FEMININITY AT PLAY: A CASE STUDY ON A ROMANIAN WOMEN'S FOOTBALL TEAM

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Submitted to
Central European University
Department of Gender Studies

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts

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Budapest, Hungary
2007

Abstract

This paper constitutes an ethnographic inquiry into women's football in Romania. The main focus of this analysis revolves around three interrelated issues: football as a profession, football and sexuality and technologies shaping the athletic bodies of women footballers. The first part of the paper is aimed at creating an adequate historical context in which to place nowadays women's involvement in this specific sport. For that matter, I present the circumstances and the development of women's football from the socialist context to post-socialism. The second part of the paper focuses on women's footballers' narratives in relation to the three abovementioned topics.

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1. Introduction

In 2003 Violeta Popas, aged 22, traveled abroad for the first time in her life. She was the goalkeeper of the Romanian National Women's Football team competing in a FIFA women's world competition. Her 10 year work and hard trainings at a local women club had finally paid off: she became a regular member of the National team heading for the big stage. Her future looked promising: a transfer abroad or a title with the National team ceased to be utopias, but dreams at hand. Nonetheless, by the end of the same year, Violeta's life took a different and dramatic turn. After she got married, her husband asked her to give up professional football and take a regular job. She complied. Now, after she divorced from her husband she admits she does not understand how that abrupt change occurred. This paper was triggered by Violeta's story and seeks to offer her some explanations. She deserves at least that.

Men's football, one of the last standpoints of male preserve (Elias, Dunning: 1986) is the most popular sport today (and in history) and is connected to high business, media and advertising. In contrast women's football is almost unknown and marginalized. Women's teams struggle against bankruptcy, the incomes of players are incommensurably lower compared to men's incomes or to other sports and there is no question of fame or fandom. Moreover, women players struggle against societal prejudices about womanhood and femininity which are said to be in stark contradiction with ideas of competition, aggression, strength and body/instrumental skills.

This is what in fact constitutes the puzzle of my research: Why do women take up football, despite the pitfalls already mentioned? What are the specific reasons that drive women

to join football teams usually coached by men and to engage in competitions that are, more often than not, organized by men? How do women footballers comply, interpret or resist to the standards set by men in general, and to the male version of this sport, in particular? Can football be regarded as a job and if so how does playing football situate women on the job market? Furthermore, can one interpret playing women football as a regular career, with all the incumbent achievements and limitations? How do women football players relate this occupation to marriage or motherhood and what are the differences of similarities between them and other women active in other different fields? A different, but strongly connected, set of questions concern the relationship between women football playing and their bodies: How does football change women's bodies? Is there an "athletic body" of the women footballers as is the case with other sports? What are the particular mechanisms that form, shape and regulate women football players' body? How do footballers engage their body during the pitch, as sportswomen, and outside of it, as women? Throughout this paper I seek to address these issues as they unfold in the daily practices of 20 women footballers, part of a local Romanian team.

Nonetheless, a strategic question should be asked right off: why approaching the more general issues of gender, work, career, motherhood and body through the particular lens of women football can offer more, fresh insights? First, since women football occurs in a highly dominated male framework, my research seeks to inquire the pervasive issue of structural gender inequality and its many causes, shapes and experiences. Furthermore, it will nuance the debate of clear cut, outward discrimination by unveiling insidious, almost benign, forms of male domination and the manner in which they infiltrate in the interstices of everyday life of women footballers. Moreover, this study will open up space for examining women lives as professionals

and the implicit compromises caused by their sex that they have to put up with, thus readdressing the multifaceted issue of resistance to male dominance.

Thus my paper lies at the crossroads of several different but overlapping areas of feminist research: women and work, women and sports and theories of the body, approached from the standpoint of everyday practices and interactions. In order to better position my current research in these overlapping fields I will hereby offer an overview of the main texts, authors and debates that have shaped the nature of the feminist research regarding these issues, by pinpointing both to their relevance for my research and to the contribution my study brings to the ongoing debates.

1.1 Working in a men's world

One aspect of football playing that is most commonly overlooked is the fact that professional football means *work*. It implies long hours of training, specific skills, tactical knowledge and organizational strategies all acquired with painstaking effort. Therefore even if financial rewards might be small, women who make such investment in professional football seek different types of rewards. Bourdieu's (1991) concept of capital could offer potential relevant guiding line of how to interpret these rewards. The concept of capital was central to Bourdieu's (1991) formulation of social space where "*the kinds of capital, like trumps in a game of cards, are powers which define the chances of profit in a given field*" (1991: 230). In an earlier text Bourdieu (1986) identified three main forms of capital. First, economic capital that is intimately linked with, and convertible to, money and institutionalized into forms of property

rights. Second, cultural capital refers as a form of accumulation that may be converted to economic capital under certain conditions or can be institutionalized in the form of educational qualification. Third, social capital is seen as a form of capital which exists in the social connections that people have and that can be institutionalized in the form of nobility titles.

In the context of this research, where I seek to grasp the reasons for which women take up football, the form of capital relevant for my analysis is cultural capital, and more specifically physical capital. Bourdieu (1986) further argues that cultural capital exists in three irreducible forms: the objectified state, the institutionalized state, and the embodied state. The embodied or physical capital exists in the form of long-lasting dispositions of the body and mind. Physical capital refers to the way people develop, alter, and hold the physical shape of their bodies, and learn how to present and manage their bodies through styles of walk, talk, dress and facial expressions. However, Bourdieu showed that reforming the physical shape of the body is not an innocent process, but it always points to political reasons (in wider meanings of the term) and relations of domination. Since women footballers work in a non-traditional women occupation, Bourdieu's remark proves crucial.

In her research on women in managerial positions, Moss Kanter (1977/1993) shows that women in male dominated occupations have a *token status*. This term refers to a particular position characterized by higher visibility among their male counterparts. This in its turn triggers stereotyped judgments about the behavior of token women. Moreover Moss Kanter contends that women tend to appropriate the male norms in order to better fit into the specific male dominated environment. In the case of women footballers however, Moss Kanter's argument has a limited value. Women appropriate by default male norms because these are the norms that govern football *per se*. Put differently, in the case of women footballers a more relevant aspect to be

discussed is the degree to which these women comply to male standards in terms of game skills, body and on pitch behavior. Women footballers are compelled by the rules of the game and by its embedded masculine nature to take on masculine behavior such as aggression, competitiveness and combative stances on the pitch, that is, at their place of work, an issue that I will discuss at length in the next chapter. Suffice it to say now, that I follow Christine Williams (1991) and Jennifer Pierce (1995) in their critique of tokenism as conceptualized by Moss Kanter. Williams showed that women in the Marine Corps, a male dominated environment experience a token status at their workplace, but they do not appropriate male-like behavior as Moss Kanter (1977/1993) suggested but acknowledge and display their femininity. In a similar vein, Pierce argued that women litigators do not conform to the male standard but actively re-construct the male appropriate behavior into one more suitable for their gender norm.

1.2. Women sports, male background

Women footballers do compete in a sport invented and regulated by men, however, they compete only against other female teams. Even though there is no direct competition between men and women on the pitch, this competition takes place on the cultural market of fame and celebrity. Indisputably, the financial rewords for professional skills are strikingly misbalanced in the favor of men footballers, however, cultural capital representing a form of gain in the case of women footballers. Nonetheless, the professional aspect of football playing is just one of side of the larger experience of women undertaking this sport. I will turn now to more general issues regarding women as athletes.

Two main directions have marked feminist scholarship on sports. On one hand, sport and physical activity are viewed as means of women's empowerment and emancipation, while the other emphasizes discrimination.

Cahn (1996) in her analysis of 20th Century American women's sports stresses the interrelation between the development of women's sports and women's emancipation project. The author places at the heart of her historical analysis the persistent opposition between sport as a male defined area of life and female athletes as a contradictory presence.

The over-emphasized feeble nature of womanhood is currently challenged by women athletes and representations of athletic women's bodies. The most documented examples come form scholarly work on women body-builders. Several authors (Schulze 1997, Bartky 1988, Mansfield, McGinn 1993, Martin, Gavey 1996) argue that to a certain extent the body of the female body-builder is challenging the current sex/gender system by blurring the line between sexed bodies. This particular type of muscular body allows for simultaneous readings of femininity and masculinity. In chapter four I will return to the idea of dual readings of sporting bodies, in the case of Romanian footballers. On an opposite stance, however, regarding women bodybuilders, Bordo (1990) argues that bodybuilding is imprinted by the patriarchal drive of control over the body similar to anorexics in order to control the "soft, loose, unsolid, excess flesh" (Bordo 1990: 90) thus reminding that no physical reform of the body is politically innocent.

Guthrie and Castelnouvo (1992) argue that bodybuilding is deprived by its subversive potential because of institutionalized competitions where judges continue to emphasize and grade stereotypical feminine attributes. Romanian women footballers, even though train and compete with and against other women are nonetheless trained and sponsored by men. As I will

show in sections 4.2 and 4.3 it is men in these official positions that reinforce and supervise the gender appropriate behavior and the compliance to heterosexuality.

The topic of gender discrimination in sport represents another line of inquiry usually taken by recent feminist studies. Many authors have argued that sport represents a social system dominated by patriarchal values and dominance patterns that subjugate women instead of liberating them (Schneider 2000). These studies place under scrutiny the cultural predispositions that prevent women from full and meaningful participation in sports. Sex discrimination in sports has focused also on the "gender" verification in sports competitions (Skirstad 2000), on the medicalization of the female athletic body (Schneider 2000), the participation of women in the administration of athletic programs (Acosta and Carpenter 2002) and on the subordinate position of women's sports in the current framework of segregated athletic competitions (Tannsjo 2000). This framework might prove useful in explaining why some sports are marginalized and have little social impact. Nonetheless, by privileging a macro-structural explanation these theories fail to account for human agency, for particular women's decision to involve themselves in one sport or another. In this paper I seek to balance the view by presenting both structural factors that influence or had influenced the development of women's football in Romania as well as to encompass women's footballers' accounts about what motivates them to take up this sport. Thus, my intention is to tackle the paradoxical interplay between discrimination of women through sports, and within sporting activities, but also the liberating potential sport activities offer. As I see things based on my field experience, man oppression and women's agency that counter this oppression (at least in the field of sport) do not necessarily oppose each other, and the story this paper presents is also a story of daily living on the thin border between the two, as the narrative of my informants will make apparent.

Furthermore, a series of studies have sought to understand how women actively construct their gender identity by participating in competitive sports usually considered as male preserve such as boxing (Hargreaves 1997) and hockey (Theberge 1997, Pelack 2002). Hargreaves (1997) contends that the body and fight of men boxers and women boxers are subjected to different readings. While the body and physicality of men boxers even defeated conforms to dominant meanings of masculinity, the body of women boxers is perceived to be dehumanized and vulgar but at the same time sexually attractive to men. Pelack (2002) documents the emergence of a gendered collective identity in a women's hockey team. In the same vein, George (2005) analyzes the behavior of elite women football players in order to discern how this group of women "does gender" (West, Zimmerman 1987).

However, I seek to go beyond this line of research and further argue that gender is not only a relational accomplishment but also about how specific gendered practices become embodied. Connell (1995) argues that "*images of ideal masculinity are constructed and promoted most systematically through sports*" (1995:123), thus athletic experience becoming a defining feature of masculine identity. In this context the ideal woman, as a social construct is opposed to the concept of the ideal athlete. Moreover as Tamburrini (2000) contends, masculinity is so profoundly embedded in sport that in sporting competitions "*women compete against each other in masculinity, narrowly conceived*" (2002:109). Schneider (2000) contends there is only one ideal model of sport, that being the male model, defined in terms of body strength, skills and rules. Furthermore, the author stresses that strength and aggressiveness are in contradiction with what is commonly understood by womanhood.

1.3 Technologies of the athletic body

The body, as Williams and Bendelow (1998) notes, is continually being constructed and reshaped through rules and technologies of sport performance and through the apparatus of sports consumption. This idea comes in the line of thought initiated by Mauss' *Techniques of the Body* (1934/1979) who pointed out the practical and social uses of the body as well as intrinsic links with training and education.

Foucault (1991) shows how the body is as a discursive product of the power/knowledge nexus. The body is the site where the microphysics of power is operating in order to render a productive subject. The microphysics of power operates in an unapparent network of relations, based on certain tactics, techniques and dispositions. The validity of this microphysics of power is to be found at the intersection between different institutions and the functioning of the body, thus instituting a political technology of power, that is, the knowledge of body which does not rely anymore on physical coercion but on supervision, calculation, examination and documentation. Discipline becomes thus the main technique of creating modern subjects, in general and athletes, in particular.

The main critique formulated against Foucault refers to the un-gendered body of his analysis. Several authors (Bordo 1993; Sawaki 1991; Bartky 1988) argue that there are specific disciplining technologies that function only in the case of the feminine body. Throughout this paper I follow this line of thought, by seeking to unveil the specific technologies of the body employed in creating and rendering productive the athletic body of women football players.

Bordieu's (1986) analysis of sport emphasizes the connection between sport, class, body and everyday practices. The author regards sport as a distinct field with its own evolutionary laws and intricate interdependencies that cannot be reduced to economic or historical explanations. It forms rather on its own a social system that develops its own logic and precise rules. Throughout this paper I take women's football to function as a field within which women footballers have to comply to its rules in order to gain legitimacy, success and status. In order to gain all that, agents take the habitus of the field. Bourdieu (1979) defines habitus as "*a system of durable, transposable dispositions that function as a generative basis of structured, objectively unified practices*" (1979: vii). The daily lived experiences of people tend to structure their lives in certain characteristic ways which in turn governs people to organize their practices in ways that are consonant with their experiences. The role of the habitus is not a determinate one, but rather a mediating one between perceptions and action. Thus habitus is constituted and altered according to intersections of objective structures and personal experiences, and internalized in the form of dispositions or subjectivity. While there are differences among and between members of a social group, there is a common bond, a habitus that predisposes people to act in common ways (Laberge 1995). Thus, the concept of habitus is particularly relevant for the purposes of this paper, for a good number of reasons. First, because habitus is formed at the intersection of macro-structures and people's predisposition makes it a highly useful theoretical tool for capturing the intricate interplay between male domination and women's agency in the context of women football. Moreover, habitus can provide a starting point for explaining the reasons that determine women to choose this sport in relation to a field of practice, not only with macro-structural, societal causes. Third, since this concept is equally applicable to individuals and groups, provides a good insight into analyzing women footballers, not only in relation to

their field of practice dominated by men, but also in relation to their female teammates. Chapters 4.2.5 and 4.3.1 will discuss this issues at length when considering the reasons that drive women to playing football, and also when depicting the life of the team under scrutiny in this paper.

1.4. Structure of the paper

Taking into account the diverse nature of the ongoing debates concerning women sports, placed in the broader perspective of women in non-traditional occupations and in relations to the technologies of the athletic body, I believe it is useful to restate the main lines of thought that underpin this current research and the manner in which they will be approached through out this paper. Thus, women who engage in masculine sports have the potential to disrupt the line between female sport and male sport, further blurring the feminine/masculine distinction that organizes the entire social and symbolic world. Therefore women's football proves to be an important site of investigating gendered practices in a field long considered to be entirely designated for men. In chapter 3 I discuss the intricate and pervasive interplay between state-socialist ideological purposes and male sexual fantasies that lead to the emergence of football in Romania. In the same chapter I pinpoint to the transformation of the state in post-socialism and to the continuities of the male sexual gaze that dominate this sport.

Second, women's professional football represents a non-traditional feminine occupation. Consequently, by engaging in such a study might prove useful in gaining useful insights for understanding the barriers and hardships women go through when accessing male dominated professions, in general and football, utterly dominated by men, in particular. The first part of

chapter 4 is dedicated to women football as a profession and its incumbent features. This part should read in connection with chapter 3, which places the discussion in the broader societal realities of state socialism and post-socialism respectively.

Lastly, the body of women footballers is a site where several power regimes collide. The norms of football, modeled after the athletic male, body impose masculine norms of strength and skill. This notwithstanding, the competing norms of "emphasized femininity" (Connell 1987), reinforcing the dominant ideal of femininity, also take their toll on the body of women footballers. Class, professional and status markers also become apparent on these women's bodies, while, above all, patriarchy norms and its compulsory heterosexuality carve deep into footballers bodies. Consequently, the discussion moves into issues of training, skills, and discipline, thus re-contextualizing the notion of athletic body by rendering visible the political technologies that makes it possible. The last part of chapter 4 approaches at length the technologies of the body employed at Smart and their role in rendering women as sport subjects.

Chapter two presents the methodology used in acquiring data, while also discusses some pitfalls and limitations in entering the field, while chapter 4 begins with the presentation of the main actors of these pages, during a regular practice day.

I admit that the manner in which I presented the structure of this paper, might suggest the contrary. However, I resent from the offset any pretensions of linearity which might place me in an authoritarian position of explaining or unveiling something. I tried as much as possible to give space for my interviewees, and to present contrasting points of view. Moreover, the three main issues that underpin the paper are circularly linked and a linear account would have been unjust and unfaithful to the facts and people. I encourage the reader to do the same.

2. Methodology

The purpose of this chapter is to present my research site and the reasons for choosing it, the difficulties I faced while establishing rapport with my subject as well as the actual research design and methods used during my fieldwork.

2.1. Research site

In order to inquire into the set of issues raised in the Introduction of this paper I chose as a site of my research *Smart-Bucuresti Women's Football Team, a Romanian professional* team.

The Romanian Women's Football Championship brings together ten teams, but many of these teams, due to inadequate funding, do not hold regular practices or even if they do, the locations of these practices varies almost on a weekly basis and thus these teams are very difficult to contact. On the contrary, the team of my research focus, Smart-Bucuresti, holds regular trainings (two to three times a week) and games (one per month throughout the championship) which enabled a more systematic manner of conducting my research.

As I found out from the Romanian Football Federation's (RFF) website Smart-Bucuresti was by the beginning of May, when I started my research, on the forth position in the 2006-2007 Championship. The team is very heterogeneous both in terms of age (16 to 38) and in terms of formal educational training (from high-school women to students or professional). This structure of the team made proved beneficial for the research since it made possible to encompass multiple voices of women with different educational, financial and ethnic backgrounds.

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2.2 Entering the Field

My first encounters with the team members were marked by a series of pitfalls and misunderstandings which, in the long run, hindered to some extent, our interaction. Since I had no previous contact in the field, I contacted the coach, Mr. Gigi, who seemed very willing to help me in conducting my research. In spite of the fact that I explained him on several occasions that I was neither a reporter nor a psychologist as he assumed, he still introduced me to the team as a psychologist. I did re-state to both the coach and to the team members, my current position as an MA Gender Studies student but this did not seem to clarify the situation. I was fully aware that the label of psychologist would hold a negative impact on my informants since the assumption that I would be trying to read, guess, or understand their hidden feelings usually underpin this profession. Consequently, I opted for the less problematic identity of "sociologist", preoccupied with women's issues. However most of the damage had already been done. All my informants expressed a certain suspicion regarding my real interest that I had to constantly appease. Probably the most important outcome of this misperception of my intentions and my identity in the filed was the number of informants willing to openly talk to me.

Another aspect that has to do with possible biases in this present research, and that was activated while establishing rapport, was the fact that I am studying in Hungary. At first, I was considered a member of the Hungarian community which still holds negative associations among particular groups in Romania. Bearing in mind the intricate relationships between ethnic Romanians and Hungarians throughout the years following the 1989 change of political regime,

some Romanians still look upon ethnic Hungarians as an internal enemy. After making clear my ethnicity, a non-Hungarian one, new challenges appeared.

The fact that I was studying abroad placed me in a privileged position among these young women. Most of them have never traveled abroad but certainly hope to leave Romania one day in order to play for better ranked teams or simply to find better paid jobs. Yet again, the fact that I am not working but studying in a different country, made me look if not suspicious, surely different.

One more significant issue that is worth discussing here is the willingness of the football players to take part in my research. Most of the players were very open in talking to me, so that through out our conversations some of them straight forwardly referred, even complained, about misunderstandings with the coach or other team mates. Still, some expressed wariness about my use of their responses, which stemmed from a previous episode in the life of the team.

Some journalists from *National Geographic* wrote some time before an article about the team. Most of the players complained that these journalists distorted their words and their attitudes, privileging minor incidents and sensationalist aspects, rather then reflecting a larger picture of the team. They considered that the article had placed them in a victim stance, with an emphasis on their emotional reactions rather then on their skills or dedication to the sport. They all refused the victim stance into which the above mentioned article placed them. Even though I explained numerous times that I was not a journalist either, some players were still reluctant to talk to me.

Furthermore, my own positionality in the field has also to be addressed. As Gorelick (1996) notes, every researcher brings her social location, her culture, motivation, education and ignorance to the interaction with her informants, and this has a significant impact on the outcome

of the research. Even though I enjoy watching football, I have never played it. Consequently some of the team players took up the role of guides explaining to me specific aspects of the game, the importance of certain tactical schemes or more plainly the difficulties they face as footballers and what they perceived to be the causes. On the opposite stance, some other team players gave brief, short answers to my questions or refused further clarification whenever I asked, reinforcing and underlining the differences between me as an outsider, as a researcher and as a non-footballer and them as women footballers.

My subjects and I come from different class backgrounds both in terms of economic privileges and in terms of education. Our relationship has been throughout the entire time one of misbalanced powers. In order to gain the team's acceptance I tried to minimize the impact of my class position. I concealed the fact that I owned a car, I gave only an approximate location of my place of residence in Bucharest (hiding the fact that I live in a highly gentrified area that is mostly associated with the economically privileged) and when asked how much my field equipment cost (a voice recorder and a camera) I said that it belonged to CEU. In doing so I did not envisage a deliberate concealment of my position, but my decision was determined solely by interest in establishing a close connection as possible with my informants so that they will offer their own stories, not ones pre-fabricated to match what they perceived to be my class-related expectations. If I succeed in doing that, represents a matter that I do not have a full answer to.

2.3 Methods

My main methods of inquiry were participant observation and semi-structured interviews. Participant observation and interviews allowed me to focus on informants' narratives, positioning them as active agents in their enterprise. As an attempt to make a reflexive piece of

ethnography, I discuss throughout the presentation of my findings the role of my own position in the field of research, making apparent the moments of tension. I do not plan to offer a coherent explanation of my data but rather try to leave space for a multiplicity of voices that react differently and cannot be reduced to a singular, coherent and totalizing explanation.

Due to the nature of this research, I spent about 20 days with the team members during their trainings, games and life on and off the pitch. Throughout this time I took part in nine trainings (at some of the trainings I joined them for the warm-up) and one game. Together with the team members I attended a friendly tournament for juniors where the Romanian National Junior Team played against Belgium, Denmark and Norway. Most importantly, I joined some of the team members on one of their regular outings in a park, followed by some drinks in a bar.

The actual design of the project includes seven in-depth semi-structured interviews with team members. In my limited time at Smart-Bucuresti, I had informal conversations with all the players that attended practices and I conducted my formal interviews at the pitch during or after practices.

Furthermore I conducted an interview with the coach of the team, a man, in order to understand how gender operates in the interaction between players and coach. This interview proved useful not only for the current situation at Smart, but also for tracing the development of women's football in Romania, in general. The coach, Mr. Gigi, has been training women's teams since the early 1980s and has been Smart's coach from its establishment in 2001.

Another significant interview I benefited from was with the owner of Smart-Bucuresti football club, Mr. Bibi. Bibi is not only the financial supporter of the club but is also currently one of the members of the Romanian Football Federation Executive Committee, the highest decision making and regulatory institution in Romanian football. He holds this position on the

behalf of women's football and consequently he is familiar not only with the particular problems of Smart-Bucuresti but also with national and international regulations and programs regarding this sport.

Marilena Barabara used to be a member of one of the first women's football team that was founded during the 1970s. This particular interview not only enriched the historical background of the present research but also functioned as a term of comparison between present accounts and 1970s realities. I will come back to Barabara's story in the following chapter, when I retrace the emergence of women football in Romania and contrast them with the post-socialist features in which my research site is placed.

3. Women's Football: from State Socialism formalism to free market exploitations

Throughout this chapter I seek to offer a historical background of women's football in Romania. In spite of the fact that Romania has a national women's football team and an internal championship that was officially established in 1984, this is one of the least popular sports in Romania (I would argue, the least). For the most of the Romanians it comes as a shock that women play football, and some intellectuals (Ungureanu 2005) actively dismiss it as an artificial creation of the Western multiculturalism ideology. The press coverage is next to non-existent, with the exception of very brief notes in different local newspapers. In stark contrast, whenever men's national team is broadcasted on TV it scores the highest audience rates. Romanian

academic writing on sport constantly ignores the existence of women's football. Moreover, even the RFF, the main institution that regulates and organizes all football events nationwide, proved unable to provide coherent information on the background of this sport and on its current development in Romania.

Therefore the task that I am undertaking throughout this chapter is to put together from fragmentary information taken from a variety of sources ranging from official documents of the RFF to life story narratives of the actors involved in women's football, a historical outline of this sport. I will concentrate on the state-socialist and the post-state socialist period because it coincides with the world-wide development of the sport and the establishment of several landmark international competitions: Women's Cup (2001), World Cup tournament (1991), Women's Olympic Tournament (1996) and European Cup (1982).

3.1. Women's football and its birth

Mia Hamm was the youngest woman football player to join the US national women's football team. On the pitch her performances were remarkable and led the US team to win the World Cup in 1999. Mia Hamm became the icon of Title IX of the Educational Act passed in 1972, which stipulated equal participation irrespective of sex in all educational programs or activities founded by the federal government. Thus, the act, although it did not specifically addressed sports, granted women athletes participation in high-school and collegiate sports.

The establishment of women's football in state-socialist Romania, emerged, rhetorically, for the need of promoting equal rights, while, in fact, it served the ideological purposes of the regime and Ceausescu's own ambition to pose as a modern, innovative leader.

The state-socialist regime in Romania, drawing from its Soviet model encouraged the participation of women in sporting activities for mainly two reasons. Firstly, through sports women were drawn into the public life which served both an economic purpose and an ideological one of promoting equality for all its citizens. Second, women athletes competing in international competitions supported the image Romania as a socialist success story and its superiority over Western countries.

The figure of the working class heroine (mother, wife, employee and political activist) employed yet another public face: that of an amateur sportswoman. The state-socialist image of the ideal sportsman/woman draws on Lenin's ideas on sports. As Riordan (1991) emphasizes, for Lenin and the Soviet visionaries of the '20s, sport had to be purified of its bourgeois legacy of competition and commodification refusing the idea of elite sportsmen/women: "*competition should serve ultimately as a means of involving people in building socialism*" (Lenin cited in Riordan 1991 p.121). The soviet sportsmen should have been regular workers, with outstanding natural physical skills that would only be trained for and through work. The proletarian spirit of competition emphasized the lack of interest in financial rewords, in personal recognition and fame. The true soviet sportsmen/women should willingly share and dedicate all their victories to the working class and to the socialist system.

The sporting life of state-socialist Romania was highly centralized, based on a bureaucratic apparatus and on state-founding, as in many other countries of the Eastern Bloc and the Soviet Union (Riordan 1991). Moreover sports activities were employed for the very specific

political and ideological reasons of international recognition, citizen's mobilization and nation building. The latter scope, creating and reinforcing a national cohesive identity that blurred internal social division was identified as one of the most salient features of the state-socialist regime in Romania. As Verdery (1991) argues "*the ideology in Ceausescu's Romania that had potentially hegemonic force, was the national ideology. Virtually all Romanians accepted and still accept the importance of the national idea, with its accompanying unification of the social world"* (1991: 15). Sport, especially at the level of international competitions was employed as one of the salient tools of reinforcing the national ideology. Athletes winning international competitions quickly become national icons in the service of party propaganda. A telling example is that of the probably most famous Romanian athlete, the gymnast Nadia Comaneci. After her stunning victory at the 1976 Olympics, she became a national hero celebrated by the media and received by Ceasescu himself. She was awarded a national state distinction "Hero of the Working Class" and become an object of cult. In 1989 she fled the country and immigrated to the United States which made her an enemy of the state (Dimitri 2006).

In state-socialist Romania the priorities regarding sports were established at the central system of planning which also tried to ensure that all state actors (especially local government, enterprise management, schools and colleges and sport clubs) cooperated in carrying out government sports policies This carefully planned system would concentrate all its resources on governmental approved priorities such as winning gold medals in certain Olympic sports. Mr. Gigi, who was a coach of women football teams in the 80's makes this interplay of sports, state ideology and apparatuses apparent, especially with regard to the emergence of women football in Romania. I quote him at length because I believe his story is cornerstone in understanding the

level of state-involvement in sports and in sportspersons' lives, and also grasping the ideological function sport had in building the regime.

> It was during 84/85 when an order from the Federation was issued. Romania was not allowed to participate in the World Cup with the boys, if we didn't have women's football. It was FIFA and UEFA pressure. We were about to go to Spain [World Cup venue in 1986] and we had no women's team. Then Professor Train Ionescu [one of the most famous football coaches] gave an order through the Federation, for all state-enterprises of over 3000 women to have a women's football team. And they all did, all the state-factories like Confectia, FRB, Miraj, IMGB[1], where I was training boys, and others. By the end of the season, there were 14 teams in Bucharest and two more teams from Oradea and Constanta joined our championship. Back then it was the Party Secretaries and the Syndicate that were giving orders. They came to me and said, Mr. Gigi, from tomorrow we need a girls' team and I had to do it. You couldn't mess with these people. I was puzzled, where was I supposed to find girls to play football? Back then the women were different, you wouldn't see them kicking the ball around. I didn't know what to do so I went to the president of the Syndicate were I was working at IMGB and he announced through the speaker in the entire factory: everyone has to help Mr. Gigi and the factory. Each unit has to provide one football player. There were then 30 units so I went around the factory and I chose the girls I liked, I chose beautiful women, some were secretaries. It was the nicest team ever.

There are at least three points of relevance in this account. Firstly, the year during which these first official teams were founded coincides with the year of the second UEFA Women's Football European Competition. This competition was established in 1982 with 12 participating countries. Throughout the years East Germany and Soviet Union attended the championship and won on several occasions. However Romania never managed to pass the qualification phase (UEFA official website). What is interesting to notice is how ideas and policies in the divided East-West Europe were circulating and were being transposed to a local context. In socialist Romania, women's football was formally established short after this sport become popular in western countries and sanctioned by a transnational organization (UEFA). However very little attention was paid to the specific context of transposition (factories) and to the needs or interests

[1] Confectia, FRB,Miraj, IMGB were all large state-owned factories in Bucharest employing mostly women.

of the women that were supposed to become involved in this game. Furthermore, this immediate seeming compliance with Western rules could be interpreted through the lens of international politics that are embedded in sport competitions (Lincoln 1986). As Riordan (1977) notes for the Soviet Union and its satellite states in Europe, Africa and Latin America, success in the Olympics served as way of proving to the West the successful implementation of state-socialism.

Secondly, Mr. Gigi's recollection reconfirms the chain of decision making process in regard to sport during the state-socialist period. Women's football become a necessity for what was called the well-being of the state during 1984 and by the end of the season, Romania had at least one internal championship. The orders were passed on throughout the rigid hierarchical structure and all the levels of decision making actors (coaches, party bureaucrats, the syndicate and the workers) were forced to cooperate in order to achieve the state directive.

Finally, it is worth noting that Romanian women's football did not emerge out of a feminist based initiative as it did in other countries such as the UK (Mangan 1991) or the United States of America (Cahn 1994). It was not the will or the need of particular women to play this sport, but rather it came as a citizen's obligation women had to undertake. There was no talk of the liberatory and revolutionary potential of this sport for women, at least not in its official inception. Women's football in the 80s came into being, not out of the strong desire of women to play it but rather it derived from just another Party policy that had no connection with the needs and desires of women. State-socialist states have been characterized as patriarchal at their core (Verdery 1994) in spite of the official propaganda that claimed equality between the rights and opportunities for both men and women. It was men who decided that women should play football, it was men who decided that this particular group of working class women had to do it and in this particular case it was the decision of one man as who of the 3000 women workers

should be playing it. Needles to pinpoint the criteria of forming the state-socialist women teams: in Mr. Gigi's account, there is no reference to the skills or performance of these women, but solely to their physical appearance, evaluated so that to match esthetic criteria of the dominant male framework. Thus, the emergence of women football in Romania served not only the ideological purposes of the state, but also strongly reinforced the patriarchal norms so heavily embedded into the fabric of society.

The realities of soviet sport as depicted by Riordan (1990) are grim and far from the original Leninist ideals: doping scandals, corruption, favoritism and a true state-founded infrastructure of elite sport producing Olympic medals. Active sportspersons were as elsewhere entirely caught up in intense training but being officially on the pay-roles of state enterprises as workers. A similar situation is described by Mr. Gigi in his narrative about the first women's football team he coached. Having to fight against the resistance of IMGB's workers to join the football team, a sport perceived to be unfeminine, he recalls that what convinced some of the women to take part in such a masculine activity were the economic incentives offered to sportswomen:

> Back then if you took part in sports, your life was easier. No more extra hours in the field doing patriotic work, Saturdays off for final practice, afternoons off two-three times a week for practice or even more if I wanted, not to mention a monthly financial bonus and even the possibility of a house. This is not to say that you were set for life. It was just that you had someone to back you up. I was very understanding to what the girls wanted and I would slip a good word to the party secretary of the factory or I would talk to the people from the syndicate. Not that I had that much influence but back then the state and everyone had a lot of respect for sport.

Despite a rather brutal imposition of what was perceived as a masculine sport, women nonetheless gained economically. From post communist Romania onwards, women's football lost almost all its economic attractiveness and its sporting facilities.

Given the fact that women's football was at its dawn and there were no women athletes with previous training in football the sport was accessible not only to regular women workers but to other sportswomen who renounced their careers in other sports and joined the team. Mr. Gigi confirms that, in fact, the team he couched was made up of both professional sportswomen and plain factory workers. What is highly interesting is again how state-economic resources were being deployed in order to compel with UEFA-turned-party requirements.

> I had friends who coached women's handball, so I asked them to give me some of their players. I would then go and talk to the girls and convinced them to join my team. I would show them that IMGB would also offer them a job. A better job was not only more money, it would be lighter work or more free time or the possibility of a house. Then I would go to the syndicate and tell them I need this girl and in less then a week she would be hired. This was how things were. In the end I had a team of half sportswomen, half beautiful secretaries or workers. I mean back then no one was interested in results, it was just my ambition.

Women's football as well as other salient features of state-socialist life was rather all about formality, plan-bound and superficial instead of meaningful processes (Scott 1998). It appears that women's football was more about having an internal championship and a national team for political and ideological purposes than about the quality of the game and the quality of the players. Even more, the idea of fair-play and open competition seemed to be falling down the path of personal ambition and corruption as Mr. Gigi recalls:

> In my first team I chose beautiful women. They had nice red outfits that suited their bodies perfectly. Even the referees enjoyed watching. With my first team I ended up in

> the semifinals of 23rd of August Cup. It was held on the seaside. My girls were all suntanned and beautiful. When they entered the field, the audience started whistling. I remember that even the referee helped the team in that game. We didn't win. I talked to one of the girls during the break. I told her to fake a fault so we would get a free kick and win. But she wouldn't, she was honest and we lost.

Women's football, in addition to its compulsory imposition on the Romanian sporting scene, was far from challenging in any way the patriarchal nature of society. There are grounds to say that Romanian women who were playing football at the time were perceived less as athletes, if at all, but primarily as sexual objects. Football was for men. Consequently what the women football players were doing resembled more a sexualized show for the delight of the male audience. As Hersenyi (1992) points out, by the 80s the rule and regulations of public displays of female bodies such as theatre shows, TV broadcasts and movies was as strict as to censure kissing scenes in the movies and to require female artists to wear long sleeves and button up blouses. Consequently women's football could have proven appealing to the audience because of its less sanitized sexuality which catered to some extent to men's unsatisfied obsession. In effect, women football during the 80's, at least in Romania, resembled officially sanctioned pornography.

In spite of the many shortcomings playing football during the 80s in Romania seemed to pose to women, it might have paid off, however, through the economic advantages and opportunities it offered. As the following section shows, in opposition to the masculine views of Mr. Gigi, who minimizes women's agency and their role in the establishment of women's football, certain women athletes not only wanted to play but also pressured institutional actors in order to have the possibility to play.

3.2. The Story of Marilena Barabara

1968 is an emblematic year for social movements, including feminism world-wide. Romania was still enjoying the most liberal part of its state-socialist rule. This is the year when Marilena Barabara, a dedicated sportswoman throughout her entire life, as she described herself, had the idea of starting a women's football team. Barabara, back then a 17-year-old basketball player at Rapid, one of the most famous sports clubs in Bucharest, was "*in love with football*". She remembers going to Rapid football matches since she was five. From where did she get the idea of setting up a football team? As she told it, she had heard of a similar initiative in Ploiesti, a small town 60 km away from Bucharest, a male football club (F.C. Petrolul-Ploiesti) that had accepted to coach women as well.

Barabara says that she convinced several other basketball teammates to joining her initiative. She states that besides her strong commitment to playing football, another crucial aspect led to the establishment of the first and only Rapid women's football team. Barabara believes that she was able to convince the club's management to allow for women to train only because "Rapid's boys" won the Romanian Cup in 1967 and entered the UEFA Cup, a prestigious European football tournament. In her view the two factors that led to the formation of this women's team were first the general liberalizing atmosphere of the state-socialist regime and this extraordinary success in men's football. Moreover the interdependency of the two teams becomes apparent in the fact that the women's team was coached by the men's coach.

A question that remains still unanswered is whether Barabara's and her friends' will to play football was not actually used as a means of gaining additional symbolic capital in the face of the state-regime by this particular football club in order to position itself as ideologically

superior in comparison to other sport clubs in Bucharest by promoting progressive ideas such as women's football.

At the time there was no official championship and the girls would play against other newly formed women's teams. Barabara estimates that there were about 10 teams throughout the entire period (1968-1970), most of which came into being in a similar manner, closely connected with famous men's teams. The matches would be played as opening to other sporting events such as the Romanian Cycling Tour. The stress on women's football seems thus to be on its exceptionality and pornographic promises. The competitive aspects so much appreciated and valued in male football, as a signpost of true masculinity, was not present in the case of women's football. Even though football entails the idea of winner and looser, taken out of its institutional structure, where the aim is beyond a singular confrontation between two teams, women's football is reduced to a mere display of sexual skill.

However, I believe that the most interesting aspect of this story is the emphasis on women's agency and initiative. In this respect, this preliminary stage in women's football is in stark contrast with the 1984 period when women's football was officially founded following a party/state request. This notwithstanding, I believe is worth stressing again the pervasive interplay between women agency and structural dependency, both in terms of state-apparatuses and in terms of male sexual fantasies. Consequently, it seems, women's liberating initiatives, especially in the case of Barabara, triggered by meaningful goals, unfolded in a world dominated by male sexual obsession, thus fostering them.

Paradoxically, this was one of the many possible causes of the team's disappearance, as Barabara believes:

> There were several reasons. The team sort of died out. Many of us started work, some went to college. Most importantly, the girls were scared away by offending comments from the audience. I remember that my dad, after attending one of my matches forbade me to ever play again because he heard what the crowd was shouting. Somehow the matches stopped, the other teams disappeared as well.

From this narrative, it seems that, as in the case of the 1984 team, women's football was perceived as a sexual parade of women's bodies rather than a sporting event. The young athletes' efforts were appreciated and valued by the crowed in as much as they would perform certain "tricks" perceived as sexually charged. As Barabara recalls, stopping the ball with the chest, a regular maneuver in men's football, prompted obscene comments from the crowd.

Another contrast from the period starting with 1984 onwards is the fact that Rapid's women's football team benefited from having access to the coaches, training pitch and status of an already famous football club. In the case of these women athletes who chose to become footballers, there were no additional financial incentives provided. What Barabara leaves unsaid is that even though they did not receive additional money for playing football, all the sporting facilities that they had access to, were state-sponsored. However, she notes: "*we chose a sporting life. We were all athletes and we decided to play football, too. Some thought it was not a sport for women but the coach and some of the male footballers supported us*". These young women decided by themselves that football was an appropriate enough sport for them to play. Moreover, the group pressure was strong enough to determine the official management of the club to allow them to use the facilities and the coaches of the club for their purposes. This private/individual (as opposed to state dictated) initiative could be interpreted as a form of resistance towards the all pervasive state control that characterized the state-socialist regime (Scott 1998).

Thus, understanding the origins and development of women's sport in socialist Romania requires placing it in the larger context of Soviet ideology. As Riordan (1977) notes, football

together with unarmed combat (wrestling) were the target of a 1973 Soviet campaign to discourage women from engaging in "*harmful sports*". According to this author, women's football was perceived by Soviet party authorities as harmful for women's bodies, with a special concern for their reproductive functions as well as harmful for the general mores of the society in that it aroused the "unhealthy" whishes of male spectators. As Riordan (1977) notes, "*this decision to discourage women's football seems to represent an aberration in the Soviet record and a remnant of "it's unladylike" attitude among some leaders*"(1997:321). Could a similar party attitude have caused the disappearance of women's football in Romania? Given the limited amount of sources, such a conclusion would prove too hasty. However, contradictions and paradoxes referring to gender regimes have been the underlining trait in regards to women throughout the entire socialist period (Gal, Kligman 2000). Therefore, it could be argued that even though at the level of the official rhetoric and legislation the promotion of women in all wakes of public sphere was highly viewed, in party practices, activities that would be perceived as endangering the gender hierarchy were severely discouraged. Women football, despite the fact that it catered for male sexual fantasies, had the potential of "troubling" the gender hierarchies (Butler: 1999) and ontologies of the regime.

After 1970, women's football disappeared from the Romanian scene until 1984. The only traces I could find were a small collection of three newspaper clippings carefully preserved by Barabara. For several years the Rapid club has had its own history museum but among its many exhibits, there is nothing on women's football.

Women's football under state-socialism has had two specific traits that are no longer present in today's women's football: it was state-sponsored and state-regulated. However, even today the male audience attending women's football matches, excluding family members, voice

similar sexual comments. To the specificities of Romanian women football I shall turn my attention in the following section.

3.3. Women's football in post-state socialism

The fall of the Ceausescu regime and the subsequent structural changes experienced by Romanian society reflected as well on the development of women's football. Among the most important transformations that took place in the 90s was the separation of state politics from sports. The centralized bureaucratic apparatus that regulated sports activities was dismantled together with other centralized structures such as fore and foremost that of the Communist Party.

In the same vein of structural transformation, state-finances for sport diminished. The expanding market economy took over the field of sports. In the case of women's football there were several dramatic changes. Firstly, state funding was cut off completely. Secondly, the privatization process affected overall more women then men (Gal and Kligman 2000, Berry 1995) and most specifically women's jobs in industry (Pollert 2005). The large number of layoffs targeted as well the factories that were designated in 1984 to form women's football teams. Among the women facing unemployment many were women football players. Another consequence of privatization was the loss of sporting facilities belonging to these large factories. The sporting facilities such as football pitches were either left in ruin or transformed to serve other purposes or leased out on the market. Even if such facilities were kept functional, one had

to pay to have access to them. Women's football lost most of its resources to attract players and to allow for development of the sport.

At the same time, in strong connection with the development of market economy, women's football attracted private investors. In Bucharest, in 1992, there were 3 teams registered (RFF website) all supported by private investors, a decrease from socialist times but in comparison with today's reality (when there is only one active team) still well off. The financial incentives were not very high however, as this was a "transition" period of financial uncertainty, any additional income was welcomed. In fact, women footballers of the '90s can be inscribed in a broader strategy women used throughout the region during the years of transition. It was not unusual for women to combine several forms of employment in order to face the harsh economic realities such as high unemployment inflation, and a decrease in state-funded childcare (Gal and Kligman 2000).

Sports after state-socialism in Romania suddenly faced the demand for profit and results. This rapid turn from state-funding and ideological use towards the demands of a market economy represents the most salient transformation in the world of sport, particularly football. Most sports rely on donors, sponsors as well as on ticket sailing. Men's football, for example, is currently one of the most profitable investments, by bringing enormous profits to their owners through several means: the sale of television rights, player transfers and tickets.

Women's football, in contrast brings very little financial profit if any at all. The internal women's football championship is not broadcasted on any of the Romanian TV channels, the football matches have very little audience and the entrance is free. The only potential source of income in the case of women's football is to sell players. Internally, the market for women footballers is very small with currently only 10 team competing. Transfers occur rarely and the

sums of money involved are insignificant. Transfers to foreign teams are more profitable but given the low international rank of Romanian footballers and the more general state of under-evaluation of women football players, the sums of transfer are much lower than in the case of men. Transfers abroad are not only profitable for club owners, but for the players themselves as my interviewees emphasized. The salaries paid abroad are incomparably much higher than in Romania. Moreover, the chance of playing for a foreign team is perceived as a change to improve overall football skills by the players. Being potentially able to go abroad and purse a professional football career is in fact one of the most important differences with the socialist regime. I will come back to this point and its meaning, when I present and discuss my informants' reasons for taking up football.

3.4 Smart –Bucuresti

Smart Bucuresti, the site of my research, was founded in 2000 and registered for the first time in the internal Romanian championship in 2001. The owner of the club, Mr. Bibi, recalls how and why he decided to become the owner and manager of a women's football team:

> I took the team from Mr. Gigi. He was then training the girls on an old football pitch and could not afford to enroll the girls in the championship. He had lost all his sponsors. I agreed to take the team. Football is my hobby. I also own a team of fusball[2] and one of beach football. I decided to take one of women as well.

This notwithstanding, it is also worth mentioning that Bibi holds a position in the Executive Committee of the Romanian Football Federation on behalf of women's football. This

[2] Fusball is a particular type of football, played indoors with teams of 5 on a much smaller surface.

position includes a generous salary, a vote in all the decisions or regulations adopted by the highest decision-making body (RFF) and access to information thus his emphasis on sheer pleasure for the game should be severely nuanced and include an account of the multiple benefits this sport brings.

In 2001, the internal championship had two divisions based on geographic proximity: the north division and the south one. In each division there were 6 teams. The reason for this arrangement was the lack of money. Club owners could not afford to pay for long-distance away games that included several meals, transport and overnight accommodation for the players and the coach. In 2001, its first season, Smart Bucuresti finished last in the South division.

However, only two years later, in 2003, it won the South division and played in the semifinal of the championship. This has been its best record so far. There were, however, other important matches, such as semifinals of the Romanian Cup in 2005 and 2007, respectively.

Another important performance of the team was a friendly game played against an amateur women's football team made up of women journalists in 2006. This match was important because it brought the first consistent media attention for Smart. Following this event, several other journalists contacted the team. The owner of the club and the players themselves say that media attention is the first step for a larger audience which in its turn might trigger additional sponsorship.

Starting in the 2006/2007 season, the format of the internal championship changed. There is only one division that includes ten teams from both the northern and the southern part of the country. The costs for the away games are now supported by the FRF. In this new format Smart Bucuresti holds forth place. Mr. Bibi has big plans for the team. He estimates that in two years time Smart will win the championship and will qualify for Women's Champions League. In

financial terms, as he further explains, this will mean that his players will become more valuable on the international transfer market. Moreover, his team will be awarded a sum of money from UEFA in order to prepare a tournament and, given the rather low costs of such sporting events in Romania, the team will be able to save some of this money.

From a different perspective though, that of the actual players, the future of Smart Bucharest looks rather grim. At the moment, all of the players consider that in order to improve their game, more investments in the team are needed. They find the idea of the Champions League rather utopian and fear that they will even lose their current ranking by the end of the season.

Throughout this chapter I have tried to point to several important moments in the short history of women's football in Romania. The major influence on women's football as on the overall Romanian society was the change in the political regime. Women's football had to adjust from a state-funded activity, answering the demands of state politics to the demands of a private investor. Women's football was initially institutionalized in order to serve party interests. Now this sport, even though still marginal, manages to echo more the ambitions and needs of particular women. Nonetheless, the sexual male gaze still underpins and marks the practice of this sport by women. The development of women's football in Romania and its current condition, apart from issues like state-ideology and financial realities, primarily seem to emerge from an unfulfilled male sexual fantasy that rendered women as pornographic objects of lust.

In the following chapter I will further present the dynamics of Smart–Bucuresti with a focus on players' narratives and perceptions, thus aiming to substantiate the research puzzle of this paper.

4. Femininity at Play

As already announced in the Introduction, I will unfold my analysis at the intersection of three overlapping topics: football as a profession, seen in the larger framework of women and sports; football and sexuality circumscribed to the broader topic of male domination and male sexualized gaze and thirdly, football and the technologies of creating the footballers body, as part of the larger mechanisms of creating individuals and subjects. For purposes of clarity, I divided these issues in three corresponding sections, but this notwithstanding, the boundaries are not at all that rigid, and certainly this was not my intention. On the contrary, as I hope to make apparent in my account, the three themes constantly communicate with one another in a multidirectional manner.

Before proceeding I will start with a section in which I introduce the main actors and forecast the main problematic. I chose to depict a regular training session in present tense in order to offer the reader a better flavor of the life at Smart Bucharest, and re-create as much as possible daily atmosphere in which my interviewees live and in which their narratives were formulated.

4.1. Training Day

Regular training days are held on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays. The practice starts at 5:30 p.m which makes it difficult for some of the players to make it from work. Juli (aged 21),

Andreea (23) and Corina (21) all work together, as commercial workers in a hypermarket. Juli is the newcomer; she has only started training and playing for Smart six month ago.

> I've done professional sport all my life. I played handball for 12 years but I had an injury during one of the trainings and I had to quit. Then I got a job at Carrefour and a colleague from there, Andreea, asked if I wanted to start something new. I did play football before: in the school yard, behind the bloc, even at handball practices.

Andreea is one of the two goalkeepers at Smart. She used to be a handball goalkeeper as well but at the same time a big football fan. She has been playing for Smart for two years now. She, as many of the other footballers at Smart started to play football in the park or near the block of flats. "*I used to be a goalkeeper anyhow when I played with the boys*".

Corina has a similar story. She has done athletics for 9 years. She even went to a high-school for sports, where she started to play football with some of the boys.

> I don't like spending time with girls. They gossip too much. In high-school I spent more time with the boys, so I played with them: at first as a goalkeeper, then little by little as an attacker or in defense.

At the pitch the three girls arrive among the first. The captain of the team, Mia, a 27 year old PE teacher, greets them. Her nickname is, how else, the *Teacher*. She is recognized by the team as the best player because she has played in several matches of the National Team.
Loredana, 20 years old, is sitting next to the Teacher on a small wooden bench. She does not live in Bucharest, but in a small village, 20 km away from the city. She comes to Bucharest three times a week for the practices. They offer to the newcomers some sun-flower seeds.

Soon, a new group arrives. Their nickname is "*the lesbians*". Neli, one of these girls is a 19 year old student in Economics. She started practices with Smart in 2004. Football was her passion ever since she was very young. She first played with her father and brother and soon she

overplayed both of them. Her father helped her find a women's football team and cheers for her at the matches.

Laura is 19 as well and she too studies economics. She came to Smart the same year as Neli. The youngest of them and of the team is "The Kid". She has just turned 17 but has been at Smart since she was 13.For her it was the only professional sport to play.

The group sits around the bench waiting for the coach. It is nothing unusual for him to be late as the girls say. "*The problem is that he has to bring the key to the locker and the balls for training otherwise we would start the practice by ourselves*".

Swearing loudly, Marta arrives. It seems that she hurt her ankle again getting off the bus straight into a ditch. She is 25, and she has played here since the club was founded. She has played for the National team a couple of times but in order to make a living she has to work as an unskilled laborer in a factory. After work she comes to the pitch. It takes her almost two hours to get from the factory to the practice spot. As she likes to say: "*…from one end of the bus line to the other… Comfortable because the seats are always free*". Her nickname is "Blacky". She is half African and without complaining says that her skin color made her life more difficult. She started to play football in the countryside where she was living with her grandparents and then, when she moved to Bucharest, in a park. She confesses that through football her life changed. She was abandoned at birth by her father, a Congolese student who came to Romania under Ceausescu's regime. In her grandparents' village she was often mistreated by the other kids. "*They called me gypsy for a while then they realized I was even darker than the gypsy. They called me monkey*". Thus, Marta bears a double stigma. For the white Romanians she represents the terrifying, monstrous "other". At the same time, she is not a fully Romanian, but a by product of an illegitimate intercourse. During the 70's having sexual relations outside the marriage

framework was severely morally demeaning, according to the official standards of the regime. The role of the family was to produce kinds for the emergent communist society, thus the State banned abortions from 1966 onwards (Kligman 1998). Through this lens, Marta is an unproductive member of the society, a child of the 1966 infamous decree.

When the coach finally arrives, all the girls hurry to change. "*We come here to play not to tell each other stories*", says Laura. The last to come is Marina, nicknamed the "*Model*". Her nickname is highly significant since it presents a double reading as her team mates explain. On one hand it refers to her physical appearance, but also designates her low performance on the field. Her father drives her to the pitch. She will graduate from high-school this summer. She has been playing for Smart for three years. However from autumn she will move to Spain and join her two older sisters. Her plan is to find a job, and with that money to enroll in a hair-styling school there.

The training starts with ten minutes of running, followed by a worm-up. From a car parked nearby, a sound of manele[3] music reaches the field. The Teacher shouts to the guy in the car to make it louder. The warm-up seems to be working better with the music. The girls stretch and then dance, weaving their hips to the oriental sounds. After warm up, the coach pulls out a sheet of paper with some new tactic schemes. He divides the girls into two teams and shouts out the guiding rules. When the new tactics are put to use, the match heats up. The Teacher shouts and swears at Juli because she does not pay attention to the ball. Andreea gets into a violent contact with Corina in front of the gate and the latter by accident kicks her in the head. The match stops for a couple of minutes while Andreea recovers from the blow. A part of the recovery is made up of constant swearing addressed to Corina. The game continues. Meanwhile

[3] Manele is a style of music, mixing together roma tradition and pop.

another violent contact takes place between Neli and Loredana. This time they both get told off by the coach and by the Teacher for not paying attention to each other and to the game.

The practice stops just after 8. It is almost dark outside. The girls retreat to the locker-room, a liminal, transitional space, where the young women withdraw from their role as women football players (see Goffman, 1959 for a concurrent analysis;), a role imbued with certain threatening potential for the patriarchal status quo and return to their "more suitable" roles of unskilled workers, high-school girls or students. Their identity is bracketed, put on hold in the space of the locker room. They are neither "footballers", a genderless position that nonetheless entails a male ideal referent, nor are they yet women who irrespective of the differences among them can be clustered together in the same highly disputable category of feminine sex. In less than half an hour their transformation is complete. The shower rinses away the visible trances of the transient footballer identity.

4.2. Football as a profession

4.2.1. Token football players

The concept of tokenism, first coined by Moss Kanter, functions in a paradoxical way in the case of women footballers. The most controversial aspect of the concept is the idea of visibility. On the one hand, in their off-pitch, everyday interaction, these young women do stand out as a very particular group of athletes, as a novelty. On the other hand, women's football as a field of sports as I have shown earlier is completely marginalized and rendered invisible. To

some extent women's football both in terms of the game itself and of the footballers can be better grasped through the paradoxical notion of the "*visible turned invisible*". They are visible because of what they do, meaning that they stand out as a challenge to the male model of footballer, but rendered invisible due to their marginality.

Women footballers do function as a token in the broader space of sports, where they are constantly reminded by the differences between their performance and that of the male footballers. My interviewees compare themselves and other women footballers in relation to male role-models. Moreover the players argue that the attributes of male football such as fame, celebrity and big money is the desired standard for women's football as well.

These ideas are also emphasized by the coach when he compares coaching women with that of men:

> The girls are more stubborn but they lack strength and speed, that's normal. Even worse is the fact that they get easily scared. I don't know what's with them. Instead of making a good pass, they just kick the ball to nowhere. Some of them are just slow minded.

Mr. Gigi denigrates the players' game on two levels, first by essentializing the physical differences between the sexes and then by placing men on a superior position both in terms of strength and mental attributes. The same essentializing view of the game and its demands seems to have been internalized by the players themselves. This idea can be traced in the argument Laura makes when she disapproves of mixed teams in football:

> Girls can develop in strength and in skills only to a certain level. For example, I think we would probably beat a team of 14 year old boys (a male junior team) but after 16-17 the boys develop so much more than us that we don't stand a chance.

Most of my interviewees faced or struggled against similar stereotypical judgments. As I showed in the previous section, Smart footballers started playing football in mixed informal

teams where they were designated as goalkeepers, a position perceived as having the lowest status. They had to prove their skills and prowess at the game before being allowed to take a more active role. Additionally, all my informants contend that part of being a woman footballer means that one has to become accustomed to a large variety of unpleasant comments or remarks ranging from sexually explicit jokes ("*I want to see how you exchange t-shirts at the end!*") to homophobic allusions ("*women footballers are not women but lesbians*") or simple stereotyped judgments about gender roles ("*women belong in the kitchen not on the pitch*").

As Neli points out, in some cases among the first actors to discipline the girls into their appropriate gender role is the family: "*My mom doesn't approve of me playing football. She tells me that I am a girl and that I have to learn how to cook and clean. I told her that I'll just marry a cook and then her problem will be solved.*"

Smart footballers experience thus, a paradoxical token position. They are subjected to schematic judgments, their performance is devalued by comparison to the male version of the game but, unlike the case that Moss Kanter analyzed, they are rendered invisible in the broader sports context.

4.2.2. Finances

In terms of income, none of the team members relies exclusively on the money football brings to them. In fact as Neli points out "*if I compare what I have to spend to what they give us, I think that I invest more money in football then what I get from Smart*". Thus, football at Smart appears to be rather a source of expenses then one of financial gains for the footballers. The idea of professionalism in sports usually referring to sportswomen/men who are paid for their

performance, is far from the case of Smart footballers. What makes them perceive themselves as professionals rather then amateurs is the institutional structure of their practices and matches (under RFF regulations) and not the financial rewards.

In stark contrast to the male version of this sport, the women footballers at Smart do not benefit from generous salaries or winning bonuses. An average first-league Romanian male football player, whose team is among the first six in the Romanian championship may have an annual salary of 100,000 to 150,000 Euros. The salaries drop considerably for the second and third league. However, even for these players, a monthly salary matching at least the minimum wage for the country (125 Euros per month) is within reach.

Even though generally speaking women's sports are less paid than their male versions, women athletes still receive, in different forms, a monthly pay that allows them to train under good conditions (to have the necessary amount of food and vitamins, not to be forced to work or to be able to take only part-time jobs). This is not the case at Smart where the footballers do not receive any monthly retribution as I was told both by the girls and by the coach. The only sums of money they receive are match bonuses (only when they win or tie a match) and a monthly pass for transportation. The story of the contract, to which I now turn, is illustrative of the precarious finances of Smart Bucuresti.

4.2.3 The Contract

Smart-Bucuresti has 20 team members registered for the season 2006/2007 at the Romanian Football Federation. In order to register its members and to take part in the internal championship, the club has to pay an annual fee per player. These costs are supported by the

owner of the club, Mr. Bibi. Furthermore, Bibi says he pays a monthly salary to the players. Most of the players, however, confirmed that this monthly payment is only a theoretical and rhetorical one, with no correspondence in reality.

Albeit there is a wide shared consensus among the players regarding the precarious financial conditions of the club, when it comes to pinpointing the causes of the situation, the girls split in two main groups. On one hand Corina and Juli believe that the current pitfalls in finances are caused by the larger disinterest of the public in the game itself, while Neli and Laura blame the poor managerial capacities and the unlawful schemes of the owner and of the couch.

All my interviewees brought into the discussion the subject of the salary contracts signed at the beginning of the season. In autumn 2006, almost all of the current players signed a contract with the team, a contract that bound them to exclusively play for Smart. In the contract (a copy of which I have seen) is stipulated a monthly payment of 100 RON (approximately 30 Euros) in addition to match bonuses. However none of the players ever received this amount of money. The sum of money written down was simply for bureaucratic purposes as Mr. Gigi, explains:

> I together with Mr. Bibi explained to the girls that there is simply no money to be given to them but they should sign the contract because this is what FRF asks of us. I told them that they should never raise any demands in regard to this money. If I were to tell you, the contracts help Mr. Bibi with his business. Maybe he cuts some of the taxes he has to pay to the state. Actually I don't know. He said the girls should sign and I told them so. Almost all signed.

This raises yet another dividing line between the members of the team. On the one hand, some of the players accept the explanation given by the coach saying that the contracts are "*something that had to be done*". They would have liked to have received that money but understand that their "*sport is simply not profitable*" (Marta). The idea of sport as business seems to prevail in this case and the demands of the market are being internalized by the players. On

the same side, Juli understands that the "*boss has a family and he invests in the team already too much in comparison to what he gets out of it*". However both players acknowledge that the sum written in the contract would have helped them to improve their game skills:

> I need a pair of shoes. I just started playing in official matches and I can't play in these shoes (cotton sneakers). I have to borrow from one of the girls whenever we have a match. I can't afford to buy cleats now. That money would have helped, in three months I could get a new pair, Juli confessed.

On the other hand, some of the players feel they have been used and tricked into signing this contract. They do not mind the fact they do not get paid but what is disturbing for them is that instead of recognition for their effort, they are used to the benefit of the owner.

> We understand that there is no money. We come to practice, we get by as we can. What is revolting is that somehow both the coach and the owner make money from our work. Who knows how he uses that money. Not to mention that sometimes we sign for match bonuses higher than what we get. What pisses me off is that they imagine that we are stupid, Neli bursts out.

The story of the contract might be interpreted as a mutual understanding between the coach and the owner, resembling "an old boy's network" where they protect each others' interests by taking advantage of the footballers. Apparently, the coach will receive his salary as long as complies with the owner's requirements, the owner will keep his position in the RFF executive committee, and he will also get some tax savings on behalf of the players. At the same time their mutual cover-up and their power position over the girls (because the girls are willing to play without pay) will perpetuate the economic difficulties these women experience. Thus, everybody benefits, except for the girls.

However, what I think is worth highlighting as stemming out of the story of the contract is that it clearly shows that Smarts' footballers do not play for money. It is rather the other way around – they invest money in their careers as footballers. Moreover, due to the fact that the

players do not get paid, most of them are forced to take up regular jobs. Often they come to trainings after an eight hour work day which, in turn, has an impact on their overall performance.

In spite of the financial difficulties, the footballers at Smart contend that playing football can become a career, a full-time job that is well paid and includes social-security benefits. As Neli explained, the career of a woman footballer can last until 40 or over, provided she keeps her physical form. She points to the example of Luminita, who is 38 and still playing for Smart. Neli identifies the main problem in devoting herself exclusively to football the fact that there are too few financial gains in the context of Romania. Neli, echoing the opinions of other footballers, says that abroad in countries where women's football is much better valued, women have the opportunity to spend all their active life on the pitch, from footballers to coaching. Thus, inevitably, the idea of football as a full time career only comes in the context of moving abroad. Consequently, women football as profession is not only envisaged in a undetermined future, but also located in a unbounded territoriality, euphemistically referred to as "abroad", "outside" or "there". Thus, women football not only that renders its players with an altered identity but also makes home an alterity: professional career is always away. This brings us to one of the main points of my argument: football as capital in the global market.

4.2.4. Women's football in the global economy

Globalization has infused the field of sport as Miller, Lawrence, Mackey and Rowe (1999) contend. Transnational sport organizations such as FIFA or IOC regulate and monitor sporting activities both in national and international tournaments. The increasing flow of capital from international corporations into sports creates sportsmen/women as brands such as, for example, David Beckam. International transfers in football are a common practice opening a new

market, where human bodies and their physicality are for sale, strikingly similar to prostitution (Pateman 1988).

This is not yet the case for Smart Bucuresti. However, the changes brought in sports by globalization have had an impact on the team as well. The footballers are constantly reminded that they are not a profitable business in comparison to other athletes, either men or women. Surrounded by sportspersons transformed into media stars, they feel disappointed by the lack of interest in their sport. Consequently the players consider that their sporting potential is not valued enough, neither by this specific team nor by the local Romanian context where women's football is underrated.

Most of the players say that "elsewhere" their skills and effort would mean more than a muddy pitch on the outskirts of Bucharest. They would like to receive a transfer offer to one of the many foreign clubs and devote their entire time to the game. At the same time they admit that this is more of a dream. In a time when globalization is linked to the melting together of centers and peripheries, the Smart football club is outside of the international circuit. As Neli points out, "*To get a transfer, we need an agent but no one is interested in us. How can we get there if there is no one to see us play?*"

Their solution is to migrate, a large scale phenomenon in Romania (Sandu 2006). Neli has set her plans: "*Good paid work is elsewhere. I go to another country, find a job quickly, then go to a local team and train. Maybe there I'll make it*". Corina has an aunt working in Italy and was considering joining her: "*there's nothing much I can do here. I'll try my luck in Italy as well. Who knows, maybe football or maybe just a better job*".

Surprisingly in this context, Marta is the only one who does not embrace migration as a real option for her future. She would leave Romania but only if she were to play football: "*I*

wouldn't go work somewhere else. I'm afraid. What is something bad happens to me? If I were to play football abroad I'd go. I mean that would be something sure, I'd have my salary, a place to stay and a doctor". The age difference might offer an explanation. Neli and Laura are 19, Marina 18 and Corina 21. Marta is 25 and even though she is one of the best players at Smart, she thinks she might be too old for foreign teams to be interested in her. In Romania, she will continue to work and play football hoping that in a couple of years this sport will become more popular and her revenues will increase. The image of the typical female migrant who moves to the First world countries in order to take over the household work of rich women professionals, so that could provide money for their impoverished families (Ehrenreich and Hochschild 2003) is thus in contradiction with the self-assertiveness and independence of my informants. Neli, Marina and Corina regard migration as a form of self-assertion and independence, that they actively embark upon in order to reach their full potential. I believe that their football playing at Smart should be interpreted in the same vein: instead of complying with the traditional gender roles of a transitional society, these girls try to engage their physical skills and professional potentials in a meaningful manner, attempting to earn money by doing what they like best. Paradoxically then, these women engage in football as much in the search for a career, but also for sheer pleasure in an inextricable fashion.

4.2.5. For the pleasure of the game, for the benefits of the career

One of the first questions I was asked when I introduced myself and my project to the team was: "*What's in it for us?*" Later on, I had the same question to pose with regard their commitment to football: what's in it for you?

The answers revolved around the idea of playing for pleasure. As they explained, for many of them, football represents a long-lasting fascination. It could be argued that, as in the case of basketball on urban playgrounds in the US (Sands 1999), women's football in Romania represents one of the last strongholds of non-commercial sport. In opposition to financial gains and fame, attributes of other professionalized sports, it could be argued that the footballers at Smart hold a higher esteem for values such as friendship, fair play, personal and group development. Juli, the newcomer, explained that at Smart the pressure on performance is much lower than in handball which makes the game more enjoyable. "*Everyone likes to win, that's true. But for example when you play for large winning bonuses as we did in handball the game is more offensive and dirty*". Huizinga (1998) believes that this is the salient nature of the game, of any game: sheer pleasure, no immediate gain, symbolic recognition and a lot of fun. The etymology of the word sport hints to its same gratuitous origins: sport was a cultural enterprise exceeding the material needs of the world.

This notwithstanding, the commitment to football has to be looked upon as a form of cultural capital. Following Bourdieu (1986), cultural capital encompasses a baggage of skills and experiences convertible into economic capital under particular circumstances or that can be institutionalized in the form of educational qualification. The case of Marina could be read in this vein. She agrees that she plays football for pleasure but at the same time, when considering her

future life in Spain she considers that football might bring her some additional income if she gets the chance to play. Neli and Laura, thinking of migrating themselves, feel that that they could use their football skills in order to make some extra money as well. For Marta the cultural capital gained through football skills counters the stigma of her skin color. From the unwanted black kid on the block, she became the girl who knows football.

For Laura and Neli, football is also a purposeful way of spending their free time. Moreover they emphasize that through football they have the opportunity to visit the country and meet new people: "*the part that I like most is when we have away games. It's like going to camp only better because we get to play football. By now we have friends in other teams as well, so before or after the match we sit around and talk"* says Laura. Thus, for the two in addition to the physical capital (Bourdieu 1986) they amass from football, they find in football a way of constructing a network of peers.

Corina, who has done athletics since she was 12, believes that sportswomen can't stop their sporting life. "*After 9 years of trainings each day I just couldn't stop suddenly. It makes my work life easier if know I have a practice to come to*". She considers her identity as sportswomen to prevail over her low status professional identity (supermarket cashier). Seemingly, and again paradoxically, the pitch is a way of escaping the realities of a low-paid job.

All in all, it seems plausible that the stakes of women's football might not be about money in its physical form as one might expect, but rather the accumulation of physical capital that can either be converted into money or be used to overcome a social marginal position, either ethnical or professional. After mapping the economical and professional realities of the women footballers at Smart, it is time to turn now to the broader societal context in which their activity

unfolds. The main emphasis will be placed on the male gaze and norms, since as I have highlighted in several occasions so far it has underpinned women football in all its stages.

4.3. Compulsory Heterosexuality and the male gaze

A recent study on Intergenerational Relations in Romania[4] draws a bleak conclusion. The younger generation (aged 17 to 25) is as conservative if not more as its parents. The study measured, among other issues, several gender-related dimensions that are worth mentioning in order to better determine the conservative gender hierarchy that characterizes contemporary Romania. The study shows that 80% of the young consider the nuclear family with children to be the best and most desirable family form. On the topic of same-sex relations, 56% of these young Romanians completely disagree with the existence of gay relations while only 3% express support.

4.3.1. Of Marriage and Football

Many feminist scholars have criticized the institution of family as the locus of women's oppression. Feminist scholars have pointed to the structural inequalities built into the marriage relationship. From financial dependency of women on their husbands, to the compulsory second shift (Hochschild 1989; Brannen 1987), from mothering and its emotional and educational work (Ann Oakley 1980) to domestic violence (Bograd 1988), all accounts stress the oppressive nature

[4] Intergenerational Relations in Romania, study undertaken by the National Institute of Educational Sciences, published on www.hotnews.ro on March, 22nd 2007. The study was conducted throughout 2006, taking into account the opinions of 3 different age groups: the young (659 interviewees aged 17 to 25), adults (463 interviewees aged 35 to 55) and the elderly (357 interviewees aged 65 and over).

of marriage. In spite of these many ills depicted by scholars, many of the football players I interviewed considered marriage as an inevitable and desirable near future plan. Violeta's story that introduced this paper already offered a taste of this issue. Her story is also highly palatable for the players at Smart.

At the time of my research, none of the players was married, but in their gatherings the subject of marriage and love relationships is on top of the discussion list. Many of the footballers consider that football is incompatible with marriage. The way they present married life is in terms of duties and responsibilities for household work. My informants take for granted the double shift (Hochschild 1989) of work for pay and house chores, viewing it as a natural fact in the life of any married woman. This could be interpreted in light of the historical legacy of state-socialism, where the double shift was an inescapable reality of the full employment economic system (Kilgman 1998; Miroiu 2004; Hersenyi 1992). Moreover some of the players stress the fact that even if football would become a source of income and thus there would be no necessity for an additional job, the status of footballer will still be incompatible with that of a married woman. As Juli puts it "*football is simply too masculine an occupation for a married woman*". This view speaks of the rigidity of gender roles encompassed by the concept of marriage in the Romanian environment. At the same time it shows that the players have internalized the demands of society and thus they are willing to undertake their prescribed role in the gender hierarchy.

In spite of this rather grim view of married life, all of the footballers see marriage as inevitable, in keeping with the larger societal trend. It is hard to discern whether they want to get married or not, but their emphasis is on *necessity*. Some players, those who are already working, say that they face an intense family pressure to get married which consequently will bring their

careers as football players to an end. Some state that they use football as pretext to postpone getting married, thus resisting family and societal pressure of normative gender roles.

Another point addressed during my interviews is that of the difficulty faced in finding suitable partners capable of understanding and supporting their endeavor in football. The players agree that a more suitable partner should be a sportsman himself who would therefore be more understanding of the demands of a sporting lifestyle such as intense, regular practices and regular traveling for away games.

Another difficulty in finding a partner, as my informants confirm, is the fact that their sport is perceived to be unfeminine. The case of Marina is rather telling of the gender stereotypes that these women are faced with. Marina stopped coming to practices for several month because her then boyfriend forbid her to come and threatened to abandon her in case she did not comply. In many respects, Marina shares her ex-boyfriend's view: "*it is not wrong to play football but it's true that this sport is unfeminine and guys don't like than in a girl*". Marina's words are also telling of the way women themselves participate in the process of upholding the gender roles, thus fostering the male gaze and sexual definitions, just as much they trouble them through practicing this sport.

Furthermore, as the Teacher emphasized: "*Men think that only they can play football and if a woman does it, there has to be something wrong with her*". Football is intimately connected with masculinity, and in the Romanian context where football is perceived to be the national sport, it is one of the icons of "hegemonic masculinity". As Connell (1995) pointed out, hegemonic masculinity is a set of ideal masculine attributes, which are context bound. These attributes impose themselves through processes of exclusion and domination both of other forms of competing masculinities and of femininity models. In this sense, men's football as an icon of

hegemonic masculinity, is bound to exclude women from taking part in the game. The silence or rather the reluctance to articulate what the "wrong thing" is, might be interpreted following Sedgwick (1990) that this secrecy alludes to the transgressive act of homosexuality/lesbianism.

Taking up one of the stronghold of hegemonic masculinity, women footballers are always under suspicion of homosexuality, a difficult identity if not a stigma given the homophobic environment. In the same line of thought, the stress on the idea of "necessity" in getting married expressed by the footballers is in fact the needed proof of their heterosexuality in the homophobic context of contemporary Romania. The women footballers seem to be trapped between two mutually exclusive choices: getting married and thus complying with the heteronormative imperative and renouncing football; or continuing to play football and thus disrupting the gender roles and traditional sexual identities, at the price of being outcaste as Other.

4.3.2. The meanings of lesbian

As I found out from my first days at the pitch, among the players at Smart there is a very distinct group, usually referred to as "*the lesbians*". The three members Neli, Laura and The Kid have a particular status among the other footballers. As I have shown before, Neli and Laura are the only two team members to be continuing their higher education outside of the field of sports. Moreover all three girls come from more affluent families in comparison with the other players, which was evident from their brand-named clothes and sneakers and from the places where they went out, i.e. more expensive bars and discos. At the same time they are still financed by their families, thus not forced to work for a living. Moreover, Laura and Neli knew each other before

coming to Smart some three years ago, and quickly befriended "the Kid". The three girls come to practices almost always together and engage minimally in conversation with other players.

In this context the term "lesbian" has a meaning that goes beyond the sexual preference of the three girls. The label "lesbian" is a marker of difference; its meaning is rather that of outcast, of not being totally assimilated, of not having the "real" habitus of a Smart footballer. Moreover, I think another interpretation can be given: the term "lesbian" might express a class difference. Those girls marked as lesbians come from a different, though not total, social strata, with a better financial condition and more optimistic holds for the future, then the rest of the team members. Thus, women in the team are divided not only along the normative heterosexual lines of the male gaze, but also along class lines. The two combine together in creating "official" identities and "inferior" Others.

However, the label is not used out loud on the pitch like the nickname of Marta (she is called Blacky) or that of Marina (called the Model) but only in the off-pitch gatherings such as the locker-room or the bench before or after the practices. The rule of heterosexuality dominates over the pitch, a space of homosocial relations, or more bluntly a space of male-like bounding.

The three players in question have internalized this term themselves because it makes them distinct from the others. As they explained "*we have shorter hair and we do not wear make up. This doesn't make us lesbians but if they want to call us like this that's fine. It is obvious that we are different"*. During one of our outings following a football match, the three "lesbians" explained further the source of their "difference" in that they occasionally drink alcohol and smoke, a behavior which is seen as undesirable by the other team members and by the coach. In this particular context then it seems that the term lesbian does not refer only to sexual preference

but rather to a different understanding of what it means to be a footballer and what the appropriate behavior should be.

The alleged sexuality of this small group has had a serious impact on their career as footballers. The coach has banned them from playing as line-up players until the end of the season. The three girls believe that the reason for this decision is connected to their presumable sexual orientation. Even though they do not use the term discrimination, they find their ban as an unjustified treatment that does not reflect their professional skills and effort. The fact that the girls interpreted coach's decision as a punishment for a transgressive sexuality instead of taking for granted the explanation given by the coach, is quite telling of the heterosexual imperative in the team. Put more directly, if there are women who take up masculine occupations, the first step in challenging gender roles, their sexuality should be policed so they do not commit a more dangerous, total transgression, that of homosexuality.

When I interviewed the coach the issue of lesbianism came up quite quickly. Because he still thought I was a psychologist, he looked for additional scientific explanations on my behalf. He complained that at Smart there is a deviant group (naming the "lesbians") and that he resented their presence and disapproved of their sexuality. He expressed his concern that this group might potentially influence the other players as well. He then stated that the lesbian phenomenon is widespread in women's football in Romania. He associates lesbianism with mental illness and with other behaviors that he considers inappropriate in sport such as alcohol use and smoking. He then further emphasized the lower mental capabilities of women footballers in comparison with their male counterparts and pointed to lesbianism as one of the causes of the poor performances of the Romanian women's team in international competitions. Gigi then stressed that one of his role as a coach is to encourage the players to have boyfriends or to marry.

It seems that from the way he understands his power position, his role is that of a patriarchal father figure safeguarding femininity and gender appropriate behavior. It looks as if women can play football but there has to be a man to make sure that patriarchy and heteronormativity are kept safe. At Smart, but also in the larger framework of Romanian society, compulsory heterosexuality (Rich 1980) is the main institution that regulates gender roles. Compulsory heterosexuality, as other hegemonic ideas, functions as an ideology that interpellates the individuals and by violence alike. Heterosexuality comes to be perceived as the only sexual preference to be natural because of its mechanisms of imposition that erase from history and from the collective memory of societies, not only lesbian existence but a large variety of alternative sexualities.

Compulsory heterosexuality makes use of violence as a main instrument of disposing of deviant and unruly subjects. In the case of Smart, the lesbian group was taken off the pitch where compulsory heterosexuality must rule. But alternative sexuality, like lesbianism, is a danger not only to the official heteronormativity and embedded gender roles and norms, but also hints to the predominant ideas regarding the normative body of the sportswomen. Technologies of the athletic body must render not only a productive subject in terms of sporting skills, but also a productive one in terms of sexuality. To this inextricable interplay I turn my attention in the following section.

4.4. Technologies of the female body

Until recently as Dyer (1992) notes that muscles have been traditionally understood as symbolic of male power: "the muscle in itself is highly gendered, the embodiment of a discourse which states that to be an adult male is distinctly to occupy space, to have a physical presence in the world" (p. 24). However, as Bordo (1997) observed the duality between male muscularity and female frailty has become more nuanced. Competing representations of muscular women that Bordo (1997) connects with the accession of women in sphere dominated by men have become a part of every day representations.

The body of women footballers is a similar locus where feminine exigencies and masculine norms collide and overlap. Their athletic body is measured up against the model of the male athletic body. Mr. Gigi has very precise ideas about who the body of his players should look like: "*The best bodies should have small breasts, wide shoulders, short legs and wide hips for stability*".

Bartky (1988) argues that the ideal feminine body subject is constructed through disciplinary practices. The technologies of femininity are taken up and practiced by women against the background of a pervasive sense of bodily deficiencies. Bartky's project emphasizing disciplinary processes refers to techniques through which women are constructed as feminine subjects. In the case of Smart, women footballers, take up disciplinary practices against their bodily inscribed femininity. During my time with Smart, one of the most shocking experiences for me was to see how the Teacher tied up her breasts with a strap of elastic cloth, upon which she added two training bras. As she explains, "*big breasts take up your speed*". The Teacher distorts the body part most associated to femininity and with female sexuality in order to become

a better player. The temporary mutilation of breasts is an acknowledgement that women's bodies are not the right bodies with which to play football.

Another technique to control the feminine body in the benefit of athletic performance is connected to menstruation. Neli argues that one of the most difficult things of being a woman and a footballer is to menstruate. She then stresses that her performance clearly declines during "those days". Marta also talks about the shame associated with this phenomenon. She is afraid that something embarrassing might happen on the pitch. Additionally some of the players, mostly with previous background in professional sport, take either particular drugs (Vitamine K or birth control pills administered in overdose) in order to delay their menstruation before important matches. As Schneider (2000) notes the lack or irregular menses is a common feature in the life of professional athletes. However, most scholars identify different distinct causes ranging from lack of body fat, intense physical effort to administration of steroids. None of these studies however shows that reducing menses is a choice women make with the help of modern medicine. Neli, The Teacher, Laura and Marta, who deliberately delay their periods, interpret menstruation as a sign of malfunction or of disability in the context of athletic life that can be remedied with the help of modern medicine.

A series of international bodies such as UEFA, FIFA and IOC are in charge of standardizing the game and reinforcing the rules. The same three international decision-making bodies, male dominated as one can already guess, have drawn the rules by which women's football matches are to be played. Moreover, the Manual provided by UEFA on women's football, mentions not only the technical rules of the game but it also contains detailed information on how to prepare an international tournament in terms of housing, food and transport. At a national level, the RFF is the decision making body that regulates women's

football competition and quite telling it does not have any women in its decision board. The only rule that is different from male football is the fact that women teams are allowed five changes per match instead of three as men do.

As characterized by Foucault, the modern type of power entails mechanisms such as organization, calculation, documentation, supervision and examination. Looking at Smart, these mechanisms can be easily discerned. Leaving aside the precise rules that govern football matches, the rules of the practices although less formally articulated are nonetheless present. The first rule that dominates the practice is that from the moment the players have stepped on the pitch they should not stop moving. In between different exercises or in case they are too tired to take part in an exercise they do stretching exercises. This rule is part of the habitus of a footballer at Smart. It does not come from the coach, or from any of the players. On the contrary, as the coach states, he sometimes tells certain players to stop if the practice is too intense but the players do not comply. The players themselves cannot tell from where they know or who established this rule. Some consider that if they stop moving while on the pitch they will not be able to catch up with the rest. Others like Marta, one of the players who spend most of the time stretching because she is tired from work says that if they stop they will give a bad example to the rest of the team and the practice will be ruined. It seems that the idea of diffusion of behavior is widely acknowledged.

At some practices, usually those in the week before official matches, the coach presents the tactical plan for the fallowing match. The details presented there include information on the best players from the opposing team, persons in charge of marking them, the component of the line-up and the strategy for the game. The coach together with the inputs from players who have taken part in matches against the opposing team, debate what tactical schemes are most suitable

either for defense for attack. At this meeting they also establish the persons to be performing free-kicks and corner-strikes.

The disciplinary mechanisms Foucault analyzed are most visible when the coach decides who should be in the starting line-up. In order to legitimize his choices, the coach ranks and evaluates the players in the form of charts and percentages that take into account their last performance on the pitch at official matches as well as their work during practices. The charts are formed of six indices: talent, team spirit, sporting lifestyle, physical shape, acceptance by the team and practice attendance. Even though these charts and percentage evaluations seem highly scientific and objective, the indices that are presented seem to be highly arbitrary and hard to measure. I asked the coach about the method he employs to measure or evaluate these indices. He explained to me that some of the indices are taken from a professional guide for coaches and some are what he thought to be important but missing from the guide. He evaluates each player after each match and also on weekly basis according to their performance at practices. Gigi mainly does the evaluation based on "*his intuition and experience*".

Gigi says he believes in laissez faire: he is not as strict at practices as other coaches, he listens to what the girls have to say and most importantly his aim in official matches is to let as many girls to play as he can. By contrast, almost all players complain about his style of conducting practices. Most players say that the coach is not strict enough during practices, meaning that they consider more intense practices to be the optimal way of learning more and improving their skills. The footballers I interviewed acknowledge that the method through which the coach selects the title players is valid and rigorous however they disapprove with the manner in which the coach conducts the matches, meaning that he uses all the five changes allowed in order for more players to participate and consider this tactic as detrimental for the team. Marina,

who is usually a substitute, says that she would rather not enter the pitch if some other player could do a better job. She is willing to give up her own pleasure for the benefit of the team.

The limited financial resources of the team already discussed, take their toll on the body of the players, as well. Most of my interviewees acknowledged the fact that they cannot afford going to the gym in order to shape the body according to the norms of the game, nor follow the dietary regime prescribed by Gigi. But most importantly however, is their vulnerability to serious injuries. Juli had already experienced a serious injury that halted her career as a handball player. She stresses that the major limit in pursuing a sport career are major injuries that cannot be fixed because they are expensive. Marta also agrees that a serious injury will trigger immediate retiring since "the owner has no interest in paying money for expensive surgeries, so if I something serious happens, then I'll be off the pitch for good".

The technologies of rendering the female body as an athletic one in keeping with the dominant masculine prototype are certainly employed at Smart, similarly to any other team. Their success can be assessed by the degree to which players themselves have fully internalized the procedures and the reformist discourse. Nonetheless, the full implementation and full success of these techniques are limited by the absence of a powerful financial infrastructure to support them. Thus, on the "imperfect", "unfinished" athletic body of the footballers at Smart is superimposed a "self-mutilated body", like in the case of the Teacher. Consequently, not only that women football players are caught between the normative sexuality of the male gaze and the subversive one granted by their sportive roles, but also caught in-between the normative athletic body and the imperfect self-mutilated one.

The purpose of this chapter was to investigate the dynamics at play in women entering football playing. I structured my analysis on three intermingling aspects that cannot be

considered but together: work, sports and sexuality and body issues. Throughout this part of the paper I pinpointed to the precarious financial state in which these women play, thus dismissing a too causal relationship between playing football and financial reword. Nonetheless, I suggested that one good reason for entering this particular and marginal field of sports is the potential physical capital women can acquire which can be subsequently transformed into economic capital on the global market. Thus, the pleasure of the game itself appears underpinned by an envisagement of a possible future financial reward. Moreover, this chapter examined the gender troubling potential of women football. Emerged and practiced under the heternormative male gaze, women footballers are usually perceived as potential threats to the hegemonic masculinity (Connell 1995). Thus, a series of authorities concur to police their roles in order not to become to masculine, thus leading to a blurring of rigid sexual identity lines. However, at a closer look, I noted that most of the players themselves internalized the male gaze and fear that they will become too masculine by engaging too seriously with this game. Moreover, the internalized male norms were strongly present when women themselves label those perceived as deviant with the term “lesbian” thus hinting to a morally degrading position. The section on body unveiled some of the technologies of the individual that are at play in structuring the women footballer athletic body. Here too, men appear in charge with rendering women disciplined subjects of the sport, by defining the criteria of a “good” body, in strict relations with male-derived norms. The ticklish issue of injuries pointed to the limits of these technologies, with lead to self-mutilating practices on behalf of the players, while hinting again to financial issues. Thus, the circle was closed.

5. Conclusion

The purpose of this paper was to explore the motives for which women take up professional football, a marginal sport in Romania. This guiding question proved to be a good staring point for understanding how women cope with male dominance and its numerous instances in the particular field of sports. Further more this current research was not intended to offer clear-cut or straight forward answers. My intention was rather to sketch some fragmentary stories, some possible explanations for a wide variety of issues that cannot be disentangled from one another (work, sport, gender, sexuality and the body).

In order to be able to pursue the analysis of Smart Bucuresti, the paper was structured on two interrelated parts. The first one investigates the historical background under which Romanian women's football was established and its development from the state-socialist context where it served a precise ideological purpose to the post socialist context where it now serves economic related purposes. The salient feature of women's football however remains the same throughout the several decades, namely that of being a sport embedded by male norms and domination. Another feature of women's football, which has survived for more than 20 years now, is the reification of women footballers into sexual objects while on the pitch.

The second part of the paper is dedicated to the case study of women footballers at Smart Bucuresti. I start out by pointing to the specific nature of being a professional footballer at Smart. The financial rewards are minimal, consequently, most of the players invest their time and energy at practices in order to acquire football skills convertible in a better life across the boarders. Further on I explore the concept of *tokenism* in this particular context and point to its limits.

The narratives of the women footballers provide grounds to grasp the interplay between the gendered nature of sport in general and football in particular and the heteronormativity embedded in a conservative, patriarchal society and its outcomes for the lives and careers of my informants. Furthermore gendered hierarchies inscribed in sport, become embodied through disciplining techniques, in the individual bodies of the players. Thus, through self-surveillance, women footballers, develop or alter their bodies in order to match the male ideal athletic body.

Moreover, the players "stories" reflect a multitude of view points, each developing individual strategies in coping with the male gaze, a term I use in order to point to the mechanisms of patriarchy at play in this context.

I believe that my current research is limited by several factors. From a methodological point of view the limits are obvious and reside in the limited amount of time that I conducted my fieldwork. Another limit derives from my complex position of an outsider, of a non-player, of a student in a foreign country, of a more privileged person in comparison to my informants.

Engaging in research on women and sports, most particularly on women footballers from a multifaceted viewpoint proved to offer a more complex, although far from complete, of what it means to be a *professional* woman footballer and a *woman* footballer in today's Romania. Further issues to be addressed in women and sports could revolve around the analysis of the male gaze and its role in creating women's athletic bodies. Another line of research that this paper did not specifically addressed is the relationship between gendered spaces and its outcome in the construction of specific subject position in women's sport.

A distinct line of research should deepen the analysis of the technologies that construct women's athletic bodies by bringing together a wider range of discourses that this paper covered form which to discern the political mechanisms at play in the making of such bodies.

This paper started out seeking for an answer to Violeta's story. However, it seems that her story might not be an exception but rather the rule for women footballers. What would then be an appropriate answer to the similar stories to come?

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