustrated by discussing the bureaucratic aspects of women's football, showing that extra-bureaucratic and rhizomatic links which uphold women's football institutionally do not contradict, but rather reinforce, the bureaucratic and hierarchical lines that female footballers cross. Similarly, looking at the spatial aspects of women's football I argued that dominant gendered spatial representations inherent in football are reinforced, and not resisted or subverted, through women's football. It was argued that spatial aspects of notions of freedom were based on a separation of space and embodiment. Women footballers were seen as challenging a masculinist representation of space through their embodied social activity. The previous chapter thus argued that although

women's football is directly gendered spatially – most clearly through gender segregated football fields – the patriarchal organisation of space is in turn re-defined across the women footballers' embodied experiences.

In this chapter I further develop this argument. Rather than refuting the subversive powers of women's football I argue that the subversion/legitimation duality is not a useful paradigm, or rather that subversion, re-tuning bodies towards bodily modalities coded male, reinforce pre-existing gender norms and ideology. Judith Butler argues along similar lines when she writes,

“I am not interested in delivering judgments on what distinguishes the subversive form from the unsubversive. Not only do I believe that such judgements cannot be made out of context, but that they cannot be made in ways that endure through time”³⁹⁵

As the example of drag in Butler's *Gender Trouble*, women's football is a social activity which foregrounds gendered imagery³⁹⁶. Women footballers literally pass through curtains that hide them from public view, divide them from sporting men, and thus their space is a gendered one quite explicitly. Their performance is from now on as 'women', they have been assigned the role of women and whatever their bodies do, however

³⁹⁵ J. Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990), xxii

³⁹⁶ Not surprisingly women's football is seen in Iran, and elsewhere, as an activity for lesbians and one which promotes homosexual relations. Many women footballers shared this opinion, some arguing that this understanding of women's football was in fact justified by the large presence of lesbians in female football teams. This is an aspect of my fieldwork that I have decided to sideline due to ethical reasons, as exploring this aspect would have endangered my informants. For a discussion on sexuality in women's football see J. Caudwell, 'Women's Experiences of Sexuality Within Football Contexts: A Particular and Located Footballing Epistemology', *Football Studies*, Vol. 5 (1), 2002; J. Williams, *Beautiful Game*. For thorough discussion on sexuality in contemporary Iran see F. Sadeghi, 'Negotiating with Modernity: Young Women and Sexuality in Iran', *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, 28:2 (2008); K. Babayan and A. Najmabadi (eds), *Islamicate Sexualities: Transnational Across Temporal Geographies of Desire*, Harvard University Center for Middle Eastern Studies, Harvard, 2008; P. Mahdavi, 'Passionate Uprisings: Young people, sexuality and politics in post-revolutionary Iran', *Culture, Health & Sexuality*, Vol. 9 (5), September-October 2007, pp. 445-457.

they act behind those curtains, they are doing so as women. It is tempting here to follow this signification as the primary state, privilege it in order to then observe the actions of the players' bodies which may or may not be according to feminine norms, only to argue that these actions work away at this signification. And in our case this would be simple as the individuals involved, as explained in the chapter on the body, work on their body strength and speed. Their bodies become more forceful and authoritative in their movement. They are called 'too manly' by some and 'confused' by others³⁹⁷. However, it is important to clarify that there is here a clear difference between norms of men and women, an understatement that I feel I need to make clear. Ayatollah Muttaharri writes in his book 'Woman and her rights' about the what he sees as inherent differences between women and men. He writes,

"From the physical point of view man, on an average has larger limbs and woman smaller. [...] Man is coarser and woman is finer. Man's voice is comparatively rough and heavy, and woman's delicate and delightful. [...] Physically, man is stronger than woman, and his muscles are more developed, but woman has a greater power of resistance than man. [...] The lungs of man can breathe more air than those of woman. The heart of woman beats more rapidly than that of man."³⁹⁸

The differences continue for a few paragraphs along similar lines. As a lexicon of the symbolic essential of gender this extract is correct and

³⁹⁷ Conversations with people outside of football, including family members, taxi drivers, security guards and so on often brought out these stereotypes. This thesis does not delve into this issue, or related issues in John Harris refers to as the 'image problem' in women's football, see J. Harris, "The Image Problem in Women's Football", *Hospitality, Leisure, Sport & Tourism* vol 29: no. 2 (2005). As Jean Williams notes this type of micro-study of either 'black', 'gay', 'muslim' and so on, study of women footballers risks exoticising women footballers and perhaps more likely paint their activities as an irregular aspect of modern sport. See J. Williams, *Beautiful Game*, p. 112.

³⁹⁸ Ayatollah Motahhari was a highly influential Islamic scholar during the revolutionary 60s and 70s Iran. He was a philosophy teacher and gave hundreds of lectures about Islamic norms in relation to Western culture. Many of his lectures, like the one the quote above is from, were about the equality of man and woman in Islam and the differences between this understanding of gender relations and the concept of equality in Western philosophy. Ayatollah Motahhari was later assassinated in Tehran on 1st May 1979. M. Mottahari, *Woman and her Rights* (Nezam-e Huqooq-e Zan dar Eslam)

succinct. This is not saying that *being* a man means being rougher and heavier than a woman; 'strong' and 'heavy' are not natural characteristics of a body due to its sex³⁹⁹. Yet, taking these as hegemonic norms there is a clear movement by many women footballers I met from one to the other, generally speaking, and more clearly perhaps there was a perception by coaches, administrators and those not involved with women's football that football promoted and even demanded an adoption of male bodily modalities. When Samie writes about exaggerated 'uber-feminine' hyper-heterosexual bodily modalities that are highlighted by female athletes to accentuate their conformity to idealised discourses of hetero-normativity, the above quote is to a large extent a summary of those idealised hegemonic notions, at least in the Islamic Republic of Iran⁴⁰⁰.

The footballers interviewed for this study were involved in strengthening their bodies, they grew heavier and became more authoritative in their movements, forceful in challenges and tackles, but at no point is there a 'danger' of the players 'becoming fully male'.

Nevertheless, this was a 'danger' expressed by coaches, players and some parents. Rather than as a challenge to the norms mentioned by Motahari above, the bodily modalities (the process of 'becoming male') of the players challenged the players' own standing; women footballers are seen to push the limits too far for their own good. What is of interest here is that the footballers pushed themselves towards all of those aspects deemed aspects of man by Muttaharri, they grew their muscles, some

³⁹⁹ The division of the body and its sex might seem as resorting to the dualism of natural and cultural/constructed however it is a semantic side-effect here, and not a conscious division made by the me.

⁴⁰⁰ Although Samie emphasizes the dominance of white, secular women in the literature on heteronormative over-compliance among female athletes. See S. Samie, 'Hetero-sexy self/body work and basketball: The *invisible* sporting women of British Pakistani Muslim heritage', *South Asian Popular Culture*, Vol 11 (3), 2013

stopped shaving their legs and their skins were coarse, they grew stronger and worked on their fitness to increase their lung capacity⁴⁰¹.

The fragility of the female body

The rhizomatic responses of women's football to their organisational, spatial and bodily environments illustrates movement and flow out of the paradigms of societal 'limitations' and reframed these as stratifications. In all three aspects women's football destratifies, provides lines of flights, which are never permanent. This is how we must read Butler's statement that so-called subversive acts never 'endure through time', they always return back into the fold. Markula's conclusions are similar when she writes,

"no activity itself is oppressive or liberating in terms of producing resistant practices, but what matters is how femininity and the feminine body are defined in a contemporary cultural constellation of discourses and how these definitions are used in relations of power to dominate women"⁴⁰²

Throughout this paper I have referred to other, limiting, conceptualisations of the female athletic bodies. Markula refers to these conceptualisations as 'arborescent' models of thought which frame social activities of women, like football, which are male dominated and articulate negotiations of gender norms or subversions of notions of femininity and

⁴⁰¹ Judith Halberstam's work on female masculinity is important to introduce at this point as she aims to illustrate that masculinity is not the effect of the male body, continuing along the same lines as Judith Butler in arguing that masculinity is a performative and citational practice. Halberstam's importance however is in the way in which she focuses on masculinity as a social construction which takes place across both male and female bodies, similarly to how I have illustrated above. She argues that female masculinity is "far from an imitation of maleness" and that it in fact is part of the production of so-called heroic masculinity – but is later framed "as the rejected scraps of dominant masculinity in order that male masculinity may appear to be the real thing." See J. Halberstam, *Female Masculinity*, (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1998), pp. 1-2

⁴⁰² P. Markula, 'Deleuze and the Body Without Organs: Disreading the Fit Feminine Identity', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, Vol. 30 (29), 2006, p. 30

masculinity in a masculine way. Within these paradigms gender is seen as a social construction that is internalised and embodied by women, limiting and constraining women both spatially and in their bodily modalities. Women footballers themselves conceptualise their organisation as taking place informally and cross-hierarchically within a larger masculinised and fixed hierarchy. Several players also repeat notions of the fragility of women's bodies as opposed to men's.

For instance, one of Ms. Amirshaghghi's contacts, a young coach she believed would be a great one, met us in the formers office to illustrate how she plans her training sessions. The desk was filled with DVD's and handbooks, all in English, about efficient training sessions and how to best delivery different lessons through drills. She showed me different drills and ways in which she adapts them to suit the players she had. "A good coach must change the training session depending on who is playing" she explained. She continued,

"In some ways we might avoid aggressive physical contact between players and work more on tactics and fitness. Women are more fragile than men, I don't deny that."

This was true of a few coaches, who specifically made a point of mentioning to me how they remove the physical side of the game, or rather try and avoid it in training. This, despite the physical reality of the competitive football matches their players were preparing for.

At times some players would also mention the fragility of the female body. For example, I spoke to Fateme who was waiting for a contract to play with the Esteghlal women's team, one of the best football teams in the country. I asked her about how she had done it and what she would recommend other women do in order to get to her position. Her answer

was simply, “train”. When I asked whether that was enough she began telling me of her own experiences,

“I am twenty two years old, I am still young. I started playing football in a club when I was sixteen. But I had been playing since I was very young, and the way I played was very different from the way others played. I used to watch the Spanish League, and the English League, and look at how they run, how they move. Most of these girls run around after the ball without thinking of if that’s good for the team at that time. So, yes, training which means training your mind and your body. But this doesn’t mean that this is enough, I know that. What I don’t understand is why they put so many difficulties in our path, why do they do that? I know that women are weaker than men physically. We’re not asking to be treated the same as men, but there are no rules with us...we have to fight for ourselves. It’s almost like nobody cares if you’re good or getting better, it’s about who you know and don’t know.

It was as if she was apologising for emphasising the aspect of training when the system of meritocracy was so inefficient if not non-existent. The statement ‘women are weaker than men’ here works almost as a way of humbling the speaker, softening the tone of what otherwise was a critique of the systemic malfunctions in the bureaucracy. Perhaps Fateme felt the need to make this statement because she was speaking to a male interlocutor. However, I found similar statements in many formal interviews and informal conversations, and in fact other informants were more direct in their descriptions of football players’ gender ‘transgressions’ and challenging gender norms. I mentioned earlier the belief in the cultural work of the coach who explained the problem of some of the players ‘acting like men’, for example by not shaving their legs. At this regard It is important to understand that what Williams refers to as the ‘image problem’ is not purely an external issue either, the idea that

women playing football is in some way a contradictory behaviour that can lead to ways of being and thinking that are harmful⁴⁰³.

Contradictions, transgressions and becoming male

I met Attusa at the Football Federation where she filled in one of our questionnaires regarding her sport⁴⁰⁴. She was in her twenties and had only been playing football for two years, which although not uncommon in women's football is still rare. Attusa was different from the rest of the interviewees as she was also very new to the sport as a whole, and she was extremely outspoken. After I left Iran Attusa kept in contact with Rouhi and kept introducing her to new footballer's who wanted to participate in our study. In a recorded conversation with Attusa conducted by Rouhi she explained her position on one of the main manifestations of the image problem for women's football in the Islamic Republic of Iran,

“People see football players who are women as homosexuals. To be honest that's because many of them are. Some almost think they are men. I don't mind it, but I just want to play football and these people make something as simple as playing football so complicated. They act tough and almost become men. I don't think that's necessary, you can still be a woman and play football.”

⁴⁰³ For a closer discussion on the 'image problem' in women's football see J. Williams, *Beautiful Game*, p. 5 and J. Harris 'The Image Problem in Women's Football', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, Vol. 29 (2), May 2005, pp. 184-197.

⁴⁰⁴ Initially, questionnaires were not part of my research methods as I felt that they put the informants in a state of alert and formality that was not conducive to enter the world of the women footballers. However, questionnaires soon became a vital part of the way I made contacts with players and coaches. The first few meetings I had organised, and which successfully materialised, I went to with only a pen and notepad. There was an immediate mistrust of the man from England who was there to ask open ended questions and take notes, it seemed to foreign and absurd and frankly uncomfortable for me and everyone involved. The questionnaires changed all of that, while they wrote I could talk to the coach, or when I could not enter, for example at a competition or a training session, my interlocutors would use 'my' questionnaires as a way to gain the teams confidence about their own role – they could also defer knowledge about the 'real research' and simply chat to the players more freely about my research and their experiences often gaining valuable trust with players and coaches that ended up significantly helping us. I had to develop a certain fluidity in my methodology: it was to only way to explore the fluid world of Iranian female football.

Many informants told us similar things, about homosexual football players being attracted to the sport, and in doing so hurting the sport by reinforcing the negative stigma of it being a homosexual sport⁴⁰⁵. There are similarities between these statements, and other similar ones from both Iranian coaches and football players. Indeed reading articles and conference papers on female athletes in other contexts who are involved in masculine coded sports I often came across similar stories. In their study on Brazilian women surfers Knijnik, Horton and Cruz describe surfers' anxieties of balancing their active, and authoritative tuning of their bodies in the project of surfing with 'traditionally' feminine bodily modalities which are widely available on Brazilian beaches, a place which they describe as a 'body market'⁴⁰⁶. The authors quote one surfer, Isabel, who like Attusa and others like her explains:

“[Surfing is] a sport that has been practiced for many years only by men, this is not the reason that a girl have [sic] to put on men's clothes, some Bermudas and behave yourself as a man. It's not the body itself, it's the way your body really is. The feminine way, I think we have to keep that”⁴⁰⁷

It is important to notice the authors' use as their theoretical foundation the thoughts of Pikko Markula whom they claim has managed to consider the nomadic essences that are continually moving essences, rather than

⁴⁰⁵ Attusa's story is particularly interesting because her continued contact with my interlocutor meant we followed her story for a few years. It turned out later on that she refused so many marriage proposals that she felt forced to come out to her parents about her own sexuality, Attusa was attracted to women. Her parents were supportive but asked her to either move abroad or have so-called gender reassignment surgery – they simply wanted her to live without the problems that would arise from such a lifestyle. Last I heard from Attusa was that she had decided to continue living a single life, and she still plays football. Although, as explained in footnote 1, I have decided not to explore the role of homosexuality in the lives of women footballers, I feel it is important to make an exception for the case of Attusa, as she enjoys the support of her family, and my brief description will not put her in danger. Note once more, that 'Attusa is a pseudonym'.

⁴⁰⁶ R. D. Knijnik, P. Horton and L. O. Cruz, 'Rhizomatic bodies, gendered waves: transitional femininities in Brazilian Surf', *Sport in Society: Cultures, Commerce, Media, Politics*, Vol. 13 (7/8), September-October 2010, pp. 1173-1174

⁴⁰⁷ Ibid. p. 1176

binary oppositions between femininity and masculinity as the primary engine behind women athleticism⁴⁰⁸. Isabel's statement is seen by the authors, who claim to follow Markula's Deleuze and Guattari inspired feminist philosophy, as an example of patriarchal society at play. The case of Isabelle is thought here to illustrate a common experience amongst female athletes who participate in sports such as surfing, football, rugby and shot-putting (examples given by the authors) which promote a certain type of embodiment which does not "conform to an acceptable stereotypical form."⁴⁰⁹ The authors state,

"[Isabel] is paranoid about being seen as a male or having masculine or atypical female body: she demands that she exhibit a unique femininity with no tolerance either way. To her surfers' bodies must still be truly feminine"⁴¹⁰

The word 'paranoid' is particularly interesting here considering the authors' claim to avoid binarism of old fashioned reductionist discussions of female athleticism⁴¹¹. There is a striking similarity between this reading and that of coach Amirshaghghi in explaining her role as one which goes beyond coaching football,

"It's hard for us [as coaches], we have to be prepared to be much more. The girls come here because they love the sport, they get better at it, but it also leads to confusions amongst some of them. They start acting like men, they stop shaving their legs. The girls think they have to act like men to be forceful, so they act up, parade their injuries and so on. What's the point of coming to this

⁴⁰⁸ See discussion on Markula at Ibid. p. 1173.

⁴⁰⁹ Ibid. p. 34 n. 34

⁴¹⁰ Ibid. 1176

⁴¹¹ 'Awareness' would be a much more suitable word considering Isabel's testimony in the article, where she eloquently is quoted to say "it's a sport that has been practiced for many years only for men, this is not the reason that a girl have to put on men's clothes, some Bermudas and behave yourself as a man. It's not the body itself it's the way your body really is. The feminine way, I thin we have to keep that". Here Isabel is seen as expressing frustration as she has reached a dead-end where her social activity contradicts who she wants to be, when she can very well be read as someone who is aware of the body's tunability, towards specific tasks rather than towards mimicry of masculinity.

sport, which isn't of any real value? It won't give them a job, and who will marry a girl who acts like that?"⁴¹²

There is a further uniting factor here between all these cases. Not only is there an awareness of how the body tuned to certain tasks will be read within the dominant heteronormative matrix, but there's also an awareness of different 'body markets' as stated by R. D. Knijnik (et al). Coach Amirshaghghi is referring to a general and societal market, specifically the marriage market, which is located within a larger heteronormative and exclusionary matrix, and which informs gender norms in Iranian society. Similarly, the Brazilian beaches, referred to by Knijnik, Horton and Cruz as 'body markets' are seen as valuing sexualised passive female bodies. In acquiring forceful authoritative and athletic modalities, which are coded masculine, the women in question are not only seen as overstepping pre-existing gender boundaries, but they are also seen as producing body shapes and modalities which are not valued in their respective dominant markets, meaning markets they are inevitably seen as judged and valued in.

The reaction to the disparity between what the body is doing and what it should be seen to be doing could, it is argued, lead to the athletes reaffirming their femininity by either simultaneously shaping their bodies within feminine paradigms, for example by shaving their legs or 'feminising' other parts of their bodies, or by distancing themselves from others like the footballer who proclaimed "you can still be a woman and play football, don't act like a man". What is at stake here is dominant norms of 'body-shape' and 'body size' which prevail in football. Jane Caudwell's study on female footballers examines this phenomenon of distancing as a corporeal strategy which is used to turn the gaze away from signals of potential masculinity because "masculine style for women

⁴¹² Amirshaghghi, Interviewed by A. Sedighi, Tehran, August 24, 2008

is an anathema because of dominant heterosexual femininity and the fear of lesbians and butch women.”⁴¹³

What is key here is to understand that both the notion of contradiction of masculine behaviour and the feminine expectation are simultaneously within the mentioned paradigm. In the words of Markula, in her article entitled ‘Deleuze and the Body Without Organs: Disreading the Fit Feminine Identity’,

“My conclusion has been that exercising women live in a constant contradiction between wanting to obtain the feminine body and appreciating the masculine characteristics [...] gained in their activity”⁴¹⁴

In recollecting their experiences women football players would hint to similar experiences. The body, admittedly alterable, is perceived as a construction between the biological body and the overcoding mechanisms of society⁴¹⁵. Markula continues in the same article that she says that she

⁴¹³ Caudwell’s study highlights the ways in which women footballers negotiate their bodily modalities *within* ‘heterosexual hegemony’ rather than as a tool to resist it Caudwell, J., ‘Sporting Gender: Women’s Footballing Bodies As Sites/Sights for the (Re)Articulation of Sex, Gender, and Desire’, *Sociology of Sport Journal*, Vol. 20, 2003, p. 377, also see the concluding remarks on p. 384

⁴¹⁴ P. Markula, ‘Deleuze and the Body Without Organs: Disreading the Fit Feminine Identity’, *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, Vol. 30 (29), 2006, p. 1180

⁴¹⁵ Currier is actually unconvinced with the notion of a pre-social body that is available for overcoding and argues that those who say this do not sufficiently tackle this issue, for example Butler whose “sophisticated account” nevertheless rests on the notion of a pre-discursive ‘outside’ that is then available for articulation or signification through the heteronormative matrix. Although this thesis has not sufficiently argued against this point perhaps I can do so briefly here. Currier’s problem with what she calls the ‘constructivist’ school of Butler, and her preference for Deleuze and Guattari’s assemblage model rests on a fallacious assumption that these cannot coexist, indeed connect much like the assemblage model she advocates. It is true that Deleuze and Guattari’s rhizomatic model is of a whole that is the aggregate of the parts that constitutes the whole assemblage – there is no component that is a prior stable entity which is then read into the discursive societal whole. Likewise it is true that Butler’s ‘constructivism’ assumes the existence of a pre-discursive body which is available for overcoding by some foreclosed, in this case heteronormative, category. Yet, there is no reason why they cannot exist, connect, link together – one describing the assemblage the other the State/Heteronormative stratifying, which as we have shown does take flight and deterritorialise but comes back in the end. Deleuze and Guattari themselves illustrate this relationship between the assemblage and the stratifying powers of the State, via the work of Virilio, using the metaphor of the police that manages the public ways. “The gates of the city, its levies and duties, are barriers, filters against the fluidity of the masses, against the penetration power of migratory packs.” In this sense Currier need not sideline Butler’s work which could be seen as an examination of those

has since her mentioned conclusions changed her perspective on the embodiment of gender, and abandoned assumptions of an a priori body that negotiates between fixed norms of masculinity and femininity. Instead she proposes the notion of 'Body without Organs', which sidesteps the trap of the latter and consequent beliefs in transgression of gender norms, through for example athleticism, as subversion⁴¹⁶. No activity would here be seen as outside the 'strata', or heteronormative matrix, but rather by refusing to collapse experience instantaneously into the feminine/masculine paradigm we would arrive at an initiation of deterritorialisation. Nevertheless, Markula keeps the idea that this deterritorialisation is the beginning to some form of challenge to the notion of a fixed experience of contradiction. More importantly, my research suggests that despite the rhizomatically organisation, the awareness of the body as 'tunable' and alterable form, and the spatial fluidity of women's football, there is reoccurring perception of gender borders which are transgressed through 'overtuning' of the body towards modalities that are coded masculine.

The above might sound like a contradiction with arguments made in previous chapters. How can we say that women footballer's embodiment works rhizomatically and not mimetically and does not directly relate to parameters set by society while simultaneously stating that their activities reinforce gender norms and are on occasion referred by the agents themselves to pre-existing gender norms? Markula argues the first but rejects the second set of claims. She dismisses Currier who states that "a

very gates and levies, of the grammar of heteronormativity – not of the essence of bodily modalities. See Deleuze, G. and F. Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Continuum, 2004) pp. 425-426 and D. Currier, 'Feminist technological futures: Deleuze and body/technology assemblages', *Feminist Theory*, Vol. 4 (3), 2003, p. 327

⁴¹⁶ See Markula's discussion on Body without Organs in P. Markula, 'Deleuze and the Body Without Organs: Disreading the Fit Feminine Identity', *Journal of Sport and Social Issues*, Vol. 30 (29), 2006, at p. 38. In relation to resistance she writes, "BwO is not a concrete body. Neither is it a concept such as agency or resistance through which we have theorized the liberation of the feminine self but rather a practice [...] unlike liberation, 'you never reach the Body without Organs, you can't reach it, you are forever attaining it, it is a limit'.

particular understanding of the body contributes to the construction of gendered identity and the acquisition of that gendered identity reiterates the particular understanding of the body"⁴¹⁷. This is a fundamental issue worth resolving here. Markula's idea is that bodily modalities do not necessarily follow prescribed patterns, lived experience is not policed according to gender norms. This would suggest, as in the case of Iris Marion Young's writing, a constant, eternal and instant reflexivity by women. But while Markula is correct to say that bodily behaviour might work outside stratifying powers and do not follow these mentioned patterns of heteronormative discourses and societal dogma, she is not right about the absence of these so-called 'prescribed patterns'.

If we recall Butler's theory of subjectification we see that gender is not a limiting factor imposed on subjects – purely because cultural constructs do not impose themselves on bodies. For Butler, the heteronormative and exclusionary matrix, Currier's 'prescribed patterns', are reiterated and made material by the actions of *already sexed bodies*. Women who tune their bodies towards masculinised projects inhabit at some point, if their tuning crosses gender norms, what Butler calls 'unlivable zones'⁴¹⁸. The footballer who distances herself from 'sexually deviant' fellow athletes, the athlete who 'feminises' her body to counterbalance the masculinised 'tuning' necessary for her sport are both examples of bodies that uphold abject modalities invited/forced back into assuming a sex within the prescribed heteronormative imperatives.

⁴¹⁷ D. Currier, D., 'Feminist technological futures: Deleuze and body/technology assemblages', *Feminist Theory*, Vol. 4 (3), 2003, p. 327

⁴¹⁸ These 'unlivable' and 'uninhabitable' zones of social life are nevertheless densely populated by those who do not enjoy the status of subject according to Butler, who writes "this zone of uninhabitability will constitute the defining limit of the subject's domain [...] the subject is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection, one which produces a constitute outside to the subeject, an abjected outside, which is, after all, 'inside' the subject as its own founding repudiation. J. Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, (Oxford: Routledge Classics, 1993), p. xiii

These 'unlivable zones' are also 'unreadable zones', this is the fundamental meaning of Butler's already sexed bodies in my opinion. Moments of reflection, where players consider their own bodies or spatial dynamics of their sport, as well as when others view or read their behaviour and social activity, what is referred to are dominant representations, a form of grammar. It has been stated above that what leads to stratification, to materialisation of gendered/sexed bodies, is the moments of reflection. This does not mean necessarily reflection by the subject herself of course. Bodies are also *read* by observers, according to those same prescribed patterns we discussed above. The latter are not fixed in their meaning: language certainly changes depending on several factors. What is important here, however, is not that these meanings are fixed, but that stratification happens according to dominant representational systems. In some ways we may refer once again to Lefebvre's spatial triad of the dominant representations of space, lived experience and that of the representational space. The first mentioned is the dominant productive power, it informs and is informed by the others but it dominates discursively.

The Wall

The dynamics I have explored in this thesis so far can be expressed in a brief exploration of one of the more visible modes of cultural production in Iran, cinema. In the first month of my fieldwork, during the hot months of Ramadan, my father and I went to the cinema to cool down. I had been interviewing someone at the Khodro football and we decided to avoid going straight back to my uncle's house and instead spend some time on our own in the city. At the cinema I immediately noticed the film poster to *Divaar*, meaning the Wall, with Golshifteh Farahani, who since then has become in Iranian terms a superstar. The poster had Farahani in a race car

driver's outfit, in make-up, smiling as if she had won a race. It reminded me of the Laleh Seddigh, an Iranian female race car driver, whom I had heard mentioned a few times during interviews. The film was not about her, and instead tackled many of the issues I have been examining in this thesis and for that reason I feel a closer look at it would be helpful for my purposes here.

In the film *Divaar*, directed by Mohammad Ali Talebi, Golshifteh Farahani plays a young woman who takes over her deceased father's job as daredevil motorcyclist at an amusement park despite pressures from her family and society at large. Setareh, Farahani's character, is introduced to us at the start of the film while walking through alleyways and streets carrying what looks like heavy bags with groceries. Her walk is authoritative, with a confident swagger, she kicks a can that is in front of her and when she arrives home she throws the bags down and opens the door forcefully. The gendered paradigm of strength/weakness continues throughout the film, as we see them as external normative limitations on projects Setareh's body is tuned towards. For example, she can lift heavy bags comfortably, yet external reading of her body as female prohibits these, or rather makes these projects unsuitable for *her*.

The title of the film refers to the Wall attraction at the local theme park, which is a daredevil motorcycle attraction, where Setareh's father used to be the star. We learn that the latter died from injuries sustained in an accident during a performance in the Wall. The idea is biking in a circle around a semi-spherical wall until you are completely vertical, while people watching you from the top of the wall applaud and dare you to go high enough to catch notes of cash from their hands. After her brother fails at the task and injures himself, Setareh takes the mantle of daredevil motorcyclist and is instantly successful. Keeping it a secret from her family in fear of their disapproval, they notice her coming home late with cash

and are concerned about how she is making the money, suggesting that she is selling her body. Here once again, the tasks of choice, and more importantly her effectiveness in doing them, places her in what Butler calls “the zone of uninhabitability [...] which is constituted through the force of exclusion and abjection.”⁴¹⁹

The contrast between brother and sister, between a male body out of tune with the tasks expected of him and that of a woman tuned towards those very tasks, is a constant theme in the movie. Shahab, the brother, is not only not able to perform the tasks asked of him as the man of the family and replacement for their deceased father, he is also literally disabled with a broken leg which makes explicit his inability to perform physical tasks. It is Setareh who has the ‘gift of her father’ but in performing tasks that she is ‘meant to do’ she is considered as crossing the boundaries of gender. Her brother, for example, suspects her of being a prostitute, as do passing cars on a street in another scene. Shahab’s inability to perform manly duties is thus mirrored in Setareh’s unwillingness to perform hers as a woman.

The success of Setareh leads to fame and she is interviewed almost exactly half-way through the film. In the interview with a journalist, Setareh says excitedly:

“I want to be the World Champion. Actually when you’re in the ring spinning around, you feel like the world is yours. When you go to the highest point of the wall you feel like you can grab the stars... At school I wanted to play football, but I wasn’t allowed and was told to play badminton and things like that...it doesn’t matter whether you’re a man or woman, the only thing that matters is that you know what you’re doing, not to break too hard, sit tightly, not be afraid, it is basically courage.”⁴²⁰

⁴¹⁹ J. Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, (Oxford: Routledge Classics, 1993), p. xiii

⁴²⁰ Setareh (character), *The Wall (Divaar)*, Directed by Mohammad Ali Talebi, Tehran, 2008

Here the film illustrates a key antagonism in my fieldwork. Most if not all players and coaches who were interviewed made similar remarks at one point or another. Not only did they see no connection between being man or woman and playing football, but they also ridiculed those who blamed their lack of ability on their gender. Many, as highlighted in previous chapters, were also clear about what makes a good footballer, time and training certainly not anatomy. Like in the film in question, women footballers saw themselves working on their bodies towards projects deemed valuable to their chosen sport, yet in both cases, the film and my research, gender is central and reoccurring. Setareh is introduced to us without contrast and explicit gendered signification; her kicking of cans on the street or authoritative walking is how her body is in the environment. She takes part in her environment, her glance at the can in the street, her mobilisation of her leg to kick it, like that of our footballers who move towards the ball with bent knees in order to pull away from defenders with their first touch, and to create new spaces behind them. They both exist in the world, simultaneously themse/ves/others. There is no deep seated or internalised gaze, the self only comes into existence at the point of contact. In one moment the ball is in the foreground, the body aligns itself for contact, and once the ball is played on it, and all other players dissolve into the environment, as the spaces created are now the target of the body – the ball is now part of the environment again, dissolved. This is not to say, to repeat the points I made earlier on in this thesis, that gender is absent, but it is to say that gender *is*, regardless of the body/environment.

Inversion

The ethnographic data I have presented in this chapter, along with the analysis of Talebi's the Wall, lead us to draw some final conclusions in

regards to the relationship between women's football in Iran and gender modalities/norms. To say that gender is to some extent a 'citational' practice, referring to a foreclosed and pre-existing symbolic order is taken by some to mean a side-lining of relations of labour and historical materialism, "social struggle [...] is anchored only in the sign – an effect of *difference*."⁴²¹ However, what 'deferring gender to the realm of the symbolic' means is not necessarily an ignoring of its material and 'real' grounding in relations of class and power. Rather this 'deferral of gender into the symbolic' fosters a division of the experiential (the doing of tasks whether aware or unaware) from the social. There is a pre-social body, structurally speaking, we just cannot see it and have difficulty describing it. Hennessy critiques Deleuze and Guattari's so-called post-Marxist theories as a step away from Marx's class based analysis of history. The argument is that for those authors' desire and desiring subjects assume centre stage in history "and the structures of exploitation on which capitalist production depends have completely disappeared." Hennessy sums up her review of Deleuze and Guattari with, "Indeed, production has become consumption."

However, it is interesting to notice that in 'Grundrisse' Karl Marx argues that production is indeed consumption, and that consumption is production. In the latter's analysis of production, he argues that production in effect mediates consumption,

"a railway on which no trains run, hence which is not used up, not consumed, is a railway only in name and not in reality. Without

⁴²¹ See for example Rosemary Hennessy's excellent discussion on Judith Butler in R. Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 55-59.

production, no consumption; but also, without consumption, no production; since production would then be purposeless.”⁴²²

To an extent this is what Butler, who is also considered a post-Marxist, is saying in her analysis of the production of gender. The marriage contract, which Hennessy uses as a way to illustrate the misleading conclusions of these post-Marxists can be and is a,

“[heteronormative] arrangement of private patriarchy [which secures the] bourgeois wife as a domestic worker whose labour, while not directly appropriated by the capitalist in exchange for a wage [is] nonetheless essential for reproducing the well-being, health and know-how of the workforce, and it did so through naturalised and racialised ideals of bourgeois womanhood”⁴²³

Yet, what brings a mixed-gender couple together in a marriage contract is not purely the above. Couples are more or less aware of the role of marriage in society, but there is often something else that brings a couple together. The consumption of the marriage ideal, of the heteronormative marriage arrangement, is a production of those very norms, through the performative act of the wedding. This does not negate the above analysis, it adds to it.

What is of interest as we reach the end of the thesis is how the reproduction of ‘traditional’ gender norms takes place in the setting of women’s football where, as this thesis has shown, football players are so acutely aware of their bodies’ tunability through training and practice. Gender always comes back, or rather it never went away in the first place

⁴²² K. Marx, ‘Grundrisse: Introduction’, *Marxist Internet Archive*, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1857/grundrisse/ch01.htm> (accessed January 12, 2017)

⁴²³ R. Hennessy, *Profit and Pleasure: Sexual Identities in Late Capitalism*, (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 65

despite the line of flight. This is where I part ways significantly with Pikko Markula or even Tim Ingold whose work also emphasises the rhizomatic and nomadic in everyday life over the arborescent model signifying model of analysis. Ingold's writing attempts to write ethnographies which avoid what he refers to as 'the logic of inversion' whereby the actions, the exterior movement or doing of tasks, is converted into an "interior schema of which its manifest appearance and behaviour are but outward expressions."⁴²⁴ He writes,

"The organism, moving and growing along lines that bind it into the web of life, is reconfigured as the outward expression of an inner design [...] the person, acting and perceiving within a nexus of intertwined relationships, is presumed to behave according to the directions of cultural models or cognitive schemata installed inside his or her head".⁴²⁵

Both Ingold and Markula are authors who in defiance attempt to reverse this order, to invert what Zizek refers to as the "fetishistic misrecognition"⁴²⁶. However, this thesis, although it has focused on the lines of flight of the tunable and alterable bodily modalities and the linkages, connections across space and organisational boundaries, does not prioritise these experiences above that of the signifying. On the contrary, as I have shown above, those same people who describe the fluidity of bodily modalities and the temporality of gender norms, can within the same interview claim weakness of the female sex, describe

⁴²⁴ T. Ingold., 'Rethinking the Animate: re-animating thought', *Ethnos: Journal of Anthropology*, 71:1 (2011), p. 11

⁴²⁵ T. Ingold, *Being Alive: Essays on Movement, Knowledge and Description*, (Oxon: Routledge, 2011), p. 68

⁴²⁶ S. Zizek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, (London: Verso, 1989), p. 25. Zizek explains the concept using the example of a King: "Being-a-king' is an effect of the network of social relations between a 'king' and his 'subjects'; but – and here is the fetishistic misrecognition – to the participants of this social bond, the relationship appears necessarily in an inverse form: they think that they are subjects giving the king royal treatment because the king is already in himself, outside the relationship to his subjects, a king; as if the determination of 'being-a-king' were a 'natural' property of the person of a king.

'becoming male' as unnatural and emphasise the importance feminine behaviour of women.

How is it that, to use a psychoanalytic language, the *symptom*, in our case gender, continues even when its perceived fundamental components are revealed as false, for example the notion of biology as determinant of footballing ability? Zizek examines where the place of this ideological illusion is, whether it is gender/ideology/money – is it in the 'knowing' or in the 'doing'. Zizek first moves towards 'knowing' as "a matter of discordance between what people are effectively doing and what they think they are doing" and changes the Marxist mantra that people "do not know what they are really doing" by saying that "people know what they are doing is wrong, but do it anyway". However, my research would immediately point away from this argument, or at least add some nuance to it. Women footballers certainly know that the football organisation does not organise their social activity but that it stems from themselves. They also know and talk clearly about the tunability of their own bodies towards projects deemed necessary for football and do not advocate any natural limitations or obstacles due to their sex/gender.

I would argue that the correct phrasing of the mantra should be, "They know what they are doing, if they stop to think about it, yet they still do it, sometimes." This is to some extent what Zizek is arguing when he refers to Sohn-Rethel's conclusions regarding commodity exchange where individuals proceed *as if* the commodity is not part of material exchanges, for example acting *as if* the money they exchange for goods has some inherent value and not tied to social relations. If we read Sohn-Rethel's analysis more closely it quite accurately describes the relationship between people and gender, even though their discussion is about money. Their argument is that we should not assume a fixed and continuous awareness on the part of exchange agents. It is the actions, and the

actions alone, that are abstracted – it essentially does not matter whether agents know or do not know that, in our case, gender norms are constructed.

To this end, as I have argued throughout this thesis, women’s football in the Islamic Republic of Iran might very well escape institutional and embodied borders socially upheld through gender norms and institutional guidelines, but these are always temporary escapes. Gender norms and sexist power relations remain, however much football women play, and will only be challenged if the foreclosed category of gender is challenged symbolically, or if socio-economic forces that value some tasks over others are reconfigured to reward work based on effort and arduousness of tasks over capital⁴²⁷. Whatever the solutions may be, it is better to focus on the challenges rather than celebrate misrepresented victories.

⁴²⁷ For example, according to Michael Albert’s notion of Participatory Economics which would value tasks based on workload, difficulty of tasks, and on repetitiveness and disempowerment of the actions rather than on class, race and gender and indeed capital. M. Albert and R. Hahnel, *The Political Economy of Participatory Economics*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991)

Conclusion

As stated in the introduction, the purpose of this study was to examine ways in which women's football in Iran is organised broadly, and more specifically the ways in which this organisation interacts with politics and embodiment of gender and gender norms in the Islamic Republic of Iran. The paper illustrated that women's football is more of a social meshwork, which although heterogeneous, operates with relative stability due to endogenous factors. Several factors were shown to support this claim. Although, on the surface one may assume that women's football in Iran is by default a subversive activity that exists on the margins of bureaucracy, behind its closed doors and away from official and sanctioned practice, it was shown that this was not the case. Women's football takes place where bureaucracy, rather than collapse, is opened. Historically, this process began with the Iranian Revolution of 1979, and the revolution permeates the organisational model in the country.

As such, the *rhizomatic response* of women's football is not a resistance to the bureaucracy of sport, but rather takes place within it and is part of it, giving it legitimacy. It is also not a phenomenon that works as an opiate for oppressed women, to help them cope with patriarchy, but is better described as a highly creative and dynamic organisation which allows for the sport to grow and develop. Sport is shown here to be a reflex and a reflection of the state structure and its history and organisational make-up illustrates its links to the developments in the Islamic Republic as a whole, at least symbolically.

This study has further illustrated that women's football, although stable through its internal mechanism, is not a single agent. Rather it a collection of coaches, players and administrators in the physical education departments, private clubs, and national ministries. Formally, these entities and individuals do not always have connections between each other and often refer to different sources of funding and support, and provide differing qualities of outcome. Moreover, the individuals and entities mentioned do not all share a passion and love for the collective 'movement' of women's football to develop; everyone in women's

football is not active in its promotion. Nevertheless, this thesis focused its attention on the most active.

The heterogeneity of women's football, and the rhizomatic response, is relevant to this thesis as it explains the purpose of third-person guarantors and networking that sets the foundation for the rhizomatic response. Crucially, these networks stretch across institutions, across multiple employments and spheres and links the most active individuals within the field in question. Connections are based on trust and guarantees and are often temporary alliances. Some of these connections however, were not between individuals but rather existed through the same body, via multiple employments.

During my fieldwork, the description of Iranian institutional failure and specifically bureaucratic incompetence was often repeated. Within women's football, and between those involved in it this was no different. However, the ways in which this view was presented further supports the notion of a particularly 'open' organisational model. The hierarchically 'higher' elements controlling women's football are not necessarily perceived as being part of it, and are rarely if ever referred to by those who work within it. Women's football administrators do not follow the 'chain of command' but rather, as repeated here and in the main body of the thesis, work across institutional barriers, cross-hierarchically.

One example that was illustrated was the offices of Women's football federation where an open-plan design highlighted the rhizomatic organisational model that it maintained and that maintained it. The response in question is thus shaped and regulated internally against what is seen as an impure and incompetent bureaucracy. The risk with this explanation is that it falls into Giddens notion of pre-modern societies and their lack of bureaucratic efficiency – depending on personalised connections rather than cold institutional links. Giddens argues for modernity to follow the growth of "institutionally organised personal connections"⁴²⁸. However, it was shown that in our case the individuals are

⁴²⁸ Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity*, Stanford University Press (1990) Stanford, p. 33

not replacing the formal channels with their own personalised and pre-modern connections, but rather the bureaucratic model allows it to function this way.

The whole process is highly gendered. The bureaucratic space, which as repeated above is seen as inefficient, is also experienced as a masculine and unsupportive environment. The rhizomatic response re-imagines these new spaces, redefining them without necessarily fighting the dominant spatial paradigms. It is here that the thesis has illustrated the ways in which women's football exists in Iran, not despite the state sanctioned institutions of sport but because of it. To assume that women's football was a contradiction to the formalised organisation would be to presume a fixed space on which the state fights women's football. Instead I have shown here that a far more complex and nuanced approach to the spatial dynamics of women's football is needed. To avoid the assumption that women's football is somehow free individuals resisting state-sanctioned oppression by playing football despite restrictions, one must see the space as a construction rather than as a background. To put it simply, the football pitch is not a constriction on women footballers, but is rather a part of her experience, and simultaneously shapes her experience. To explain this more clearly let us revisit the bus journey which shows that the very movements 'out' of city in search for facilities that both allow for the sport to develop and connect it to the stratified state-sanctioned sport institution. Women footballers travel across the country, sometimes across many miles in search for tournaments and competitions and training facilities. But rather than disintegrate the discourses of protection, or gender difference, they affirm these through their legalisation of the bureaucratic organisation. Consequently, this thesis has challenged the notion that spaces encourage certain behaviours and other paradigms that by definition assume that space is at best a background that 'leans' towards a certain outcome but is nevertheless a background. In these

paradigmatic models, to go against the spatial bias is resistance. Women's football however, as explained above, is not pure resistance but exists, like all activities, in space not on it.

A particular focus in this thesis has to present the findings within a paradigm that does not reduce the experience of Iranian women to the often-adopted secular paradigms which reduce Islam (or at least the more exoteric aspects of it) as an obstacle to freedom. A more complex picture was thus presented, outside of the simplistic resistance/compliance framework. Here the thesis moved towards embodiment and argued that this too was more nuanced than simply women working on their bodies despite/against dominant traditional norms. Working on the body, *tuning* it towards specific projects is a better way to understand what women footballers do as it presents specific and particular routines that allow for certain types of movements rather than assume some sort of linear progression of bodily capability. Nonetheless, what I call tuning does not happen outside of heterosexual imperatives that stratify and materialise sexual difference in society, but once again, in the same way the bureaucratic 'escapes' reinforce the dominant, return to reinforce those norms. In fact, many footballers would directly 'read' their or others' tuning as becoming masculine. Importantly however, the projects that were identified as important for the game, for example jumping or sprint, are deemed more useful and efficient than those that may be sacrificed, for example feminine expectations of smooth unscarred skin. The values placed on different bodily modalities differ clearly, yet it has been shown here that it is to reductive to see sexist and patriarchal norms as 'handicapping' female bodies.

Finally, I hope to have illustrated that it is misleading to focus on the rhizomatic response, which on the surface looks like a resistance movement (albeit in what some might consider the mundane arena of

sport), without including the dominant structures that in the end return and are legitimised. One example of this here is that I have shown how the same people who show awareness of the fluidity of bodily modalities, and the tenability of bodies towards projects, can turn around and proclaim beliefs in the weakness of the feminine gender, warn of too much training leading to 'becoming male' and unnatural.

In conclusion, women's football in the Islamic Republic of Iran certainly does escape, at times and via certain routes, the institutional and embodied barriers/borders that are socially upheld. Nevertheless, these escapes are temporary and gender norms, state power, and dominant structural divisions return and are legitimised by those very practices.

Final thoughts

There have been no ethnographic studies of the Department of Physical Education and this thesis provides a glimpse into this underfunded and still relatively new organisation. The focus of this body is squarely on building new facilities and expanding territorially to meet the growing demands for its services. There are many enthusiastic athletes, both men and women, who participate in sporting activities all year around. During my fieldwork in 2008 and 2009 there were many discussions regarding the need to improve the department and the state of sport in the country and changes were being seen, particularly in relation to the professionalization of football. However, as time has gone by it is more and more clear that the professionalization and centralisation efforts of the state are still top-heavy reforms, concerned mostly with the national team than with any significant changes that would alter the rhizomatic processes that are examined here. Moreover, the concerns of bodily tuning and crossing too close to the masculine edge made international news when in 2010 doubts were raised about the gender of the Iranian women's national team

goalkeeper. This was later escalated in 2014 when the Football Federation introduced randomised checks after it was ‘revealed’ four national team players were “men awaiting sex change operations”⁴²⁹. The story of women’s football thus continues to inspire critical subversive challenges to gender norms, while also helping to further incorporate it institutionally⁴³⁰.

⁴²⁹ B. Henderson, “Eight of Iran’s Women’s Football Teams ‘are men’”, *The Telegraph*, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/11903290/Eight-of-Irans-womens-football-team-are-men.html> (accessed November 10, 2015)

⁴³⁰ R. Tait, “Iranian Women Footballers to Undergo Gender Tests”, *The Telegraph*, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/iran/10622778/Iranian-women-footballers-to-undergo-gender-tests.html> (accessed November 10, 2015)

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