Global Campus Europe

UNIVERSITY OF VIENNA

European Master's Degree in Human Rights and Democratisation
A.Y. 2018/2019

Tackling the patriarchy:

The football pitch as a transformative field for girls and women

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Abstract

The aim of this thesis is to investigate the transformative power of football for women and girls. It will first conceptualise football as a space for male hegemony and power, and hence of interest to feminists. This dissertation will expand upon the history of women's football as a space of gendered discrimination, to the extent that this is still visible today. It will find that when girls and women play football there is extensive stereotyping deriving from social constructions determining gendered behaviour. It will find that precisely because of this male hegemony, football becomes a space for 'empowerment' or change for women. This thesis will subsequently draw upon empowerment theories as put forward by prominent feminist scholars within development. These theories will be extensively applied to the case study of this thesis, a grassroots girls' football team based in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was founded to raise gender awareness within a patriarchal society. It will be argued that football can be a useful tool for transformative change for girls and women on a personal and relational level even though there is remaining structural bias impeding social change.

Acknowledgements

First and foremost, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Christina Binder and Marion Guerrero for supporting the idea of this thesis, perhaps somewhat unconventional within the human rights field, and their feedback.

A special thank you goes out to my friends and family who have been extremely helpful coming up with new suggestions and for their thorough proofreading.

The transformative power of football for girls and women would never have occurred to me if it wouldn't have been for the grassroots team of my heart, Bend it like Peckham.

I would like to thank some wonderful people in Sarajevo, those who helped me out on the field, such as Benjamin and Alex of the FairPlay team, and Igor, who was kind enough to translate and answer never-ending additional questions.

Most of all, I would like to thank Daliborka Nicolic, who was brave enough to start a girls' football team against all the odds, and is fighting the patriarchy every day. A special thanks also goes out to Mirha, Amina and Đejna. Their replies made me laugh and cry. I hope they never stop kicking ball. Hvala.

Table of abbreviations

FA	Football Association
FFF	French Football Federation
FIFA	Fédération Internationale de Football Association
FIFPro	Fédération Internationale des Associations de Footballeurs Professionnels
LGBTQ	Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SDP	Sport for Development and Peace
UEFA	Union of European Football Associations
UK	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland
UN	United Nations
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
US	United States of America

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“The controlling body of the FA are a hundred years behind the times and their action is purely sex prejudice.”

- Mrs Boultwood, captain of Plymouth ladies, 1921

(qtd. in Williamson 71)

“People would give me the looks and ask me why, among all sports, football was my choice. I usually tell them ‘why not’? Women love football too.”

- Mirha, goalkeeper of Nova Žena, Sarajevo, 2019

(personal interview)

1. Introduction

“Look, Son, Maybe Men Just Aren’t Built to Play Soccer”, was the title of a recent *New Yorker* article. It was satire, of course, but the message was spot on. Replace ‘son’ with ‘daughter’ and ‘men’ with ‘women’ and this is the reality of many girls and women globally wanting to kick a ball around.

Football – soccer for the Americans - is today’s most universally known, watched and practised sport. It attracts millions of participants and fans who are interested in the game, playing a crucial role in the lives of many people globally. In many societies, football is intrinsic to the construction of social identities and a fundamental part of public life (Giulianotti and Robertson 4). It can unite and divide nations. A highly emotional game, it can bring relentless joy and sadness. It can offer relief and hope in difficult times. In fact, it is hard to think of anything else as universally powerful as football. Trivial and accessible, it speaks to the imagination of millions worldwide.

Unfortunately, football is also the epitome of gender discrimination. As a society, we somehow assume that football is just not the game played by girls and women. Those women who do transgress those norms are usually discriminated against, disrespected or simply laughed at. In many situations, these are daunting obstacles for girls and women wanting to participate in the game, often putting them off completely. In other cases, girls and women are not even allowed or able to play at all.

Why it is that football is off-limits for girls and women? Why is that girls and women playing are still considered a special case? How come female players are at the margins of the game, while all you need is a ball and a space to kick it? These are puzzles which many authors have attempted to unravel and address in the past, but many questions remain unanswered.

This thesis by no means will serve to be a solution to all these complexities, but rather, the focus of this work will be on how football has become a space for feminist resistance. As Martha Saavedra writes, “sport can be a powerful, and potentially a radical and transformative tool in empowering girls and women and effecting gender norms and relations through a society” (124). Indeed, if the name of Megan Rapinoe rings a bell, it is probably

more because of the player being an outspoken advocate for equality and taking on United States (US) president Donald Trump than because of her football skills.

Therefore, this work will aim to demonstrate that by taking the pitch, girls and women can challenge existing gender norms. Firstly, this thesis will argue that by playing football, girls and women can become ‘empowered’. In other words, how does football instigate transformational change for girls and women on a personal level. Secondly, this thesis will attempt to take a holistic approach by assessing whether girls and women manage to transform their relational context, and in a wider sense, their communities by playing football.

For this purpose, this work will rely on the findings of a case study concerning the girls’ team, Nova Žena, which was founded to raise awareness for gender equality. Based in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, the team is an example of how women and girls are attempting to transgress the boundaries within a patriarchal society by playing football. Through taking a qualitative approach, interviews were held with team members on how football has brought about change for themselves and impacted their environment.

However, before analysing the empirical data, it is necessary to frame the history and the context of women playing football. Therefore, in the first chapter, sport as a gendered institution will be conceptualised, drawing upon the definition of a male hegemony. As a general rule, sport is divided on the basis of sex and football is a prime example of this dichotomy. Subsequently, the tumultuous history of women’s football will be discussed and, as will be demonstrated, it is one that is marked by exclusion and marginalisation.

Parallels will then be drawn with the situation of the women’s game today, which is still marked by gender bias sustaining women playing as ‘the other’. This furthermore results in stereotyping and stigma, much of which is related to the ‘body’ and the cultural expectations of women, in other words, what they should or shouldn’t do. The Women’s World Cup of 2019 has been a wonderful occasion to illustrate some of these arguments with concrete examples.

Some of these cultural norms have continuously been tackled by women playing. Therefore, the subsequent chapter will look at how a new kind of athlete is being created: one that is

more activistic and not afraid to speak out. The link between football and social change will subsequently be explored. This includes the role of the sport in civil society, as harnessed by institutions such as the United Nations (UN) and developmental organisations who are tapping into the world of football to pursue diverse human right goals.

Yet, although a lot has been written on the power of football, there continues to be a gap in existing literature and knowledge examining the experiences of those at the receiving end (Jeanes and Magee 134). Therefore, this thesis will focus on the experiences of girls playing football, rather than analysing the organisational structure. This work will seek to demonstrate the transformative aspect of football by applying 'empowerment' theories, a popular concept within feminism.

However, as this dissertation will show, words can be powerful and tricky, and 'empowerment' has been employed in too many contexts with the risk of losing its transformative edge. While still a useful tool for pursuing social change, caution should therefore be taken when using the concept of 'empowerment'. Nonetheless, empowerment still serves the purpose of assessing aspects of change for Nova Žena team members. Different models of empowerment, as put forward by scholars such as Naila Kabeer and Jo Rowlands, will be particularly useful when analysing the interviews.

Finally, it is important to underline that even though football is a universal game, the importance of local contexts should never be underestimated. For instance, the situation of a local grassroots team Nova Žena is inherently different from a professional women's team in France, or even a club within Bosnia. Therefore, this thesis' aim is by no means to generalise the challenges of women playing football, as they much depend on the local setting.

Ultimately, it should be mentioned that for the purpose of clarity, this thesis will utilise the term 'football' rather than 'soccer'.

2. Mapping the playing field

This chapter serves to contextualise the world of sports, and in particular, the world of football. Therefore, it will start with a broad overview on the gendered nature of sports and it will introduce concepts such as the 'male hegemony'. This will be followed by a discussion of historical gendered discrimination on and off the pitch. Ultimately, it will assess the ongoing inequalities that consist within football by giving contemporary examples.

2.1. A conceptual framework of sport as a gendered institution

Sport has always been a space for gender segregation. In ancient Greece, gender separation was already a common practice and women's physical activities were limited compared to men's. Concerns about women exercising manifested themselves as potentially harmful to their reproductive system throughout the Victorian era in the mid-19th century, with doctors warning of a possible loss of 'sexual control' until women finally started participating in the 20th century (Kelly 34).

The field of sports, especially competitive sports, is one of the social institutions where strict sex, and gender, segregation is dominant. Because of biological differences, men and women don't compete against each other in most fields. These gendered processes are extremely apparent in football, where individuals must present themselves as male or females and a dichotomy of gender has existed ever since. As Saavedra writes, sport is "bounded by sex and sexuality – often exclusively male or female, masculine or feminine" (125).

People make sense of sport based on what is suitable and acceptable for males, and what is suitable and acceptable for females (Hargreaves, *Sporting*). For example, gymnastics or netball are sports that are acceptable for women whereas aggressive contact sports, such as football, are acceptable for males. Therefore, for feminists, sport sites are a contested space as "sport is seen and is part of our social space, which is one composed in the production and use of material space, the representation or abstractions of space, and the lived experiences of those who are in those space" (Lefebvre quoted in Willson et al. 4).

Feminists have mainly been occupied with power, which, as Joan Scott says, is only logical as “gender is a primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated” (Scott in Allen 21). According to French philosopher Foucault, the notion of power is fluid, relational and exists only in the everyday relationships of people, both individually and in institutions. Foucault believes it is kind of power that can lead to repressive practises, actions and discourse which are expressed in disciplined bodies, actions and thoughts or discourses. However, Foucault also recognises that relations of power inspire resistance as well (Parpart et al. 6).

Raewyn Connell has published various studies on hegemonic masculinity and defines it as the existing gender practice which is the embodiment of the currently accepted answer to the problem of the legitimation of patriarchy, which safeguards the dominant position of men and the subordination of women (Masculinities, 77). Essentially, the concept of hegemonic masculinity denotes when a group of men have normative power over a group of other men, or ideologically subordinated women. Connell has also proposed that in societal institutions, there is not simply masculinity and femininity, but "a historically constructed pattern of power relations between men and women and definitions of femininity and masculinity" (98-99).

Jones points out that there is a difference between internal and external hegemonies, with the former one being the hierarchy of power among men, for example the relationship between the football authorities and fans. The latter hegemony is “the institutionalisation of men’s dominance over women,” thereby sustaining the current gender order (Connell & Messerschmidt and Demetriou qtd. in Jones 518).

The idea of social institutions has been conceptualised by feminist writer Judith Lorber, who defined it as how individuals experience gender as a social institution and how they organise their lives, thus they are societally constructed:

> The social reproduction of gender in individuals reproduces the gendered societal structure; as individuals act out gender norms and expectations in face-to-face interaction, they are constructing gendered systems of dominance and power. Gender has changed in the past and will change in the future, but without deliberate

> restructuring it will not necessarily change in the direction of greater equality between women and men. (Lorber, Paradoxes 6)

For feminists, what sustains gender inequality is this male hegemony, in other words, men's dominance in values, knowledge, culture and politics because they have patriarchal privileges (Lorber, Gender 216). This furthermore legitimises and perpetuates heteronormativity and the negative stereotyping of women in sport. Heteronormativity is central to the construction of Western sports cultures and trivialises those who don't fit the norm (Hill 2).

According to Connell and Messerschmidt, hegemony is not a space of complete control but finds itself on a balance of forces, which are supported by social, structural and organisational factors. In sports, the concept has been deployed to understand the popularity of body contact confrontational sports and a symbol for masculinity (Connell and Messerschmidt 833). Deducting from this, the historical construction of the gender order is a dynamic process where multiple hegemonies shift and reconfigure over time and place, one in a constant state of change albeit these changes to the order only occur slowly (Shakib and Dunbar). Feminists therefore tend to reflect on wider social relations and treat women and girls as the 'other' in relation to the hegemonic masculinities.

The power relations in sports favours the hegemonic norm of men as leaders and public whereas many women were kept in the private sphere, physically and visually. "Sport was invented by men and for men in accordance with men's social institutions and physical abilities. Women were accepted into the various sport cultures only slowly and reluctantly" (Pfister and Bandy 224). Indeed, especially in male flag-carrier sports like football, the norms of male hegemony are upheld. Sports, and football, is a field where power plays out and is thus of concern to feminists wanting to disrupt this power.

French sociologist Bourdieu has described the process of the habitus, which are patterns of behaviour created over time, not just recreated by group, but through an interplay between individuals and group structures which then creates a world view to guide individuals to that appropriate behaviour accordingly (Harper and Marcus 191). Football in particular can be considered a 'social field' that provide opportunities for men, the players and the fans, to stage their 'serious games' and to gain visibility as well as economic, social and cultural status (Pfister and Bandy 225).

Sports, such as football, provide for this male dominance by linking maleness with highly valued physical skills, thus positioning men as superior to women. It has been a prime example of a manifestation of male power in sports and is therefore a field relevant to feminist theories and research. The masculine hegemony is maintained through men defining sport as male, controlling women's sport directly, and ignoring, trivialising and sexualising women's sport, strengthening male solidarity (Bryson in Welford, What's 80). Football as a game provides a stage wherein male attributes and behaviours, such as athleticism, aggressiveness and strength are demonstrated and rewarded. In other words, it is a space where men can act like 'real men' and where they are identified as heroes (Pfister, The Future 93).

The consistent exclusion of women throughout the game, as will be discussed in the next subchapter, should be acknowledged to understand the prevalence of dominant masculinities and the struggle of women to challenge these hierarchies within the world of football.

2.2. Female footballers as the 'other'

Football is still a gendered space and one where women have experienced historical and ongoing marginalisation and exclusion. Caudwell, drawing inspiration from feminist writer Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex* described how, in sociocultural processes such as football, women are played as the 'other' as "in such a binary, one group as dominant as they secure more power than 'the other'"(Caudwell 333). Women playing football are the aberration of the norm and are thus othered.

Harper and Marcus have studied extensively the meaning of norms, which they defined as "the widely accepted informal social rules that govern behaviour – are simply one set of many in every society where gender discrimination often serves as a potent force against the *capability development* of adolescent girls" (Harper and Marcus 23). In other words, it curbs the potential of girls to live the lives girls and women want and achieve value through ways of 'being' and 'doing'. "Each norm that serves to restrict girls' capability development is held in place by complicit acceptance – and repeated enacting – of practices and behaviours" (Harper and Marcus 23).

Even though their work focuses mostly on adolescent girls, these statements can also be assigned in some cases to adult women. This chapter will attempt to analyse the history of exclusion of women and girls playing football until today.

2.2.1. ‘Unsuitable for females’: a history of gendered discrimination

That women in football have been discriminated upon throughout history might be an understatement. Football was ‘invented’ by men for men at the beginning of the 19th century as Bourdieu once noted (Pfister, *Assessing* 564). From the start, “football offered the opportunity to gain and demonstrate hegemonic masculinity and male superiority, on the football field and in stands for spectators” (Marschik qtd. in Pfister, *Assessing* 564). Women were considered outsiders of the game and, as will be discussed next, it was only at the end of the 20th century that women’s football was formally accepted by institutions.

Even though a lot of studies have been published about football, it is hard to pinpoint when exactly participation of women in the game started (Williams, *An Equality* 153). However, there is evidence of women in the late 19th century and early 20th century taking to the football pitches, and thus they were self-consciously challenging the association of the ‘manly game’ (Williams, *A beautiful Game* 1). In Europe, women started trying out football as a game for their own enjoyment during the First World War, when the men were fighting at the front. As matter of fact, women’s football became a beloved sporting event and experienced an enormous boost in England. For their employers, this was seen as a way to maintain health and fitness of the workers. By playing football, women also raised money to donate to charity, and these games became popular events (Pope 127). Women would play against men or dress up in costumes, an indication that more importance was attached to the charity purpose than actual sports quality (Pfister et al., *Women* 12).

Around 1921, some 150 women’s teams were active in England with perhaps the most popular one being Dick, Kerr Ladies. This team played extensively in England and also toured the continent to play ‘friendly’ games. Many fans today don’t know that these teams attracted huge crowds with Dick, Kerr having played in front of 53,000 spectators at Everson’s Goodison Park in 1920. The standard of women’s football had risen by then with players training regularly to gain more ball skills and tactical moves (Pfister et al., *Women* 13). After the war, the organising of charity events had also lost its validity and football was

no longer seen as a 'harmless' pastime. What is more, women's matches had become so popular that "the matches between women's teams seemed to divert public attention from boys' and men's football" (Pfister et al., *Women* 14). In a post-war reactionary climate, there were calls for return to a normality as women's football challenged the traditional gender roles, including their position within the domestic sphere. Additionally, medical arguments were also made against playing football, suggesting negative effects on women's health (Pope 127).

At the end of 1921, the English Football Association (FA) decided that women's teams were prohibited from playing on competitive grounds, stipulating that "it being quite unsuitable for females and ought not be encouraged" (qtd. in Williamson 96). This measure had grave consequences for women's football in England, the ban stood for half a century and was finally lifted in 1971. A women's football association was formed in 1969, with the goal of establishing an official women's England team. However, it took till 1993 to for the women to be officially incorporated in the men's football association (Pope 128).

In France, teams were already formed during the First World War even though the French Football Federation (FFF) refused to accept women's football at its inception in 1919. In the 1920s, women's championships and football competitions were taking place regularly. Matches occurred between French and international women's teams from other European countries (Pfister, *The Future* 96). Football was considered a sort of 'feminism in action', a way to protest the exclusion of women in sport. "In a sense, women's participation in the male domain of sport, and especially football, was seen as a way of offering resistance what was going on in broader society" (Prudhomme-Poncet 30).

However, football wasn't thought to be acceptable for women and those who did play were slandered as "garçonne" or "tomboy" (Prudhomme-Poncet 33). During the 1930s, resistance against women playing increased by male institutions and while participation in sports during the Second World War was encouraged by the French government, football was still prohibited. It took until the 1960s for women's football to become popular again with local and regional competitions being organised. The FFF finally accepted women's football in 1970 because they thought it would bring more members to the federation and generate more football interest (Prudhomme-Poncet 33-35).

Similarly, in Germany, an increasing number of women started taking part in physical activities after the First World War, Pfister writes. This led to debate over whether women should be allowed to take up sports that demanded strength. The popular opinion was that women's football was not considered a sport for women as it was "not suited to the female disposition" (*Sport and Gesundheit* in 1932 qtd, in Pfister, *The Future* 96). Because of the stigmatisation of football as unnatural and unfeminine for women, very few women actually played the game. Pfister also points out that, in contrast to Germany, Austria did form an Austrian Ladies' Football Union but this was disbanded after Austria was annexed by Germany in 1938. "Under the National Socialists, who liked to highlight gender differences, women's football had to be stamped out since it offended their notion of gender segregation" (Pfister, *The Future* 98).

In the 1950s, the economic upturn in Western Germany was paired with a return to normalisation of everyday life, including men and women reassuming their traditional roles. Yet women started to play football and in 1957, a women's international game in Munich was held between women's teams from West Germany and from the Netherlands, attracting around 14,000 spectators. Despite this success, it did not change the German football federation's strategy, loosely based on the same trope of female bodies and minds not being suitable for the rough game, which "was reserved for men displaying their physical and mental superiority" (Pfister, *The Future* 47). Hence, women were forced to play football unofficially until women's football was recognised in 1970 by the German Football Federation as a result of a decade of revolutionary social upheaval which fostered a climate of 'women's liberation' (Pfister, *The Future* 101)

Discrimination of women's football throughout history isn't just of European nature, however. Take Brazil for example, one of the world's biggest names in football, where (male) football players have godlike attitudes and the game is often compared to dancing samba. Elsey and Nadal have given an insightful account on the history of women's sport in Latin America in which they write that the silence surrounding the history of women in football is striking. They assert that Brazilian female football perhaps framed by the most prohibitive landscape anywhere in the Americas (61). When authoritarian Getúlio Vargas rose to power in the 1930s, his regime sought to regulate women's lives such as access to education and health debates (Elsey and Nadal 61-62). In 1941, the government of Vargas passed Decree Law 3199 which prohibited women from playing sports, including football,

because they are “violent sports and not adaptable to the female body” (Elsey and Nadal 100). The patriarchal regime went as far to use concepts of “femininity” to criticise football, thus “further disconnecting women’s football from acceptable sporting practices. If men who played poorly were considered “feminine,” women’s sports, by definition, lacked quality” (Elsey and Nadal 110).

However, there is ample evidence that women’s football still flourished during the ban, even though societal norms were against it, with some clubs still having women’s teams. By continuing to play throughout the 40-year ban, with many gaining male support, Brazilian women “challenged institutionalised sexism not only of Brazilian football but of Brazilian society as a whole” (Elsey and Nadel 109). The ban on women’s football was finally lifted in 1983, thanks to its close relationship with the feminist movement. Brazilian feminists strongly advocated for gender inclusion in sports by calling out institutionalised sexism, criticising the sports council body as no woman served on it and pointed to the profits men gained from the sport. “Indeed, Brazilian feminists identified their exclusion from the national sport as an important part of their oppression” (Elsey and Nadel 133). In 1982, feminists organised the National Festival of Women in the Arts of which the final event was a football match between women’s teams from Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo (Elsey and Nadal 133-134).

Although it isn’t the goal of this thesis to address gender discrimination in football globally, the conclusion here is that women were attracted to the game, and in defiance of all these prejudices and oppressive measures, kept playing football. Games were also held in China in the 1920s, South Africa in the 1930s and a there was a global resurge of interest after the Second World War. Women’s games also started to develop networks in the 1950s in the US and Canada and women’s football associations were being developed globally in the 1960s (Williams, *A Beautiful Game* 13-14).

This global interest first culminated when an ‘unofficial’ Women’s World Cup was organised in Mexico in 1971, even though the international federation, FIFA, was firmly opposed because it wanted to protect its male players and own business interests (Elsey and Nadel 231-232). However, the event turned out to be widely popular for that time, providing high television audiences and attendance figures of over 100,000 (Pope 128). Consequently, FIFA began to realise it wasn’t a viable option to continue ignoring women playing football, or

hoping that the trend would go away (Williams, *A Beautiful Game* 14). Nonetheless, it took FIFA until 1991 to organise the first official world championship for women's teams. It wasn't until 1996 when women's football became an official Olympic event. In 2000/2001, Europe's football federation, UEFA, introduced a Women's Cup which responded to the growing interest in and importance of women's football in Europe. This was rebranded in 2009/2010 as the UEFA Women's Champions League (Pfister, *Women* 48).

These events could be considered milestones for the women's game, although when compared to men's football, it is still incredibly behind. Therefore, worldwide tournaments organised by sporting associations of the 1990s could be considered more of a "departure than a homecoming" as women's football is still very much in its infancy compared to their male counterparts (Williams, *A Beautiful Game* 1). Therefore, it could be argued that due to the historical marginalisation of women playing football internationally, women's football today has a rootless existence, both on the elite and grassroots level.

2.2.2. Ongoing institutional discrimination

As previously discussed, football has long been a space of discrimination against women. The sport continues to be a field where male superiority is enacted and there are still enormous challenges for women playing football, on both the elite and grassroots levels. Despite the considerable current attention on women's football, it is not yet at equal footing with the men's game as women's participation in football is still limited and dependent on choices made by men, especially so on the structural level. As Williams rightly points out, football has arguably been a global sport since the first (men's) World Cup competition was contested in 1930, and if this view is accepted, the internationalisation of female play appears at least sixty years behind the mark given that the first official Women's World Cup was only organised in 1991 (*A beautiful* 2).

When looking at current realities of football, this statement by Williams seems to be backed up by the facts. The number of girls and women playing football is still significantly lower than that of their male counterparts. The FIFA Women Football Survey in 2014 reported it estimated the total number of female participants in football of about 30 million, while the number of registered players is even lower: according to the 2019 survey, a 13.3 million

registered girls and women play organised football worldwide. This is a small number compared to the 239 million boys and men that play football, as reported in the last comprehensive FIFA count in 2006. Institutionally, there are still significant gaps between women and men playing the game professionally. As Williams writes, the adoption of federations of women's associations "seems to have prompted something of a contradictory progress as the women's game became gradually institutionalised but without effectively being commercialised" (*A Beautiful Game* 14-15).

Additionally, FIFA published its Women's Football Strategy report in October 2018, in which it stated its commitment to doubling the number of female players to 60 million by 2026. One of its main strategies to accomplish this is by raising the profile of the Women's FIFA World Cup and enhancing the commercial value of football. FIFA aims for all its member associations to have women's football strategies by 2022, as well as double the number of youth leagues by 2016. On an executive level, at least one third of FIFA committee members by 2022 should be women.

The federation also set aside an (albeit small) percentage of the money meant for member associations to earmark for women's football. As a result, around $10 million between 2008 and 2016 was meant for the development of women's football. This is hardly enough to build up national programmes on par with men's. More problematic is that the programme has no enforcement mechanism, meaning that there is no oversight of whether these federations are actually spending it to the benefit of women's football (Elsey and Nadel 249).

Indeed, even though the women's game has been integrated into existing football structures, there are existing inequalities in FIFA's investment between the men's and the women's games. While the Women's World Cup 2019 is the most financially successful and competitive one yet, the discrepancy with men's football is still astounding. According to *Forbes,* the winner of the Women's World Cup 2019, thus the US, takes home $4 million worth of prize money (McCarthy). Compared to the $38 million that the French team bagged for winning the Men's World Cup 2018, this is an abominably small amount. In total, the prize money for the 2019 FIFA Women's World Cup is $30 million, a mere 7.5% of the men's prize money for the 2018 World Cup (Hess). Even though FIFA garnered favourable headlines by doubling the prize money to $30 million this year, the men's prize money had also been increased from $400 million to $440 million. Effectively, this means that the gap

between the prize money has now widened from $385 million in 2015 to $410 million (Gibbs). Moreover, some country federations are still firmly opposed to investing in women's football as became clear in a *Guardian* article which published the dire conditions of the Argentina's national team who, because of a complete lack of funding, did not play at all between 2015 and 2017 (Nadel and Elsey).

Another illustration of the financial discrepancies becomes apparent when looking at the gender pay gap in football. Financial discrimination is visible not just on the world stage but on all levels of female football. Players union FIFPro published an employment report about women's football in 2017. Jointly researched with the University of Manchester, around 3,600 female players in were surveyed in Europe, Africa, Asia and America. According to the report, two thirds of the respondents indicated they are disappointed with the prize money in women's tournaments, highlighting its inequality. The average monthly salary per female player is $600 with 50% of the players indicating they get no pay at all (32). It goes without saying that this is hardly effective when the aim is to attract more girls and women to play. On the elite level, the payment gaps aren't any less shocking. For instance, according to the website *FourFourTwo.com*, Barcelona international Lionel Messi is the world's highest paid football player (and athlete), with earnings of €130 million a year. By comparison, his female counterpart Ada Hegerberg, who plays for Lyon, is earning about €400,000.

As discussed previously, governing bodies such as FIFA and national football associations are now showing willingness to promote girls' and women's competitive football at all levels. Nonetheless, this only seems to be true on the condition that women and girls' participation is distinct from men's elite and competitive games. Thus, "in many ways, these governing bodies aim to differentiate not only women from men, but also femininity from masculinity" (Caudwell 335). By excluding and then later segregating women's football, this contributed to the ongoing presentation of gender differences, "and thus to the reproduction of a gender order based on gender duality" (Pfister, *The future,* 95).

The sustained separation on the basis of gender manifests itself in the current dominating discourse. Telling is the use of terminology such as 'football' versus 'women's football' and the 'World Cup' versus the 'Women's World Cup'. This evokes the idea that men's sport is the standard, and women's as 'the other'. Moreover, as Engh asserts, the distinction between the two legitimises and perpetuates heteronormativity, a concept which assumes that there are

only two sexes, with each having predetermined gender roles. It doesn't just regulates sexual relationships, but also the roles, behaviours, sexualities and appearances among women and men (*Tackling Femininity* 138). Furthermore, the separation implies that women's football is subordinated or secondary to the men's game.

Williams also contends using the title 'women's football' upholds the myth of football as the manly game (*An Equality*, 163). In *Heroines of Sport,* Jennifer Hargreaves goes into more detail about the differential treatment of men and women, and in particular, the glorification of male achievements while simultaneously downgrading women's achievements:

> Gendered heroism is constantly being challenged by women who are appropriating the narratives of maleness and transforming themselves from victims into superstars. According to many feminists, to claim an identity that used to be exclusively male in macho, sexist culture is symbolically heroic. (3)

Dominating male institutions intend to maintain this binary opposition between the two genders, by maintaining women and girls' concerns are as a niche interest compared to men's. The preservation of male hegemony in sport has sustained gender-appropriate behaviours which were, until recently, very rarely questioned in sport. Indeed, this model seems to suggest an "equal-but-different-model" where it is thus highly unlikely women's football can aspire to achieve the same market share and media coverage as men's (Williams, *A Beautiful* 16-17).

The question could be asked therefore if the establishment of more opportunities for women playing football within existing male hierarchies is actually a good thing. Hargreaves rightfully wonders if the entry of those previously excluded or marginalised, in this case girls and women, create a culture of resistance or a culture of assimilation and whether it will be "a powerful expression of these women's progress or a form of manipulation" (Hargreaves, *Querying* 198). These issues deserve attention but go beyond the scope of this dissertation.

In sum, this chapter has uncovered elements which perpetuate the gender hierarchy which has long underpinned mainstream football. As will be explored next, this ongoing discrimination has consequences for women playing football, resulting in stereotyping and actively discouraging girls and women to play football.

3. 'Kicking like a girl': devaluing female players

Oscar Wilde once said: "Football is all very well as a game for rough girls, but is hardly suitable for delicate boys" (qtd. in Morris 10). When the writer noted his thoughts on football, little would he have known this is still the dominating discourse today. This chapter will explore how football is associated with a dichotomy between masculinities and femininities. Not surprisingly, these constructions are already formed on the playground, as will be explained first. Then, this chapter will go deeper into this opposition and how it results into stereotyping of female players.

3.1. Embodied differences on the playground

Gender duality based on behaviour (and vice versa) starts from a young age and is engrained in our society. Marion Young's influential essay "Throwing like a Girl" describes the gradual development of movements, which are inscribed by our gender dispositions and thus manifest themselves in 'gender appropriate behaviour.' At the root of those modalities, according to Young, is that the woman lives her body as an object created by the patriarchal society which "defines woman as object, as a mere body, and that in sexist society women are in fact frequently regarded by others as objects and mere bodies" (Young 153-154).

Young has written about the focus on boys' versus girls' sports on the playground level: "girl play is often more sedentary and enclosing than the play of boys. In school and after school activities girls are not encouraged to engage in sport, in the controlled use of their bodies in achieving well-defined goals" (152). Masculinities and femininities are socially constructed based on those ideas of gender appropriate activity, as well as an awareness of the movements that could transgress these categories. The gradual development of hampered movement reflects the gendered dispositions of the female body. Consequently, when a boy or a man is accused of "throwing like a girl", "kicking like a girl" or "screaming like a girl", it means to devalue him, based on stereotypes of the inferior physical capabilities and bodies of women and girls. Sites of sport practices, such as playgrounds, clubs and parks, represent those engendered spaces and the central construction of masculinity from a young age onwards (Hill 3).

In line with Young, Jeanes and Kay describe how, from primary school onwards, playing football in both formal and informal settings contributes to the development of 'masculinities' (113). They base their argument on research done by Swain, who investigated how gender ideologies continue to be restrictive for girls' participation in football, ensuring that they have unfavourable experiences. Boys from the research also viewed football as 'their sport', over girls "demonstrating the impact global assumptions can have within local structures" and the girls consequently understood that "football was a sport that allowed boys to assert their maleness" (113).

Thereupon, girls were being ridiculed for playing football by the boys, which in turn stopped the girls from playing. Hence, the segregation between masculinities and femininities is manifested and "girls, instead, define their femininity by not playing football" (Jeanes and Kay 114). Hargreaves also finds that changes in women's sports won't happen when boys continue to be schooled through sports to accept this aggressive model of masculinity which evokes an aggressive model of masculinity and the subordination of women (*Sporting females,* 171). Football as the masculine game is forced upon kids from a young age onwards, and therefore it is not surprising how girls are mostly excluded from playing.

3.2. Femininities vs masculinities

The dominating discourse of football' masculinity influences people's everyday realities throughout their lives. Often, this discourse exhibits ideas or images about others which result in a "set of beliefs about the personal attributes of a group of people" (Ashmore and del Boca 16). Stereotypes resort to the use of discriminatory assumptions about groups or people and invoke characteristics about individuals. In sports, they are based upon the physical body and the socio-cultural norms attributed to it (Crawley et al. 23). Thus, stereotypes are used to communicate a level of deviation for a specific group of people associated with specific social identities.

Female and male athletes who do not adhere to these images of masculinities in football are not only devalued, but also stigmatised. Sartore-Baldwin has conceptualised stigmatisation

according to Link and Phelan's work. They define stigma as a reflection of a culturally shared assumptions about members of a specific social group, in this case girls playing sports, and consists of labelling, stereotyping, separation, status loss and discrimination. The negative stereotyping entails negative attitudes and prejudices towards specific groups of people. Furthermore, stigma establishes power differences between groups that maintain distinctions and social hierarchies, thus legitimating the power and status quo which exist within societies (Sartore-Baldwin 4-6).

Women in society should behave in hegemonic feminine manners, displaying characteristics such as being emotional, passive, dependent, maternal, compassionate and gentle. By highlighting that athletes can be feminine too, by presenting female athletes as attractive and feminine, is presenting them as culturally accepted women (Krane 116). On the other hand, strength, competitiveness, assertiveness, confidence and independence are characteristics of hegemonic masculinity and thus don't fit the feminine style. "Society scrutinises and marginalises individuals who engage in cross-gender role behaviours" (Krane 117). Therefore, the presence of females, femininity and non-hegemonic forms of masculinity highlights the discrepancy of these sociocultural norms within the sports context as women engaging in formerly "male" sports are transgressing those lines.

These are daily realties for many female players, both on a grassroots and professional level. When the US team beat Thailand 13-0 at the World Cup, the US players were consequently vilified for their ongoing celebrations of this damning defeat for Thailand. In the aftermath, questions that inherently came up were that if it were the men's team, would they have received the same amount of criticism. The women were criticised because it didn't adhere to the stereotype of the 'feminine' as they displayed the same ruthlessness of a men's team (Aluko).

Caudwell, who has done much research into women participating in football in the UK, has similarly addressed this issue stating that "throughout our histories of football participation, in the UK and elsewhere, it is evident that women have faced harassment, discrimination and abuse" (330). Her statement appears to be confirmed by findings of the report by football union FIFPro, which also researched levels of discrimination and harassment in the women's game. Although 17.5% of the female players reported experiencing discrimination based on gender, the survey points out that the numbers are expected to be much higher than reported

since speaking out about abuse isn't easy. Additionally, it warns that amateur players appeared to be more exposed to this than professional players (36-38).

Moreover, in masculine sports such as football, players are more likely to experience gender role conflict and can result in negative stereotyping of women, as research has illustrated that female football players have been derogatively labelled as 'tomboys' , 'butch', 'lesbians' or 'dykes' (Devonport et al. 2). Myths surrounding women and girls playing football centre a lot on their 'sexual deviance' and accusations of lesbianism through transgressing gender boundaries (Griffin 1998).

These accusations derive from the sentiment that women are transgressing gender boundaries, while the discourse of masculinity spurs the myth that those girls participating are not real women and serve an important social control function in making women limit their participating (Hill 5). Many scholars have analysed the homophobic lesbian stereotypes and how women and girls, in order to avoid these 'accusations', perform heterosexual femininity, 'hyperfemininity" in sports, to be attractive to men (Connell qtd. in Hargreaves, *Heroines of Sport,* 141). This stereotyping and subsequent expected hyperfemininity eventually discourage women them participation in masculine activities. "Football is an arena that can provide a relatively safe, shared space for lesbian women, but can also produce hyper-femininity as a strategy of resistance and negotiation with homophobia" (Scraton et al. 28-29).

Therefore, Williams argues that "it remains a moot point whether women can and may play football and under what circumstance. Like many aspects of women's lives, this surveillance over what they can, should and ought to do with their bodies (…) is the subject of much regulation and control" (18). This regulation and control over women's players are demonstrated on a day-to-day level. Former FIFA president Sepp Blatter once stated that in order to boost the women's game, players should wear tighter shorts to promote "a more female aesthetic". Blatter, now banned from activities involving football because of a huge FIFA corruption probe, obviously based his statements on behaviour and looks: "Female players are pretty, if you excuse me for saying so, and they already have different roles to men – such as playing with a lighter ball" (Christenson and Kelso).

Yet Blatter isn't the only one focusing on femininities. As Pfister points out, in order to receive more media attention, the sexualisation of conventionally 'attractive' players is a key feature in the coverage of women's main events. Media have the power to frame women's football as a worthy sport to follow so media coverage plays a critical role in advancing the game (*Assessing* 565). By continuing this practice, women's aesthetics take centre stage over their skills, passion or love for football but on the way they look or what they represent.

This was poignantly illustrated in 2018 when Norwegian player, Ada Hegerberg won the Ballon d'Or– the highest award for an individual football player. When she took the stage to receive the trophy she was subsequently asked to 'twerk', a sexy provocative dance, by presenter DJ Martin Solveig (Aaron). While this recognition for women's football skills should be celebrated, and especially so since it was the first time that the prize was awarded to a female player, Hegerberg was still asked to perform a traditionally heterosexual, feminine dance.

4. Bending the norms: negotiating gender dynamics

Precisely because of male domination and women's position as the outsider, football can also be considered a platform for female resistance. The previous chapters have uncovered how historically and socially, sports have been a space of male hegemony. The significance of women and girls playing football can only understood when in relation to that of the male 'standard'. Given that these categories of masculine identities present themselves on everyday interaction, the direct involvement of women in football is a significant challenge to the routine reproduction of the patriarchal discourse. In short, it could be stated that the football pitch becomes a site of gendered conflict (Meân 793). This chapter will aim to give an overview of how women have been addressing traditional expectations, thus bending the norms.

4.1. Searching for a leaky hegemony

Football is a refugium for traditional masculinity, an arena where male hegemony shapes the power relations. However, these power relations can also be altered. The process of the slight shifting of an (oppressive) culture has been called "leaky hegemony", a term originally coined by George Lazere in 1987 (Newhall and Walker 125). Ann Hall uses the concept to describe women's sports inserting themselves into the male-dominated world of Canadian sports, in her research concerning hockey, as part of cultural resistance. Therefore, searching for leaks in the male hegemony of sports is a way of addressing – and, ideally, mitigating – gender inequality in sports culture and football in particular. Although an effective tool to understand the masculine status of football, caution is necessary when trying to deduce one truth from hegemony theory and there are inherent risks to doing so.

One illustration of this complexity is, again, the US women's team whose success is often explained as the result of the Title IX law in the US, which prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex (Donegan). Passed in 1972, it demands that schools and colleges provide equal scholarship funding, creating opportunity and incentives for young women to play sports. Although its implementation was delayed for years, it ultimately resulted in a massive influx of girls and young women into athletic programmes with football emerging as a primary beneficiary (Henry and Comeaux 278).

While this opened access to the pitches to women who are obtaining results, and are overtly dominating in the field, their financial earning is still significantly below that of their male counterparts. The US women's team has generated more revenue that the men's team over the past three years: from 2016 to 2018, women's games generated approximately $50.8 million in revenues compared to $49.9 million of the male team. In March of 2019, the US squad made headlines when it filed a lawsuit against their own governing body because of "institutionalised gender discrimination". The US women's team is currently the most successful women's team on the elite level ever, so it should be hardly surprising they are seeking equal pay with their male colleagues who didn't even manage to reach the 2018 World Cup in Russia ("US Women's Team"). When the team was victorious in winning the third consecutive World Cup in 2019, the public was caught on camera chanting "equal pay", a powerful reminder that the team is still battling for equal treatment (Sacks).

Despite their increasing presence as participants and consumers, football remains a space where men construct women as outsiders (Pfister et al., *Female* 862). It could be concluded that even when women are trespassing into the male hegemony, they are still not treated equally and are automatically expected to perform at a lower standard than men (Hill 5). Or when the opposite happens, are not rewarded accordingly.

Moreover, not all women should be treated as a universalised unit, as not all women share the same location or gendered identity. Gender therefore should be put into context in relation to difference, and non-shared gendered identities as women are not only oppressed by a male dominance or simply, the patriarchy, but as Caudwell points out, they may also be oppressed by other women (334). Recently, some furore was caused by Chelsea women manager Emma Hayes who called for smaller pitches and goals to be used for women's games, claiming this wouldn't be sexist although it appeared to be just that (Yoesting).

Indeed, women are not a homogenous group and feminist approaches to challenging the hegemony have been criticised for treating women's experience solely from a Western, white, middle-class and heterosexual point of view, therefore neglecting numerous other differences such as 'race', 'ethnicity' and 'religion' (Hargreaves, *Querying* 188). The gendered discrimination women face sometimes intersects with other aspects of identity, such as religion, class and education, among others. This intersectionality approach was first

coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 who believed the term can be used to describe the interaction between systems of oppressions and aim to correct the gap.

Depending on the region and football culture, women's football continues to face diverse challenges stemming from stereotypes and a lack of resources, among others.

> How, when and where groups of women football players participate in and across societies can be understood as issues of access to education, leisure, resources, and transport, which in turn impact on culture. (…) both the resistance of the dominant culture to change (of which sport is an economic, social, symbolic, political and social project, among others) and, usually, smaller adjustments to the prevailing mores are implied by women's participation in football. (Williams, *A Beautiful* 11)

As will be discussed later in this paper, this will become relevant in the case study of Muslim girls in the area of Vogošća, Sarajevo in Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this case, cultural norms are also closely linked to the creation of the image as them defying stereotypes through playing football.

4.2. The new athlete

However, there is also a new generation of sportswomen who are breaking down those boundaries of the past and who are redefining gender roles and meanings. They appear strong, dominant, and perceptive and proud of their well-honed bodies. Furthermore, these sportswomen feel a physical sense of empowerment, control, strength and beauty in the female body (Hargreaves, *Querying* 195). Athletes such as these are producing new sporting and cultural identities through challenging the stereotyping of people playing sport, using it as a platform also to deliver their message.

These sportswomen appear confident and uninhibited, and are seemingly no longer daunted by being stereotyped, choosing their own appearances. Increasingly, there is a movement of sportswomen who want to participate in a range of activities as women and on their own terms. A recent New York Times article by Allison McCann on the Women's World Cup

highlighted the tension on gendered performances. Many female athletes wear make-up such as lipstick or fake eyelashes, with some indicating that this makes them feel more at ease and confident. They want to show they can be athletes and feminine too. The article quotes sport psychologist Vikki Krane saying that: “Seeing these elite female athletes have the opportunity to present themselves as they want to be seen is really empowering (...) If they’re using the little bit of attention and power they have to get themselves noticed — as long as it’s their choice — then they should have the space to be able to do it.”

These successful sportswomen are furthermore breaking cultural norms by speaking out. Heywood and Dworkin describe in their book *Built to Win* how female athletes can be considered new athletes because of cultural and historical shifts, and write how young girls can now dream of being former US football player Mia Hamm (viii). Perhaps more topical, one example would be Brazilian forward Marta who made a passionate plea to younger (Brazilian) girls, to commit to football and to keep the women’s game alive, in an inspiring video that went viral after Brazil lost against France in the 2019 World Cup (Critchley). Another example would be the already mentioned Rapinoe, who openly rejected president Trump and his policies by stating “I’m not going to the fucking White House” (Tharoor). Rapinoe, purple haired, went on to score the most goals and became a symbol of resistance on “how to play soccer and how to dissent” (Foer).

These athletes could potentially become, or are already, female role models, which football has been sorely lacking. Role models have a recognised function and a demonstration effect by showing that success can be achieved through a set of choices, behaviours and actions (Meier and Saavedra 1168). Yet Meier cautions that a quantitative increase of female sportswomen in key positions does not inherently foster gender equality and simply displaying women as stereotyped role models will be counterproductive unless they are also covered by the media, speaking out, or are in charge of certain domains (*The Value* 2-3). After taking on president Trump openly in a video, a photo of Rapinoe after scoring a goal, her arms widespread, triumphantly, became the signature silhouette of the 2019 tournament but also a symbol for equality and feminist resistance (McNamara).

In this light, women participating in masculine dominated fields could potentially transform the social order, in the sense that disrupting notions about gender roles and challenging male power is achievable by changing the public consciousness (Hargreaves, *Querying* 195). It’s

hard to imagine that these women will still be rewarded a tea set, which was the prize for the German national women's team when they won the 1989 European Championship (Thorogood).

According to Pope, who did research into female fandom of female footballers, the general profile of women's football should be raised and marketed more effectively so the game can be developed commercially, including attracting more media coverage (147). It's too early to discuss the exact effects of the 2019 Women's World Cup for women playing football, but certain is that it has already garnered more attention than ever before. The prospects for the women's game are promising when looking at the audience figures: France's quarter-final match against the US attracted 10.7 million viewers, making it this year's most-watched French TV programme (*The Economist)*. The semi-final between the US and England attracted a BBC audience of 11.7 million, becoming the most watched British TV event of 2019 so far (Morgan). While in 2015, the World Cup attracted a total of 836 million viewers globally, FIFA expects the competition to have reached a total of 1 billion viewers across all platforms worldwide for 2019 (*The Economist)*.

Finally receiving increased global attention, women's football might attract more girls and women to play the game globally. Without doubt, women's football is on the rise as a 2017 UEFA report found that female participation across its 55 member associations had risen from 1.27 million in 2016 to 1.37 million in 2017. Yet, issues such as investment will need to be addressed properly. As Williams has pointed out, "the tension between facilitating international competition and the development of mass participation is the major challenge for the international federation as it continues to invest disproportionately in male football" (*An Equality* 166). Additionally, the amount of media attention will remain a key issue for those seeking to advance the game, and for those girls wanting to get into the game. As Pfister points out, "real football is still men's football" (Pfister, *Assessing* 565).

5. ‘Empowering’ girls and women as a goal for transformation

One of the goals of feminism is to disrupt systematic power relations. Because of the barriers for women into football, there is now overarching evidence that women’s football has become a force for gender equality in sport and beyond (Pfister, *Assessing* 564). Therefore, women’s interest and success in football may also be a vehicle for female empowerment which would cause friction in the male hegemony (Prinz et al. 4).

Saavedra has noted that it is somewhat paradoxical seeking to empower women through sport, given that sports is a bastion of male privilege and power (124). Saavedra, who has done extensive research on gender and football, also believes that sport has transformative potential and that it offers the opportunity to realise the potential of sports in disrupting the hegemonic gender relations:

> In directly confronting the puzzle around females and what is perceived as ‘normal’ in sport around the world, female involvement in sport has the power to upend what is seen/presented as ‘normal’ and become a major force for social change beyond sport by challenging gender norms. (Saavedra, 127)

Women playing football still cause strong reactions: some find women participating in this sport uncomfortable, because they threaten to destabilise the existing order but on the other hand, others don’t find it worthy of anything but their disdain. For girls and women playing football the debate has moved to questions of resistance, agency and empowerment. “Because of this ‘power’, this decentring effect, female involvement in sport can and has been deployed in the development process where particular changes in the social order affected by gender are sought” (Saavedra 127-128).

Therefore, this chapter will explore how empowering girls and women through playing football can achieve social change. At first, since empowerment has become a popular concept within the apparatus of development, the context of civil society and empowerment will be given. Football has become a mainstream occurrence within the development sector. Thereupon, this chapter will link empowerment with feminist concepts, which will uncover the complexities of the term and the difficulties of measuring empowerment.

5.1. The role of civil society

Football is part of a domain within global civil society and has been employed as a tool for change. According to Belloni, civil society exists as a 'third sphere' next to government institutions and the business sector which counterbalances the state, by individuals collectively organizing themselves. Giulianotti has further identified global civil society as fulfilling the 'human good', primarily in the Global South where non governmental organisations (NGOs) and intergovernmental organisations fill welfare gaps. Referring to Kaldor, he has also expanded upon civil society as a social field "featuring struggles, partnerships and interdependencies between interested individuals, groups and institutions" (*The Sport,* 211). There has been a substantial analysis of global civil society as a space wherein institutions, movements and groups promote international development, peace and social justice (Giulianotti and Robertson 16).

While at the beginning of the 21st century, sport was barely used as a vehicle for strategic change, projects using sports by means of transformation have surged in recent years (Schulenkorf and Adair 3). A crucial role in this shift was played by the UN when it recognised sports as an effective tool within human rights. It established the United Nations Office on Sport for Development and Peace and designated 2005 the International Year of Sport and Education to boost a better understanding of the value of sport for human development programmes, with football at the forefront. It became an important strategy for the so-called Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) sector. Following this institutionalisation of structures, the international community consequently turned sport into an important tool to foster education, health and personal development (Beutler 361-365).

The majority of international development projects are often closely intertwined with those UN supported targets such as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), of which SDG5 compasses "achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls", and the Global Compact scheme, an initiative by the UN to encourage businesses to contribute to development (Levermore and Beacom 1). SDP now consists of NGOs, official government development agencies, inter-governmental organisations, sports federations and transnational corporations (Giulianotti 208).

Most sport projects include an aspect of tackling local problems such as poverty, sexual violence, drugs, war or most relevant to the topic of this paper, gender equality. The sector's goal is to use football as a vehicle to mobilise people around resources so the sporting experience will be a mechanism for change. The changes strived for include awareness, captive audience, capacity building, life skills, health benefits and demonstration effect (Saavedra 137-139). Moreover, the link to other projects brings about an awareness of education and gender equity on the grassroots level (Brady 1).

Since the early 2000s, "sports for gender equity" has become a popular paradigm. This entails going beyond the inclusion of women in existing projects, and instead making women and girls' participation the sole objective of programmes. This discourse also suggests that sport as a social institution could effectively "empower" women and girls and contribute to gender equality. Meier asserts that by just promoting female sport and encouraging girls and women to be physically active, some gender norms can already be challenged in some socio-cultural contexts (*Gender Equity* 8).

The benefits of sports for women and girls has been extensively addressed within the development sector. For example, the Sport for Development and Peace, International Working Group argued in its 2008 report that these type of programmes " enhance the empowerment process by challenging gender norms, reducing restrictions and offering girls and women greater mobility, access to public spaces, and more opportunities for their physical, intellectual and social development" (131). Besides the health benefits of sports and being physically active, it also includes an often visible "fun factor" which is generally said to build social competencies such as self-esteem, self-control over one's body, emotional and physical awareness and learning about mutual respect (Meier, *Gender Equity* 7-9).

Most of the existing literature limits its scope to organisations from the 'Global North' managing projects in the 'Global South'. Some organisations that have been discussed by development scholars include Moving the Goalposts in Kenya, which links gender equality with sexual and reproductive health (Saavedra), or Football for Peace in Israel using football to build bridges between Arab and Jewish towns (Caudwell, *On shifting Sands*), and the Mathare Youth Sports Association in Kenya whose major goal is to reduce women's social isolation by providing public spaces to develop (Coalter, Brady).

Football by means of social change isn't only part of international development. At a national and European level too, sports-based intervention industries have been used to promote various social benefits including social integration (Giulianotti, *A model* 757). Indeed, the European Union has made social inclusion and integration, with a special focus on football, a priority under its Erasmus+ programme which serves to promote education, training and sport. Football initiatives such as FARE Network support grassroots groups, NGOs and other organisations who set up activities for refugees and asylum seekers. One such example is Austria-based NGO Kicken Ohne Grenzen. This grassroots organisation claims to promote inclusion and employability of refugee women through offering football trainings and workshops working with several partner organisations, relying on a peer-to-peer model to boost education and coaching programmes, thus bringing them "life skills" (Gstöttner and Lackner).

While development is not the explicit focus of this analysis, and this discussion is by no means extensive, it proves important in giving the larger context in which football is linked to "empowering" girls and women. Therefore, the next section will describe theories of empowerment as put forward by feminist scholars.

5.2. A theoretical background to empowerment

The notion of empowerment has become a frequently cited goal among development interventions, activist groups and NGOs. Empowerment entails an approach for developing interventions and creating social change, going beyond the negative aspects of a situation and pursuing the positive (Zimmerman 44). While the dominating discourse in international empowerment focuses on economic and political empowerment, this paper will draw upon the core of empowerment theories such as those proposed by feminist writers Batliwala, Kabeer and Rowlands.

Empowerment, for the purpose of this dissertation, is framed within a feminist approach, borrowing from Rowlands who suggests that, "feminist interpretations of power can lead to a broader understanding of empowerment, since they go beyond formal and institutionalised definitions of power and incorporate the idea of 'the personal is political'" (*Questioning* 14). Importantly, at the core of empowerment theories is resistance against a dominating force. Amy Allen has suggested the "need to theorise the power that women retain in spite of

masculine domination often manifests itself in a concern with a more specific type of empowerment; namely, resistance" (32).

Within social change, the concept of empowerment has a long history. According to Cornwall, feminist consciousness-raising and collective action became articulated in the 1970s, and from the 1980s onwards, "empowerment was cast as an unfolding process, a journey that women could take that would lead to changes in consciousness and collective power" (343). Some feminist scholars constructed empowerment theories based on the approach developed by Brazilian scholar Paulo Freire in the 1970s. He coined the word "conscientisation," which might be considered as the precursor of empowerment, and which according to Freire is the process by which an oppressed person perceives the structural conditions of their oppression and who is subsequently able to take action against their oppressors.

While Freire's theories on education have completely ignored gender, feminist scholars have adapted his theories within a gender framework. They built upon the conscientisation process by recognising that engaging in processes of facilitation can stimulate a process of consciousness raising and mobilisation as a means of resistance against gender inequalities. Scholars such as Batliwala have stressed that such processes can help people make sense of their world and its existing relationships: "Unless women are liberated from their existing perception of themselves as weak inferior and limited beings, no amount of external interventions (…) will enable them to challenge power equations in society, the community, or the family" (*Empowerment,* 31).

Batliwala and other feminists activists used this concept widely in their terminology and action plans, giving the word a specific gendered meaning, in this case the transformation between men and women across social categories (*Taking,* 560). Batliwala notes that "the process of challenging existing power relations, and of gaining greater control over the sources of power, may be termed 'empowerment'", and is linked to changing patriarchal power relations, thus to "transform the structures and institutions that reinforce and perpetuated gender discrimination and social inequality" (*The Meaning*, 130). In other words, empowerment is a process of transforming the relations of power between individuals and specific societal groups. In her view, development interventions should engage in combatting

multiple layers of discrimination but have mostly failed at recognising the structural oppression and exploitation of women (Mosedale 248).

Therefore, the first step in the process of empowerment means that women distinguish the ideology that legitimises male domination and acknowledge their oppression. In order to do this, they need access to new information which changes their self-image through empowerment which functions as "a spiral, changing consciousness, identifying areas to target for change, planning strategies, acting for change" (Batliwala, *The Meaning* 132). These shifts in consciousness are needed to overturn the oppressive beliefs that keep women in situations of subordination, and the second necessary step is engagement with these culturally embedded beliefs and their understanding of gender, power and change (Cornwall 345).

Some of the core theories of empowerment in feminist writings today has been advanced by Naila Kabeer, who also insists on its importance for the struggle for more gender equality. She asserts that empowerment entails "a process of change", referring "to the expansion in people's ability to make strategic life choices in a context where this ability was previously denied to them" (*Resources*, 437). It is important to underline that empowerment's interplays with existing relations of power and for Kabeer, strategic life choices are those "which are critical for people to live the lives they want" (*Resources* 437).

Put differently, in order to be empowered, one must be disempowered first. Choice implies there is the possibility of alternatives, i.e. the ability of an individual to have chosen otherwise. To be disempowered, therefore, is to not have the ability to make choices (*Resources* 436-437). In the case of sports and football, this could be considered as Kabeer's discursive alternative as it offers new opportunities to add dimension to traditional gender roles, while creating more consciousness.

To this end, Kabeer has outlined three related dimensions of resources, agency and achievements. For Kabeer, resources do not only invoke access to material resources but also involve that which is acquired through a multiplicity of social relationships conducted in various layers of society. "Access to such resources will reflect the rules and norms (…) which give certain actors authority over others in determining the principles of distribution

and exchange” (*Resources* 437). These can include human and social resources and include future claims and expectations as well as actual allocations (*Resources* 437).

Agency according to Kabeer is the process defining ones’ goals and act upon them. This is more than just ‘decision making’ Kabeer believes, and should also encompass the meaning, motivation and purpose individuals contribute to their sense of agency while achievements are the outcome of agency. Agency only works when it is challenging existing power relations, “because of the significance of beliefs and values in legitimating inequality, a process of empowerment begins from within” (Kabeer, *Gender* 14).

Women must be significant actors in the process of change as this invokes a bottom-up approach, rather than a top-down approach. Resources, combined with agency, enables people to develop their full capabilities. Like Batliwala, Kabeer emphasises collective, grassroots participatory action and continues to explore practical, measurable ways to empower women, especially at the local level.

Kabeer has also recognised that many aspects of behaviour are governed by rules and norms which maintain the existing social order, which determine the appropriate behaviour for different genders. Therefore, “these gendered identities are developed throughout life and cannot easily be shaken off because of some relatively minor change,” Mosedale asserts (249). Kabeer points to research done by Shaffer in West Africa, where women recognised existing gender inequalities but didn’t consider them as ‘unjust’ (*Resources* 440). Thus, women’s adherence to existing social norms, such as preference towards sons, violence against daughters and authority of mothers-in-law, contributes to further discrimination within that society. “This notion of power is a controversial one because it allows for the possibility that power and dominance can operate through consent and complicity as well as through coercion and conflict. (Kabeer, *Resources* 441).

Mosedale defines women’s empowerment as a “process by which women redefine and extend what is possible for them to be and do in situations where they have been restricted, compared to men, from being and doing” (252). She states that while Kabeer’s definition is gendered in nature, Mosedale also indicates women have multiple identities (such as farmers, workers, traders) who will often choose to work with men to improve their mutual situation. Therefore, on a structural level, women can act as part of a collective struggle to challenge

gender roles. Additionally, Mosedale's approach to empowerment is also one which focuses on redefining and extending limits of possibilities, and therefore emphasises "women achieving a change that expands options not only for themselves but also for women in general both now and in the future" (252).

Jo Rowlands, a main scholar within empowerment and feminism, has also stressed that empowerment is not something that is given to someone or endowed upon someone. Empowerment "must also include the processes that lead people to perceive themselves as able and entitled to make decisions" (Rowlands, *Questioning* 14). Empowerment should involve some level of personal development which involves moving from insight to action and assess three levels of empowerment: the individual level, relationship and the collective level. The individual level concerns developing a sense of the self; the relational denotes the ability to negotiate and influence the nature of relationships; while the collective level designates that individuals can work together to achieve more as a group. Collective action can designate involvement in political structures but can also be locally focused, such as groups acting at the village or community level (*Questioning* 15).

As will be discussed in the case study, changing the nature of relationships between family members are of importance for the young women playing football. As Rowlands contests, "empowerment in close relationships' with husbands, parents and mothers-in-law, is the area of change that comes hardest; it is the place where the individual woman is 'up against it on her own', and where positive and negative aspects of her life tend to be most closely intertwined" (*A Word of,* 23). Hence, empowerment can only happen when other members of the family are made aware of the sense of agency of an individual part of the family.

5.2.1. Models of power

In order to understand the empowerment experiences, it is useful to look at different models of power which have also been discussed to great extent by scholars and feminist activists. Rowlands has put forward four different dimensions of power: 'power over', 'power to', 'power from within' and 'power with'.

For a long time in social sciences, 'power-over' was the dominating model. It is the capacity of actor(s) overriding the agency of others. This could be considered an example of a zero-

sum game, one person's gain will be another's loss (Mosedale 250). Ironically, football is an example of a 'power over'; as it is a game centred around one team winning from the other. Rowlands interprets 'power-over' as a model of dominant social, political, economic or cultural groups over those who are marginalised, which according to her is a critical issue: "When power is defined as 'power over', then if women gain power it will be at the men's expense (...) men will not only lose power but also face the possibility of having power wielded over them by women" (*Questioning* 11). These reflections are strongly connected to the ideas of radical feminism, although Allen has also argued that the concept of 'power-over' must be broader than 'domination' (34). She also points out that 'power-over' is the ability of an actor or a group of actors to constrain the choices available.

Therefore, in order to challenge these norms, acquiring a 'power to' and 'power within' is crucial (Rowlands, *Questioning* 14). The concept of 'power within', refers to the self-esteem and self-confidence, the spiritual from within "or sense of self within a wider context" (Rowlands, *Questioning* 113). Before anything else can be achieved, the realisation of oppression starts within the self, as Mosedale contends that "in a sense all power starts from here" (250). In the case of women playing football, it could be argued that "empowerment often manifests itself in the form of an increased awareness and confidence in their physical capabilities, the extension of physical limitations and the rejection of narrower definitions of femininity" (Knapp 36). Hence, football being a contact sport, it also opens up the possibility of transgression, because female players challenge concepts of strength and power as manifestations of masculinity (Knapp 36).

The model 'power to' generates new possibilities, without the domination of 'power over'. Kabeer has described it as when people define their own life choices, even when they face opposition (Kabeer, *Reflections* 438). According to Allen, the understanding of 'power to' is almost synonymous with empowerment (34-35). Mosedale has conceptualised it as a power which increases the boundaries of what is achievable for a person without necessarily tightening the boundaries of someone else (250).

The model of 'power with', referring to solidarity and collective action, underlines that more can be achieved in a group than by individuals alone, thus grasping "a sense of the whole being greater than the sum of individuals" (Rowlands, *Questioning* 13). At the same time, people have evolved a sense within themselves, which can stimulate other people to act

(Rowlands, *Questioning* 87). Certain perquisites for collective action should exist, such as space for women to develop critical minds, where new demands can arise and new ideas can be discussed. These include social spaces, with role-models as examples, an ideology which explains the sources of oppression, a threat to the newfound self and a network through which a new interpretation can spread (Evans qtd. in Mosedale 250-251).

Rowlands calls this 'power to' and 'power with' a generative interpretation of power in which empowerment is concerned with the process by which people are becoming aware of those interests, while also being enabled to connect it to the interests of others. Given this, they can now participate with a stronger position in decision-making. Therefore, questioning power can undo damaging social constructions. As has also been addressed previously, societies ascribe a particular set of abilities to social categories of people. "Empowerment must involve undoing negative social constructions, so that people come to see themselves as having the capacity and the right to act and influence decisions" (Rowlands, *Questioning* 14).

Importantly, Rowlands suggests that only when there is individual conscientisation of the 'power within', as well as the collective 'power with', can this lead to 'power to' having transformative change.

Rowlands' theories have been applied to the case of Zambian female football players, as part of projects set up for gender equality by different NGOs, and as researched by Jeanes and Magee. One of their main findings was that when women played football, they indicated that they had created a new female identity for themselves, incorporating elements of physical strength and fitness (Jeanes and Magee 144). These are all characteristics which normally are typified as the masculine stereotypes although they were defying them. Yet, by playing football and having assumed visibility, the girls and women had a general awareness that they were changing beliefs, to a certain extent, regarding the capabilities of women in Zambian society. While they recognised that they had a subordinate position within their communities and wanted to change this, this heightened consciousness had not yet turned into collective action (Jeanes and Magee 144-152). Parpart et al. have noted that collective action can be enabled or constrained by the structures of power encountered and therefore, closer attention should be paid to the broader political, economic and cultural contexts and discourses (4). This was also one of the outcomes from the research of the Zambian players, who did not believe in the outcomes of challenging gender stereotypes, reducing violence and increasing

opportunities outside the home thus not conforming the expectations from the NGOs (Jeanes and Magee 152).

5.2.2. Limitations of empowerment

One recurring criticism of empowerment among feminist scholars is that it has become a buzzword in the last few decades, too readily adapted by agencies, while carrying multiple meanings that have waxed the word of its connation with transformative change (Eyben and Napier Moore). FIFA explicitly mentions empowerment several times in its Women's Football Strategy report in 2018 and UEFA has also stated that "empowering women through football" will be instrumental to gender equality. However, both institutions fail to address what precisely this empowerment process would entail thus becoming part of the much-used trope.

Part of a wider problem, the use of empowerment has become almost overtly employed. The focus has shifted on individual empowerment as part of a global policy framework suiting market capitalism and neo-liberalism, thus failing to address structural power-related changes (Philips). Often women are considered as instruments of development thus neglecting the element of relationships and collective agency: "women's lived experiences of empowerment cannot be understood adequately by approaches that atomise women, abstracting them from the social and intimate relations that constrain and make possible their empowerment or disempowerment" (Cornwall and Edwards 4). The trend of development agencies is that they invoke images of empowered autonomous subjects, able to choose, make and shape their own directions of travel. In reality, few women have the capacity to make independent choices and follow them through, and therefore, context should always be crucial in an empowerment framework. There are various structures of constraint which can limit the ability to choose, including historical shifts in societal norms and practices, political and economic changes, donor funding etc (Cornwall and Ewards 2).

The biggest challenge is perhaps that empowerment in the strict sense is difficult to prove or measure. When returning to definitions of empowerment, as those put out by Kabeer for example, we notice that this definition suggests that empowerment is not a fixed state or an

end-point on itself thus not a measurable outcome to which targets can be attached (Cornwall 344).

Empowerment isn't always manifested in radical actions with radical results. Some feminist scholars have cautioned not to overlook that women's agency should also include the possibility of sometimes recognising subtle changes. These are 'negotiations' and can indicate how some women assess their own sense of agency, for example in informal contexts. "The kind of change that we see in women's everyday lives is much more subtle, much more incremental, than that portrayed by development agencies in their narratives of empowerment. It is often necessary to work within existing structures to achieve some positive gains, with the hope that these may eventually ripple out and bring about wider changes" (Cornwall and Edwards 7).

This idea is echoed by Kabeer, who asserts that while personal agency can be manifested in many forms, it also includes negotiation, deception, subversion and reflection as part of 'power-within', which can be exercised both by individuals and collectives (*Resources* 438). These can happen through shifting the power relations in households, where women are opting for private forms of empowerment while retaining intact the public image. One example of how power relations are negotiated within the private sphere is, in the case of South Asia for example about land cultivation or household decision-making. Statistically, this is impossible to measure as these are private forms of empowerment which retain a public image and honour. "Such strategies reflect a certain degree of caution on the part of women – a strategic virtue in situations where they may have as much to lose from the disruption of social relationships as they have to gain" (*Resources,* 448). These kinds of empowerment should also be valued, perhaps not as measurable, but indicative for transformation at some levels.

This discussion of limitations of empowerment is by no means extensive but rather, serves to criticise the result-based approach and its dominance. Batliwala has criticised this trend in her essay, "Taking the Power out of Empowerment". She questions the idea as it has been seized and re-defined by populist politics, fundamentalist and neo-con ideologies. Approaches such as these have shifted agency into the hands of professional intermediaries such as lawyers, NGO activists and policy specialists, Batliwala writes, and away from marginalised women and communities (*Taking* 563).

It is also important to underline that empowerment is neither a linear process, nor a destination in itself. Those who are set to lose authority are usually highly resistant to change in power relations (Jeanes and Magee 140). Hence, people might become disempowered through exclusion and marginalisation in their communities. Saavedra and Meier have sketched this complex situation in their analyses of role models in South Africa, where it's sometimes dangerous to cross the line. They touched upon the case of Eudy Simelane, former mid-fielder of the South African women's team, who was training to be the first female referee for the 2010 World Cup Simelane was raped and stabbed to death because of her campaigning for equal rights and sexuality (1171).

Therefore, there seems to be a mixed relationship between gender goals and sports. Going back to the study of the Zambian female football players of Jeanes and Magee, many reported negative reactions to them playing football and how many players had to undergo derogatory comments and negotiate considerable challenges to be able to play regularly (144). Indeed, other members of the community accused them of disrespecting conventional values and norms.

They didn't only experience resistance and stereotyping from the wider community but also from their own family members. Even though some members have been supportive of women playing football, several other players had family members who continued to discourage young women from participating. The reasons behind this were various and connected to larger cultural norms and expectations, such as a fear they would be unable to marry. (Jeanes and Magee 145-146). Hence, the girls had to negotiate to be 'allowed to play', with the team captain reporting that some young women stopped coming to football regularly (Jeanes and Magee 146).

5.2.3. A conceptual framework of assessing empowerment

One method of assessing empowerment has been put forward by Mosedale who proposed a strategy of identifying constraints to action. Women's empowerment is a process by which women redefine gender roles in ways that can extend their possibilities for being and doing. Firstly, the state of gendered power relations should be defined before any action is taken. By

repeating the process at a later stage, it will be possible to identify and whether power relations have transformed to become more equitable (252). Secondly, identifying constraints contributes towards expanding the understanding of how women are discriminated against. “When women are oppressed,” she writes, “their own perceptions of their situation are shaped by the ideology which supports the oppression they face” (253). Ergo, they might consider various aspects in their life as unchangeable or just, thus “actions may be considered desirable which in fact act against women’s own interest” (253). The need for action should be firmly informed by the local context, Mosedale asserts, as it is necessary for those women to consider their own perceptions to be unchallengeable. “Instead the participatory process of identifying constraining must include opportunities for women to reflect on their situation and develop their awareness of their own interests” (Mosedale 253).

Mosedale proposes to identify constraints through discussing if they are significantly different for women and men and by laying bare significant disadvantages for girls and women relative to boys and men. The constraints to be considered can be those which are imposed through cultural norms and ideas of social property. Identifying how girls’ and women’s agency have developed is in a way a “mirror image” to identifying those constraints: when those barriers to action are opened up, by definition, one’s agency will increase and “vice versa, if possibilities for action are increased then constraints are loosened”. Analysing changes in women’s agency involves considering both the individual and collective level, Mosedale argues (253-255).

6. Let the ball roll: case study Nova Žena

So far, a general discussion of women's discrimination in football and how this can become a field of transformative power, has been explored. This section will aim to go into more detail on how football can be a tool for empowerment or transformative change for girls and women. Therefore, it will introduce the case study, Nova Žena. In order to understand the goal of their project, the setting will be at first contextualised. Subsequently, theories of empowerment will be applied to the interviews with three players and the founder of the team.

6.1. Research context of Bosnia and Herzegovina

This research's case study is situated in Sarajevo, the capital of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Bosnia). Bosnia, once part of one of the six states within Yugoslavia, declared its independence in 1992 after a referendum. A bloody civil war followed which lasted until 1995. During this period, Serbs from Bosnia, Serbia and Montenegro conducted hostilities against the Bosnian Muslims, the Bosniaks, in order to recreate their own state Republika Srpska. The capital Sarajevo underwent a 1,479 day-long siege. Some 200,000 citizens, mostly male Bosniaks, were killed during the war and two million people were forced to flee from their homes (Ibrahimbegovic-Gafic 226-227). The war officially ended in November 1995 with the brokering of the Dayton Peace Accord and Bosnia was divided into two political entities: Republika Srpska and the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina (Gasser and Levinsen).

After the war, football clubs were in shambles: they were penniless and had suffered a loss of talent, but moreover, there was a clear division among ethnic lines which limited match attendance, media coverage and standards of competition (Gasser and Levinsen 460). The Bosnian national football operation was and still is run by political appointees from different ethnic groups, with no or little connection to the sport (Vullamy). As was common throughout the Balkans and thus in Bosnia, club leadership was often closely linked to the local political leadership which meant that to get financing, they sometimes depended on funding from municipalities (Gasser and Levinsen 460)

On the elite level, the national football team has been a sparkle of hope within Bosnia. The team was revered when they qualified for the FIFA World Cup in Brazil in 2014 and consists of a mix of ethnicities, with the superstar being striker Edin Džeko who is widely admired across the country (Ibrulj).

Women's football on the other hand, is still very much in its infancy. For a country with almost 4 million inhabitants, there are only 1,152 female players registered as playing football, the latest FIFA numbers showed. This hardly seems a surprise as the budget that the Bosnian football federation has taken out to invest in women's football is only €100,000. Institutionally, there are no female executive committee members at the board of the federation, and there is certainly no national women's football strategy (FIFA 2019). Women's football appears to be marginalised even though there is clearly a surge in interest. A UEFA report from 2017 noted an increase of 275% in female players registered from 2013. The exemption on this underrepresentation is perhaps SFK 2000 Sarajevo, the only women's club in Sarajevo which has been dominating women's football in Bosnia with 14 continuous titles and has taken part in the UEFA Champions League for women.

Unfortunately, Bosnia is a country where gender inequality is still a daily reality and visible in different areas. On the gender ranking, the country only ranks 62 out of 142 countries, according to the 2018 Global Gender Gap Report. Although several laws on gender equality were established and Bosnia ratified the Convention on the Elimination on all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), a 2015 World Bank report on gender equality revealed that, despite these measures, certain inconsistencies remain in the system. Women's political representation continues to be low with women only holding 21% of seats in the parliament. The main obstacle, the report stated, is the seeming persistence of traditional social norms about women's roles. "Women's lives continue to be governed by a patriarchal value system," it noted (17).

The country also deals with high unemployment rates. According to numbers by the International Labour Organisation of 2017, Bosnia, has one of the lowest female employment rates in the Balkans of around 23.1% (compared to 18.9% of men). Moreover, youth unemployment rate among women is more than half and stands at 51.4%. Total youth unemployment stands at a 45.8% rate.

Gender inequality lies at the root of gender-based violence against women and girls. A 2019 report, published by Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) on the safety of women, exposed that two-thirds of the women in their survey, or 67%, think that violence against women is common. The numbers are the highest for previous partner violence, at 11% compared to 6% of those with the current partner. 38% of women over the age of 15 are said to have experienced some form of sexual harassment. While these numbers might appear low, the report points out that violence against women is underreported compared to the average in the EU. The report suggests that this is due to cultural norms as Bosnia doesn't have a tradition of raising awareness of gender equality. What is more, the report acknowledges that "while norms may be slowly changing, some forms of violence are still widely accepted and regarded as normal" (73).

As Bosnia is a post-conflict country, civil society is very active and there are plenty of developmental organisations who focus on sports, mainly as a tool for reconciliation and peace. One of them is the FairPlay Initiative, part of the Vienna Institute for Dialogue and International Cooperation, who organise various tournaments in the Western Balkans and have recently also started organising women's football tournaments to promote inclusion and the promotion of human rights. According to their website, "a focus is on the empowerment of disadvantaged groups and enhancing the equal participation of girls and women in and through football".

Existing research about football and Bosnia is limited to the role it played during the war (see for example articles by Vrcan and Lalic, Wood) and about football as a tool for reconciliation and peacebuilding (see Belloni). Other literature has focused on the work of Open Fun Football Schools, a Danish NGO which started in 2008 offering programmes to children regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion or political background which aims to strengthen links between different communities (see Gasser and Levinsen, Coehoorn). Although these projects deliver important work, the focus on gender doesn't appear to be priority but rather of secondary importance or included within a bigger framework. In fact, little or almost no research has been conducted in how football can play a role in achieving gender equality, within the context of Bosnia. Likewise, there is no literature available on sports and empowerment within this setting.

The case study of this dissertation will centre around local Sarajevan team Nova Žena. Nova Žena – which means New Woman in Bosnian - was founded by Daliborka Nicolic in the municipality of Vogošća in 2017. The team is only for girls and young women and has the goal, apart from getting girls and young women to participate in football, to pursue more awareness for gender equality. Prior to that, Daliborka was organising workshops in local schools through organising some football matches. After noticing a surge in interest among the girls, she further developed the idea of forming a proper girls and women's team to inform them about gender equality.

Bosnia still has a mixed ethnic population with 50.1% being Bosniak (Muslim), 30.8% Serb and 15.4% Croat, according to the 2013 census. Vogošća however is predominantly Bosniak with only 2 % of the population being Serb. Evidently, all 20 members of the team are Muslim girls, although Daliborka is Serb. Asked about there being any other teams with similar aims active in the area, or within Sarajevo, Daliborka clearly answered: "no" (Nicolic 2).

Additionally, Nova Žena is not a developmental project set up by an NGO or other outside s as organisations. The team was founded on her own initiative. Daliborka says "it's a one woman show" (Nicolic 1). It has received small funding packages from foreign donors and initially the team received small funds from the Mediterranean Women's Fund in 2017-2018, followed by financial support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). This small financial backing allowed the team to start regular trainings of twice a week in a sports hall during the winter and in good weather, outside at the Koševo Olympic Stadium. Girls and women can attend the training sessions for free and don't have to pay for using the football gear and kits. However, since our conversations, the funding has run out and Nova Žena is currently in the process of again applying for funds. Until then, the project is on hold.

6.2.Methodology

In order to investigate the role that football could play to empower or emancipate girls and women, I travelled to Sarajevo on invitation of FairPlay in April 2019. I attended a girls' tournament and training sessions of girls' football teams. Some trainings were mixed with both genders, but the tournament, which was organised by local organisation Fudbala

Respekt, consisted of indoor matches with girls' teams from all over the region (including teams from all over Bosnia and Herzegovina and two from Macedonia). Most of those teams teams were incorporated in existing male football clubs apart from the junior team of SFK 2000 Sarajevo.

It was at one of these occasions I met Daliborka, whose team, contrary to the teams I had met until then, wasn't involved within existing club structures. Even though preliminary interviews were held with some of the players from the tournament, mostly adolescent girls, I ultimately preferred to shift the focus to Nova Žena. It was the only team that stated to have the clear goal of using football as a tool to raise awareness about gender equality, thus using it as an activist tool to shift power relations within the community. Moreover, it is a purely grassroots team, thus independent of any union or association, which in my opinion reflects the feminist resistant nature of the group (Rowlands, *Questioning* 39). I was intrigued by the local activism, and the change required from actors from the bottom-up as opposed to a top-down approach.

I opted for qualitative interviews and conducted various interviews with Daliborka: first a recorded interview an hour in Sarajevo in a conversational style, followed by four email interviews. The contacts for the interviewees were made via Daliborka and the players who agreed to be interviewed are between 13 and 21 years old: Mirha (13), Amina (16) and Đjena (21).

As a researcher, there were several barriers to assess the transformative impact of football. First and foremost, the language barrier was one of the biggest challenges because the interviewees spoke little to no English, insufficient to ask about transformative aspects of playing football. Hence it was decided to pursue email interviews and a translator was used to translate the questions into Bosnian and vice versa.

Moreover, it was challenging task to ask what notions such as 'empowerment' and 'gender equality' meant for the interviewees. There is the inherent risk some meanings might have gone lost in translation. Additionally, the spoken or written word always "has a residue of ambiguity" (Fontana and Frey 645). The concept of 'empowerment' was therefore not used in the questions as it depends on the women's context and knowledge of 'empowerment' which wouldn't necessarily correlate to the theoretical framework as discussed in this thesis.

The questions where semi-structured and the same questions were sent to each interviewee, thus with some space for divergence. Questions started with “how” and “why” with the aim of making it possible to deduce from the answers how football impacted the players on an individual and collective level. Also, I wanted to avoid “yes” and “no” answers thus always asked for further elaboration.

As discussed previously, empowerment is a process and not an end-goal on itself. Due to time constraints, there was not enough opportunity to go deeper into the wider context and ask follow-up questions. The interviews were compared and analysed and consequently, the key themes were identified, to then explore relevant subthemes. Some findings were afterwards discussed with Daliborka and some clarifications were sought with her. The next subchapter will be organised around these key themes which are assessed within an empowerment framework as suggested by Mosedale.

Additionally, reflexivity and power hierarchies between the researcher and the research in the process of data collection and analysis are always central to feminist research (see Wilkinson, Doucet and Mauthner). Therefore, I also recognise that my identity as a Western European, who has founded a grassroots women’s football team, has shaped my interview questions and my perspectives on the results.

Ultimately, it should be noted that this case study by no means serves to represent the whole football community in Sarajevo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, but rather, is an attempt on how playing football can impact girls and women on a grassroots level.

6.3.Findings of empowerment through playing football

The following section will touch upon the theories of empowerment by themes that emerged from the interviews: the joy of playing football, growing stronger, claiming space, creating visibility, beyond the pitch, and ultimately, structural power relations.

6.3.1. The joy of playing football

Asked why the girls wanted to join the team, they all expressed their love for football. The interviewees had experience playing as children, either with the boys from their neighbourhood or with family members such as brothers. Mirha said she was inspired by her role model Edin Džeko, Bosnian national football hero and currently playing for A.S. Roma. Džeko's status is so elevated, he is called the 'diamond' of Bosnia by local commentators and cheered on by the whole country (Vullamy). In line with this, Meier and Saavedra have argued about role models, their function is to inspire and demonstrate others how to achieve their goal (1168).

Đejna and Mirha both state they were supported from the beginning from the family home and that they themselves decided to keep playing. What is more, Mirha's dad fully supports her potential a future goalkeeper: "My dad says that I can become a great football player because I'm not afraid of the ball, duels or tackles." Likewise, Đejna's parents encouraged her to try out new things and "football was a pretty natural choice for me".

While the interviewees indicated that parents supported them, some only after the girls started playing, the reality is that many parents are strongly opposed to girls playing. Daliborka recalls an encounter with parents of a player who played in two league clubs saying that she shouldn't be playing "should be employed" (Nicolic 3). Indeed, in a poor environment such as Vogošća, for the parents it's a priority to find a job rather than participate in a game such as football. Daliborka has also expressed her amazement that girls to keep coming and play "it is hard because there is really much prejudice about passion for football" (Nicolic 1). Indeed, this persistence demonstrates the girls' own agency and action taking outside of traditional gender roles as a challenge to expectations of traditional gender norms.

In many contexts, the opportunities for adolescent girls to develop agency is constrained and severely limited by norms that emphasise this obedience to relations, such as family members and to the outside world (Harper and Marcus 33). Amina's parents only approved of her playing once they saw she was serious about playing and very persistent.

> They were telling me that football is not quite the sport girls should play but I always ignored that and focused on my work and goals. (Amina)

This shows that Amina wasn’t adhering to the traditional gender norms and faced opposition at first as football is not perceived as the game that girls should be playing. The fact that she followed through on her choice shows the ‘power to’. Moreover, her parents are now supportive of her playing football afterwards and are “happy” about her playing football. This can be interpreted as a consciousness raising of her environment that it is fine for their daughters and girls to play football too.

Family resistance is also often related to broader cultural and religious expectations. In general, Islam practised in Bosnia is moderate with Muslim women participating freely and successfully in sports. Although women wear Western style clothes, many also wear hijab to comply with Islamic requirements (Ibrahimbegovic-Gafic 227). In Daliborka’s experience, after the war there was an increasing interest among Bosnians to express their religion, such as for example wearing the hijab and go to the mosque (Nicolic 3). For their daughters to play football does not fully fit within cultural expectations. Moreover, Daliborka also mentioned that other girls had stopped coming to training sessions, insinuating they were not ‘allowed’ to come (Nicolic 2).

> Football in such an environment seems like a very extreme idea. There was one case of a father who told me that by sending his daughter to the mosque, then to folklore, then to gymnastics but when she heard there was a women’s football team in our neighbourhood, she begged him for permission to play football. At her first training, she looked so relieved and very happy but ultimately, she came only a few times. I suppose the father decided football was not for her. (Nicolic 3)

Within the norms of their community, parents often believe their daughters should be doing a girls’ sport such as gymnastics. While in this case the player had to be ‘allowed’ to play, this choice was eventually taken away from her. This is considered a case of ‘power-over’ as the player has become disempowered since.

6.3.2. Growing stronger

On the individual level, the interviews reveal that the girls experienced agency of becoming stronger. Amina says: “I am playing football to grow stronger, to learn what fairplay is and to become more persistent and enduring”. By giving everything on the pitch, it gives them a feeling of enormous confidence or as Amina put it again, “I feel the strongest when I score the goal”.

Đejna benefitted a lot from playing football, with her clearly expressing “For me it is all about powerful strikes and high jumps. These are the traits that great players possess.”

Interestingly, powerful meant for the interviewees literally the power of their bodies in the physical sense, a new type of athleticism. The girls outlined how football makes them literally feel stronger with the interviewees using words such as “strong”, “healthy” and “powerful”. This physical strength is connected to feelings of well-being, confidence and security and a greater sense of control (Jeanes and Magee 143). As Amina puts it “I can truly say that I am proud of myself”, indicating exerting a greater control of her life and her ability to make choices, denoting ‘power within’.

Friesen points out how girls are often socialised to believe that they are physically weak or at least weaker than boys. When they become aware of their own physical strength is a revelation that of physical feats and skills that they didn’t expect themselves (111). In other words, they have experienced personal development, thus an agency in themselves which is potentially empowering.

For Mirha, playing football is also a way to deal with her health. Suffering from asthma, she is forced to do inhalation therapy and has to do hormone tests all the time but because she can play football, football she grows more confident in her own abilities:

> Football makes me feel stronger, especially when I’m feeling down. Football encourages me in a way, so that I’m fighting to overcome my condition.

At one other point she wrote, “football is there to bring me back to life”. By playing football, Mirha denoted she is growing stronger in combatting her health issues, denoting a “power-

within’. She is not just developing a physical strength but also a mental health to overcome these barriers in life. According to Kabeer’s definition, this is a strategic life choice as by playing football she is living the life she wants, batting her health issues, while achieving a change within.

6.3.3. Claiming space

In general girls and women have much less access to, and are sometimes completely excluded from, public spaces which men can visit freely-town such as parks, football pitches, and sports stadiums. Even when public spaces are intended for general public use, including girls and women, they all too often feel too intimidated to use them (Brady 3). Since these spaces are male spaces, girls and women using those contributes to challenging the gender norm.

Access to space, in this case infrastructure, is of crucial importance for the team to be able to train and play. In all interviews, Daliborka has explained that they use the same stadiums as men as this is the only infrastructure available in the vicinity of the Vogošća. As will be explained later in this chapter, this access to resources is crucial and when restricted, has grave consequences on the team.

Taking and using space can also be interpreted as creating a field in which they grow a collective network.

> Football helps us to bond and to grow closer. It helps us to reduce this social perception, the difference between men’s and women’s football, which also helps to encourage other girls to start playing. (Đejna)

By having access to play football, it doesn’t only create a bond but challenges the existing inequalities, moreover it creates visibility which could encourage other women to join in and mobilise.

All girls seem to agree that sport is a good way to fight for gender equality. By playing football, there is an increasing awareness that the girls can do the same things as the boys and sometimes even take the higher ground:

> Gender equality means that girls can do everything that guys can, and that there are no differences. When guys realise that a girl can play football, or that a girl can outplay them, they get so surprised that they themselves forget how to play. (Amina)

The power that Amina has gained by playing football, the skills to be even better than the boys, has given her confidence to defend the position of women in football. She has appropriated the 'being' and 'doing' to her new sense of self, disrupting expectations of the boys. Indeed, this elevated her sense of confidence shows the young women's agency. It can also be interpreted as Kabeer's discursive alternative and realising a different way of being and doing, a new awareness of being more skilled than her male opponent.

Đejna believes that through playing football, they are changing the perception of women playing football. Moreover, she declares: "I feel very special when I play with other girls. I can channel out all the negative energy and feel very positive about the world out there." This is Đejna own declaration of power to do, to accomplish, to change, and to take ownership over her own destiny and feel more positive, or so to say, a discovery of her own agency. Being part of a group can provide pathways to gain status and increases the bonding between the girls, thus a feeling of collective efficacy.

Brady also pointed out the importance of space for adolescent girls "who have narrowed social networks and few collective spaces in which they can gather to meet with peers, receive mentoring support, and acquire skills" (Brady 3). What is more, a close-knit social network of peers which is offered by a team can give them an identity outside as that conventionally assigned to them and provide them with a sense of affiliation, providing a physical and emotional refuge for girls (Brady 4).

Hence, being in a team setting provides them with the possibility to share their experiences with women in a similar situation, thus providing social support. This 'sisterhood' feeling, Knapp says, referring to Theberge, has potential to achieve cultural change, precisely because of the built-in support network (42). The fact that the team bonding is strong is also again

underscored by Amina: “We often have minor quarrels, but we always sort it out quickly. We are one great team after all.”

6.3.4. Creating visibility

Claiming space is often linked with visibility. As Meier pointed out, if women playing football paints an unusual picture, this can be normalised by claiming space regularly and recurring events can overcome awkward feelings and eventually reconstruct gender norms (*Gender Equity* 19). By taking to the pitches, girls playing football should become a normalised activity within their community. The three women felt they were changing beliefs. This entails the ‘collective power’, to generate new possibilities within their communities, for altering beliefs about women’s position within sport and their environment more broadly. Again, as Mirha phrases it:

> We are becoming recognised for what we are doing here and I think it helped people understand and change their attitude about women’s football.”

Mirha even promotes her being part of a team on social media, thus in her friendship networks: “I can brag about our success on social media haha, that was a joke, but I’m very proud to be a pioneer of something that is very new in this region.”

Indeed, Nova Žena openly challenges and contests the existing gender norms but as Daliborka reveals, the girls weren’t even aware at first what gender equality meant. “Then they started thinking: why would football be for men only? They are driven by love for this sport” (Nicolic 3). This refers to the conscientisation process, as described by Freire, how the girls became gradually aware of their situation.

When asked about what gender equality meant, the interviewees referred to literal equality with boys. “Women are capable of doing everything that men can,” Đejna believes, or as Amina has put it: “Gender equality means that girls can do everything that guys can, and that there are no differences”.

Mirha also expressed that "it helps me in a way that we can show that we can do all the things that guys can. Perhaps we are not as good as guys at football or some physical demanding jobs, but it doesn't mean we can't do it." The stress on 'physical' shows how Mirha is aware of the physical characteristics which belong to the norms of feminine vs masculine, but at the same time, she also shows an awareness that this shouldn't stop them from participating or trying to participate.

They are not doing this by merely playing football, something which already disrupts existing gender hierarchies, but by wearing kits with the feminist symbols (see Annex 1 for a photo of the team in their kits). Even though Daliborka admitted not everyone in the community might realise what this means, she is convinced that they will find out.

> At the beginning of the project, girls didn't know what the symbol on their jerseys meant, but now they know. I think that in general, the people in our community don't know what it means but this way they will find out. I chose this symbol because were fighting for equality with men through women's football. (Nicolic 3)

However, there are also negative experiences which are rose out of this project and Daliborka indicates how they had to negotiate considerable challenges.

> For this stage, it's enough just to play [football] because we have already shocked and caused negative attention of stakeholders, they don't like us. They don't want big problems. We just want to play for now and then we are ready for bigger steps. (Nicolic 2).

Thus, by making statements that are perceived as radical within the cultural norms for that community, Daliborka seems to be aware that it should be taken step by step underlining that empowerment is a process, referring to negotiating empowerment, which for the time being means just being able to play.

Indeed, most girls have talked about how their community questioned their participation, as it doesn't adhere to social norms. Đejna explains that it "at first it was pretty weird for them [her environment] to understand why I would choose football among all sports. They used to tell me that it's not a girl' sport and that I should go for a different sport". However, now they

have accepted that Đejna is playing the game. This development shows that initially, the relational environment was reluctant of her as a female football player, but now have accepted this fact. Moreover, she believes that by playing, “it helps us to reduce this social perception of the difference between men’s and women’s football, which encourages other girls to start playing”. This denotes the ‘power with’ and a potential ripple effect, instigating other girls to play themselves.

Similarly, Mirha also explains she experienced disregard from the community at first but shows great resistance against these presumptions:

> People would give me the looks and ask why, among all sports, football was my choice. I usually tell them ‘why not?’ and I hate explaining why so I usually tell them that women love football too. Maybe they should try it first, and then talk about it.

What is more, she gains in a position of power by questioning the others why they would question her. By her playing football, she has acquired a voice and she can speak up for herself. Telling other people that they should try to play first before judging is a powerful statement, subverting the traditional expectations, and denoting a ‘power within’ and ‘power to’.

The girls also pointed out that most of their friends accept they play football, with Mirha even saying that everyone finds it “cool” and boys find it “interesting that I’m playing”. Here it’s important to stress that Mirha is younger than Đejna and Amina who have expressed that more people in the environment are not always as supportive. Out of her friends’ circle, Amina said that she invited some girlfriends to join her as some did. This again refers to the consciousness-raising of the people around her. Yet, this is limited as not everyone seems to approve of her playing. Amina carries on regardless: “some like it, some don’t but I’m still going to keep on doing what I like and enjoy it”.

While it has previously been discussed how the differences between gender are constructed on the playground, they manifest even more at a later age, especially during teenage years. Daliborka already explained that several of the players broke off their relationships with boyfriends, with one of them being Đejna. When she started playing for Nova Žena, she stopped coming after some time because her boyfriend did not want her to play (Nicolic 4).

When they ended the relationship, only then was Đejna coming back regularly to play for the team. By their male partners not approving of their girlfriends playing football, this shows that again that they are not conforming to the expectations of football not being for girls. Therefore, boys are important in this regard because their behaviour influences girls' mobility and access to resources.

Furthermore, an interesting take from the interviews is that the girls were not as much preoccupied with playing football against people from different backgrounds or ethnicities. As discussed previously, the dominating narrative in international development and sport is about peacebuilding and international reconciliation. Yet, when the young women were asked about playing against or with girls and women from different backgrounds, they almost seemed surprised by this question as if it didn't matter. Đejna said that it doesn't on the pitch: "When we're playing together it doesn't matter who you are, what your religious beliefs are or where you're coming from".

Amina as well is purely focused on the game, rather than identity or background of other players: "When I play against other girls, I don't focus on what they look like but the way they pay and try to read their tactics and style of play." Mirha even admitted never to have thought about it in this way. There seems to be a new, young generation which is less so preoccupied with the background but more focused on playing the game. This diverges from trope of the development narratives organisations such as Open Fun Football Schools and FairPlay.

6.3.5. Beyond the pitch

All of the girls interviewed said that football had a positive effect on their life. The trainings gave them a purpose in life and made them prioritise playing over other things, such as for example hanging out in coffee bars as Amina articulated. "I've got so much love for this game and I want to keep playing for the rest of my life". Moreover, the game also proved to have life changing effects for Đejna "I feel healthier now and it kept me off the street".

In this context, it means that football has given Đejna a purpose out of a setting where young people are increasingly using drugs and alcohol (Nicolic 3). Football transformed her life in a

way that now she has the choice to transform her life situation, thus having the ability to choose a different path and complying with Kabeer's definition of strategic life choices. She has the 'power to' and become an active agent for personal life changes. Moreover, they have all admitted that they want football to remain vital in the rest of their life.

This might well happen as the next plans for the team are the enter one of the local girls' leagues (Nicolic 2). Additionally, the players' ambition and love for the game is a bottomless well. Đejna dreams of playing "for a big European Club and to make a great career in football". Likewise, Amina declares she has "so much love for the game" and wanting to play football for the rest of her life. Mirha is equally ambitious stating football should remain a big part of her life:

> I would love to achieve a whole lot: great games, travelling, making friends and having a great life (…) I see myself as a healthy and successful goalkeeper in the future. I honestly hope for the best and I pray to God for that.

In this light, it's important to stress that empowerment is less a destination than a journey, it involves the process of women thinking differently about themselves but also about the situations they are in (Cornwall 25). Moreover, it has made them aware of the possibilities within football, and how they can use it in the rest of their life. For instance, three of the girls of the team how decided to become trained as licensed coaches under the Bosnian football federation (Nicolic 2). This would be an important step for them personally, as a coach is a figure of authority and power. Moreover, this would be helpful for the team as they can manage to build more capacity, in the sense that they'll be able to rely on female coaches have come out of the same squad.

6.3.6. Structural power relations

Attention should also be paid to the broader political and economic structures of Vogošća. One of the main issues that typifies Bosnia is corruption. According to Transparency International Corruption Perceptions Index of 2018, the perceived corruption of the public sector in Bosnia ranks 38 out of 100, which indicates that corruption is thriving and is also

noticeable in football. Daliborka has continuously repeated the issue of corruption as the biggest obstacle for girls playing football in interviews:

> In Vogošća, almost all sport clubs are mercenaries of local authorities or members of the family of businessmen. They do not have any competencies, getting money from the state and register completely non-transparent (….) The NGO sector in Vogošća is a complete farce, headed by the same people are in the council of the municipality. (Nicolic 2)

This context is important as Nova Žena is the only girls' team in the area but receives no support from the local government. "They don't like this idea. Last year they had a strategy concerning women's rights but they failed to execute it because in reality, they don't want gender equality" (Nicolic 1). For them it is evident to keep the status quo, as they are still very much so a patriarchal society.

Additionally, Nova Žena deliberately was set up to differentiate themselves from the male order of football clubs who, plagued with corruption. However, from this outsider position, the team has been disadvantaged by these existing institutions repeatedly. Football infrastructure is a major issue in the country as there are almost no public spaces or parks where football can be practised, Nova Žena is required to train on official pitches. To be able to use the football halls, Nova Žena was required to pay 30% more than other teams for renting the pitches just because they were a female team. Moreover, the sports hall didn't allow Nova Žena to display their banners to attract more girls to come and play football (Nicolic 2). Hence, their access to resources, such as infrastructure, was already financially restricted when compared to the local male teams and they were further disadvantaged by the men in power of the stadium.

One of the major hurdles for Nova Žena is precisely the lack of financial resources, as it doesn't require a membership fee of their players and is dependent on external money. The team was forced to stop their practices temporarily since their funds have dried up and thus forced to stop their training sessions until new financial resources are coming in. This is a typical example of a local project, in absence of institutional support, is dependent on donor support. It affirms the paradigm that empowering women doesn't just involve giving them

access to resources, it also requires systematic and structural changes, as articulated by Nagar and Raju (4-5).

The entrenched gender bias obstructing the training of the young women is further damaging their personal and professional development. One of the goals for Daliborka is to have some team members to become trained as licensed coaches as part of the football federation. In the first interview, Daliborka already indicated she would prefer using female coaches which was impossible to find (Nicolic 1). For the girls being trained, it would be a significant step for them as individuals, but also for the team as then they can build capacities. However, once again, they are being restricted in achieving this:

> Due to the alleged overcrowding of the stadium in Vogošća, it is necessary to conduct trainings at the stadium in the rural part of our municipality - Semizovac. We need 1300 euros to rent stadium and for bus tickets for girls. These days, I write to everyone: the municipality, the government of the canton, the ministries of sports, etc. to help us to continue the activity with this grant, but nobody answers me. No one has any understanding or empathy. When I told all this to the director of the stadium in Vogošća and begged him to help these girls with free training terms, he told me that I should enjoy by the river beside which I live, and that I should not deal with such nonsense. Terrible. (Nicolic 4)

This quote reveals various levels of discrimination. Institution-wise, men are openly excluding the team from participating based on stereotyping. Women and girls should not be playing football, but instead, "should enjoy the riverside". Such statements can be understood as the norms which until people question these gender ideologies, adhere to because it's the way things are done (Harper and Marcus 215). These remarks are also similar to those as described in the first chapter, when girls and women were systematically excluded from playing football throughout history. By expressing football for girls as "nonsense", there is a complete lack of respect and consideration, thus Nova Žena is not even taken seriously.

Furthermore, it also indicates that football for the institutions should be and will remain a masculine space. Unfortunately, this also has also detrimental effects in the longer run, including on a personal and a relational level. As discussed previously, unemployment rates

for women are high and obtaining a coaching degree be an opportunity to achieve professional qualifications with ultimately the goal of obtaining employment (Nicolic 4). The male grip on leadership and societal preferences are the overarching norms within the patriarchal community. In the last interview with Daliborka, this became extremely palpable.

7. Conclusion

This thesis has sought to prove that playing football can have a transformative impact on girls and women. It has established that football as a sport is a refuge for the male hegemony but now also can become a field of resistance when girls and women transgress these norms, on both the elite and the grassroots level.

In terms of ‘empowerment’, or ‘transformative change’, the findings of the case study on Nova Žena provide evidence of an increased sense of agency after girls started participating in football. According to Kabeer’s theories, the girls have shown agency by making the choice of playing football and acting upon that choice. Them playing football is not bestowed upon them, it is a clear choice they’ve made themselves, mostly, because of a love and passion for the game. It can even be argued that they’ve made strategic life choices: Đejna said it helped her to stay off the streets and is now training to becoming a coach.

All the girls interviewed have clearly expressed a ‘power-within’, in the sense of feeling physically and mentally stronger. The latter is extremely important as it gave them the confidence to invite other girls to play, denoting a certain level of ‘power with’. Words such as “pioneer” and “proud” underline this consciousness, and an increased awareness of self-esteem and efficacy.

In this context, it is also crucial to underline the role of a ‘safe space’. This isn’t necessarily a physical space, albeit this is important because they need access to resources, here footballing infrastructure. Moreover, it is a safe space where they can come and train together and bond. The importance of this safe space shouldn’t be underestimated: through playing football, they are able to manage challenges in their wider lives and these friendships and networks provide a platform for collective empowerment.

This thesis has also demonstrated that the issue of gender equality and football clearly intersect. In this light, the relational aspect is crucial to the nature of empowerment: the players had to convince their near environment to be able to play football. In some cases, this was successful such as for Amina who developed a clear case of conscientisation of the people around her and thus an increased sense of agency.

Unfortunately, there is also evidence that the majority of the girls interested in playing within the community were simply not allowed to participate or didn’t return because it didn’t fit the cultural norms of their near environment. This shows that when they are supported by their

relations, including boys and men, the girls have the biggest chance to acquiring this agency and discovering a new sense of self.

This agency is paired with an increased awareness about existing gender relations. Some had to sacrifice existing relationships with those men who were opposed to them playing, such as breaking up with boyfriends. On the other hand, this shows an increased sense of 'power to', that of choosing to play football over traditional gender norms. Therefore, it could be stated that football made the girls' aware of patriarchal societal norms and male domination. Although the interviewees didn't go into great detail, they all said that they feel "equal" to boys or men in their community. While there was no awareness about oppressive gender structures before, this sentiment can be considered as a considerable gain and is an important first step.

Furthermore, even though Nova Žena might seem radical in their community, it seems that this is the only way possible to make small advances. Merely playing football on itself and wearing gender equality symbols on their kits is evidence of openly tackling male privilege. Additionally, playing has also increased their life choices: as mentioned previously, several members of Nova Žena can become qualified coaches, thus achieve an increased opportunity to employability. Moreover, this effort could be reinvested in the community and enhance capacity building for their own team.

However, the relationship between playing football and gender equality is complex and we should be careful with overtly using 'empowerment'. Rowlands' definition of 'power with' in the sense of 'collective action' in order to gain structural changes has so far not happened. Therefore, the conscientisation process hasn't been significantly altered within the community as a result of collective action. Agreeing with Parpart et al., this is also because this collective action for the time being is constrained by the broader political, economic and cultural context (15).

In a patriarchal community such as Vogošća, the barriers are incredibly high and as is shown in this case, those who are set to lose authority are most resistant to changing power relations. Daliborka has several times expressed the team doesn't receive any support from the local authorities and is thus entirely dependent on small funds from international development organisations. A conclusion that can be drawn from this is that on a structural level, the fate of the team is still very much under the auspices of the patriarchy. For the time being, it seems that "football takes place within current gender relations rather than leading to

reshaping of ideologies" (Jeanes and Magee 150). Indeed, gender equity, authority, and power have not been transmitted via their participation, and it could be argued that in some cases it has led to disempowerment. Because of a lack of funding, their activities are temporarily on hold.

Nonetheless, we should recognise the advances that have been made for these women playing football. To an outsider, they are very openly questioning patriarchal structures. Simultaneously, for insiders the girls have clearly indicated that they challenged some cultural expectations resulting in them being able to play football, which was tolerated in their local communities. A small grassroots girls' team operating within a patriarchal society, plagued with corruption and within a context of economic hardship is a sign of resistance on itself. Therefore, it should be underlined again that empowerment is a process, as Cornwall has pointed out, and the biggest limitation to this research has been time constraints. The situation of Nova Žena is developing every day and they are nowhere near finished.

The fact that these girls can reimagine their lives and dream together about new alternatives is also part of transformative action in the development of critical consciousness and agency, "including a need to recognise that small changes are important and may potentially contribute to a ripple effect that can ultimately contribute to broader changes" (Spaaij et al. 584). This can for example be achieved through the peer effect: getting more and more girls to play football as Nova Žena sets the example.

In a best-case scenario, if these girls' voices are heard by the wider community, there might be a gradual shift in relations that there will be a newly created confidence, cohesion and cooperation -- a first step towards local social change and regeneration. As Spaaij et al. have also claimed, small projects such as Nova Žena can provide a foundation to build on and pursue further gender relations in the future (584).

On a grander scale of things, the 2019 Women's World Cup has, apart from garnering more attention than ever, also caused much debate about gender roles, both on and off the pitch. Even though the women's squad of Bosnia didn't compete and while it is also impossible to measure the effects of the event on Nova Žena, there is no denying the fact women's football is just becoming increasingly popular. This is hopeful: if more girls play football globally, this will undoubtedly cause a ripple effect.

On a personal note, when I arrived in Sarajevo, one of the first things I was told by a taxi driver was that women's team SFK 2000 Sarajevo had played Chelsea in the UEFA

Champions League. Even though they lost, this event impacted people's everyday lives; such is the power of football.

As a final remark, all girls or women should be able to play football, on their own terms – wherever, whoever and whenever they want. But as this thesis has demonstrated, it is an ongoing battle. Who else has phrased this better than Marta in her plea to girls wanting to play football: "Women's football is relying on you to survive. Think about it, value it more. Cry in the beginning so you can smile at the end."[1] It is a battle worth fighting for.

[1] See page 30

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Annex 1

Photo of Nova Žena, courtesy of Daliborka Nicolic, May 2019.