

SEXUALITY POLITICS ON THE FOOTBALL FIELD

DENİZ NİHAN AKTAN

BOĞAZİÇİ UNIVERSITY

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SEXUALITY POLITICS ON THE FOOTBALL FIELD

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Deniz Nihan Aktan

Boğaziçi University

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DECLARATION OF ORIGINALITY

I, Deniz Nihan Aktan, certify that

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ABSTRACT

Sexuality Politics on the Football Field

This thesis explores the potentials of the football field as a site of resistance through the mobilities and alliances of gender non-conforming footballing bodies. The queer-identified teams, which have emerged in the last years in several cities around Turkey, are analyzed with respect to the voluntarily and/or compulsorily decentralization and proliferation of the sites of resistance within the current sociopolitical conditions of the country. The ways in which dissident groups relate to the football field, which is mostly considered as a male-dominant and heterosexualized space where social norms are reproduced, are classified into three groups: resistance *through* / *against* / *for* football. After the contextualization of my research both in the academic field and in the domain of football, with a particular focus on the journey of women and LGBTI+ individuals, the category of resistance *for* football is thoroughly examined as a unique way for gender non-conforming footballing bodies to inhabit the field. Getting inspired by the recent tendency of queers toward football field as a site of politics and collective well-being, the link between sexual orientations and spatial aptitudes of the body is investigated. Bodily movements and spatial configurations co-constitutively and constantly shape the field, its borders, rules, values, and thus participants. Attempting at denaturalizing and historicizing of seemingly effortless appearance of the football field, I argue that the queer-identified teams disrupt the straight lines and thus can extend the footballing bodies to new spatial orientations where queer happenings can blossom.

ÖZET

Futbol Sahasında Cinsellik Politikaları

Bu tez, toplumsal cinsiyete uymayan futbolcu bedenlerin hareketlerini ve ittifaklarını odak noktasına alarak futbol sahasının direniş mekânı olma potansiyelini keşfe çıkmaktadır. Son yıllarda Türkiye'nin pek çok şehrinde kurulan kuir-tanımlı takımlar, ülkenin sosyopolitik koşulları içinde direniş mekanlarının zorunlu ve/veya gönüllü biçimde merkezleşmesi ve çoğalması da göz önünde bulundurularak, analiz edilmiştir. Toplumsal normların yeniden üretildiği, erkek-egemen ve heteroseksüelleştirilmiş bir mekân olarak kabul edilen futbol sahasıyla toplumsal hareketlerin politika yaparken ne şekillerde ilişkilendikleri sorusuna şu üç kategori önerilmiştir: futbol *aracılığıyla*, futbola *karşı* ve futbol *için* direniş. Hem akademik alanda hem de futbol sahasında -kadınların ve LGBTI+ bireylerin yolculuklarına özel bir yer ayırarak- konumlandıktan sonra, “futbol *için* direniş” kategorisi toplumsal cinsiyete uymayan futbolcu bedenlerin sahayla ilişkilerinde benimsedikleri özgün bir yol olarak derinlemesine incelenmiştir. Kuirlerin son zamanlarda futbol sahasına kolektif iyilik ve politika yapma arzularıyla yönelmelerinden ilhamla, cinsel yönelimler ve bedenlerin mekânsal yatkınlıkları arasındaki bağ araştırılmıştır. Beden hareketleri ve mekânsal düzenlemeler arasındaki ilişki mekânı ve bu mekânın sınırlarını, kurallarını, değerlerini ve katılımcılarını şekillendirir. Bu bağlamda, futbol sahasının zahmetsizce oluşturulmuş gibi görünen halini tarihselleştirerek ve doğallığını sorgulayarak, bu tez, kuir-tanımlı takımların sahanın düz çizgilerini dağıttığı, futbolcu bedenlere yeni mekânsal yönelim imkanları sağladığı ve böylece kuir olasılıklar yaratabilme potansiyeli barındırdığı savını ileri sürmüştür.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Sporting bodies have the capacity to resist against, negotiate with, or transform the social norms and to disrupt the reproduction of hegemonic power. As a physical activity, sport requires a space where players can compete.¹ The ways in which space has been conceptualized changed from being a surface to a container, and most recently, scholars consider the space as an active participant in a reciprocal relationship with the larger power dynamics. In parallel with this, sport is approached in a more elaborative way, different from being seen as a mere reflector of social relations. The Olympic and Panhellenic games in ancient Greece were called *agones*, meaning “contests,” and this term has been claimed by many as the building block of “sport” in the sense that we know it (Besnier, Brownell, & Carter, 2018). Sport necessitates an agonistic relationship, a struggle against something, which is mostly the other player(s). The analysis of its contested character carries the agonistic relationship beyond the limits of the material playfield through the claims of that sport is both influenced by and influencing social relations and that it has a relative autonomy that sometimes allows it to move in non-aligned ways with the order of life (Bourdieu, 1996).

The cisgender white heterosexual male embracing “hegemonic masculinity” (Connell, 1995) has been the main character of the sports domain since the primary efforts of constituting modern sports with universalized standards all over the world, stating the motive of ensuring a fair playground. Those who support maintaining the fairness ‘between’ sexes often put forward the argument of stopping men from

¹ A quick but necessary note is that the spatial dimension of sport is not limited to material borders since the rapidly growing domain of e-sports entered the field.

competing against women and thus strict regulations around sex-segregation are implemented and justified. This, a practice ostensibly made for the sake of avoiding misconduct; providing women with a fair playground, on the contrary, causes many human rights violations, unnecessary medical interventions, and psychological problems because of the non-consensual sex policing over bodies who are trans, non-binary, intersex, or cisgender women with diverse levels of hormones and with different chromosome patterns.²

Under these conditions, even the mere participation of women and gender-non-conforming bodies in sport indicate a constant effort to exceed the foundationally present borders that keep being reproduced through sports institutions, discriminating discourses by sports authorities, misrepresentations in the media, and so forth. We regularly witness ruptures and non-linear changes in the participation level of women in certain sports, both in the careers of individual athletes and in mass exclusions. Therefore, I find it extremely important to pursue the footsteps of these non-conforming bodies in sports spaces, particularly on the football field, claiming that those who cannot follow the predetermined path are the ones who can find new ways, methods, and communities that are otherwise forgotten or thrown aside (Ahmed, 2006; Halberstam, 2011).

This thesis analyzes the sexuality politics and embodiment processes in and around the football field in Turkey with a particular focus on queer-identified teams that have emerged in the last three four years. Adopting an insider perspective, as I am among the founders and players of one of these queer-identified teams, I pursue football-related narratives of the players in these teams through which one can see

² These categories are neither mutually exclusive nor static. This is a large and fluid site of construction while for some people there is an identity that they embrace for all their life, for others it is more of a playground where assigned and self-identified identities are continuously played with, deconstructed, and constructed again and again in different ways.

that inhabiting the sexualized spaces from a very young age has a remarkable impact on individual preferences related to physical activity and on the aptitudes and limitations of bodies. This thesis also focuses on recent changes in the socio-political space in Turkey and their impact on the mobility of queer activists in big cities. Therefore, it has an aim of making sense of the increasing popularity of the football field as a site of resistance by queer activists in relation to the voluntary and/or compulsory changes in the ways and spaces of resistance. I develop a multifaceted perspective to suggest ways in which dissident groups—gender non-conforming bodies in particular—treat the football field as a site of resistance. These are categorized into three forms: resistance *against*, *through*, and *for* the football field.

In this chapter, I first give brief contextual information on my field (1.1) and then explain my field in detail while I reflect on my positionality in relation to a broader methodological discussion (1.2). After I situate my research within the large body of literature on sports, sexuality and space (1.3), I give brief explanations for several terms and concepts in the language of LGBTI+ and queer movements in order to make the following discussions and arguments in the text comprehensible (1.4). Finally, I introduce the following chapters of the text (1.5).

1.1 Contextualization

Even though the beginning of the modern football for all genders dates back to the second half of the nineteenth century in many parts of the world, predominantly due to colonization and overseas commerce, the progress of women's football has been quite intermittent. Including some of the leading countries of today's football such as Brazil, Germany, and the UK, the institutional organization of women's football was halted for many decades. At the beginning of the 70s, developments in women's

football have accelerated again. And today, the interest in women's football is greater than it has ever been before.

In Turkey, entering sports fields, as is the case with many other public spaces, has been much easier for men; the limited number of women in sports were from the non-Muslim minorities or were the daughters of elite supporters of modernization. The motivation for allowing women in was related primarily to attempts at regulating women's bodies in harmony with modern gender roles as well as to secure the reproduction of healthy generations (Yarar, 2015).

The first women's football teams in Turkey were formed in 1954 (Orta, 2014), and slowly emerged in other cities; nevertheless, the Women's Football League started only in 1994. The league is just another example of the interrupted journey of women's football around the world since the teams in the league and even the league itself shut down from time to time for various reasons, including mismanagement, corruption, rumors of lesbianism, not being successful enough, etc.

Today, there are 26 million women footballers in the world experiencing numerous problems, some of which are culture-specific and some that are shared by all. Among these are financial difficulties, sexual abuse, homo/trans/biphobia, institutional sexism, and so forth. Women in Turkey continue playing in the midst of all these challenging difficulties and they cultivate strategies for their survival inside. Öztürk states that the Turkish Football Federation (TFF) has considered women's football a social project since 2006. While this has led to a remarkable increase in the number of women football players and has inspired women's teams in many cities, Öztürk problematizes this institution-level attitude of the male-dominant football domain, arguing that the athletic skills of the players, the quality of the game, and international competitions become of secondary importance. Moreover, describing

women's games as a social responsibility project reproduces the gendered structure of the field and shapes the limits of players' expectations (Öztürk, 2017).

There is another group of women, trans, and many others who do not prefer or cannot stay inside the institutional domain and thus has embarked upon finding or creating new fields. With the significant influence of the Gezi Uprising on the coming together of a variety of dissident groups, gender-mixed alternative football leagues have emerged in the last couple of years. Inside the two leagues, queer-identified teams were also formed, and around the same period, a few other queer-identified teams were formed independently from a league. Today, there is a growing number of queer-identified teams in many cities. Among them are Lezyonerler, Atletik Dildoa, and Queerpool in Istanbul; Sportif Lezbon in Ankara; Muamma in Mersin; and Lolitop in Kocaeli. Besides the obvious crucial struggle against sexual discrimination in football, these teams deserve particular attention because they subvert the meanings of being a team and they intervene in the taken-for-granted rules and configurations of the game itself in order to open up new possibilities.

1.2 Being in the field

The word field, which is presumably the most frequently used word in this thesis, is intended to have multiple meanings throughout the text. First, as the title suggests, it is an area where the physical activity of football is performed by two teams and with necessary equipment. When I write "football field," I also refer to the structural domain which produces and impacts the relations and the rules inside, which gives the word its second sense. Third, I consider this sport branch as my academic field of study; therefore, I also refer to the domain in which football-related knowledge is produced. Finally, drawing upon Bourdieu's conceptualization, I consider the field,

with all the other meanings that I have just counted, as a contested space with relative autonomy and thus can both have the risk of reproducing social norms but also harbor potentials to struggle against the oppressive dynamics (Bourdieu, 1984).

As a person who is extremely bad at recalling childhood memories, I have quite vivid images from the days when I played football with the boys who lived in the same housing estate with me. We used to play mostly in the terrain between the blocks of flats, and if we were crowded enough, we used to go to the large area behind the housing estate, which was far from being a proper playfield but rather a construction site full of sand, dust, and stones. I remember several other public places where I played football in those years, such as the grass pitch of the shopping mall where we used to go every Sunday with my family and the schoolyard where I tried to make myself accepted in the boys' football matches during break times and physical education lessons. Their acceptance would come along with the amazement by my average football skills and this would only further highlight my difference on the field as a girl. When I started high school, my not-so-bright football career faded away. My family always encouraged me to do sports such as swimming, basketball and tennis but they never considered football as something in which I could seriously engage, but they did not try to stop me. In the following years, I somehow had to realize that football would not fit my self-in-the-making as a girl, so I should have left it out of my life. I played football only two or three times after secondary school until I could finally enter the fields again in the summer of 2015. Since then, football is one of the few things that have been consistent in my life and that I cannot imagine leaving aside at some point. When I decided to study this very topic, I was already aware of how my personal story is similar to that of many others in terms of being the only (or one of the few) gender-non-conforming child on the field, hating football

for a long time even though I had a strong interest during childhood, taking a long break, returning to the field after coming out of the closet, etc. All these I share with others who are doing sexuality politics on the football field tempted me to focus on these narratives in order to investigate the relationship between spatialities (preferences and aptitudes) and sexualities (orientations, expressions, identities) as well as to pursue the possibilities that could arise from this relationship.

I argue that theory, data, and methods are not sharply distinct categories; rather, they interact with and continually influence each other. The analysis of the relationship between football field and sexuality, especially when combined with my insider position as an athlete-activist, inevitably requires an interplay between these three categories. Methodology, for Heckert, should be practiced as an act of “becoming-queer,” “continually learning to let go of borders between theory and data” as well as “researcher and researched, hetero and homo, right and wrong,” and so forth (2010, pp. 45, 43). The process of making sense of the data is a social practice; in the light of this, studying sports and sexuality from an insider perspective requires a [self-]reflexive attitude that is constantly on the alert for the prejudgments on body and gender both in one’s own reasoning and in the theoretical and methodological knowledge production.

While it is a common situation, especially in the research done by the marginalized communities, an outsider sees no harm in intruding on the private lives and asking the most intimate questions with no ethical concern. Being native in the field, however, might also result in a variety of problems, mainly due to what O’Reilly calls over-rapport (2008, p.88). As I have also seen in my own case, an insider position provides several advantages. These include gaining trust and acceptance more easily, making scheduling interviews quicker and leading to

interviewees' being relatively honest and willing to provide detailed answers; creating a space of dialogue for further co-operation within the community and bringing abundant and immediate benefit to the community; and being attentive to nuances and thus more likely to prevent biased stereotypes. It is undeniable that "shared marginalization" provides the researcher with easier access to the field, this in itself does not promise a politically correct ethnography (Ong, 1995; p. 355). When familiarity is too much, maintaining a certain level of physical and emotional distance might be harder, and this might weaken the observational capacity. The line between the researcher-self and activist-self is blurred in the case of an insider, which could well become a strength but could also lead to a conflicted situation between the individual and *their* community. In addition to these, an insider researcher is more inclined to feel overwhelmed by ethical contradictions, by responsibility for and commitment to the community since *they* are too involved in the field, whereas an outsider might protect *their* assumedly neutral position.

Since the day I decided to write this thesis, my researcher self and my everyday self have been intertwined in a way where I found myself observing every move that I and other players made on the football field through an ethnographic lens. These inseparable layers led me to question my distance and my ethical responsibility toward this movement and the individuals inside. A significant number of ethnographic data that I processed in my thesis came into existence through the effortful processes that I also took part in as a football player. This enabled me to access a first-hand account of events but at the same time it might raise questions whether I could interpret the context from a distance. At this point, I am relieved to learn about previous works that discuss the impossibility of "view from nowhere" (Grosz, 1994) and that make attempts at "queering" conventional methodologies.

Enke states that “feminist and trans studies depend partly on ‘experiential knowledge,’ because social hierarchies keep certain knowledges marginal to the academy” (2012, p. 8). Similar to my feeling of being in my ethnographic field whenever I enter the football field, I often think about how my academic research, the statistical data that I came across, and my arguments can contribute to our community. I shared my new learnings with my teammates plenty of times and also with anonymous people via our team’s Facebook page; we sometimes used these information and arguments in our public announcements and press bulletins.

When the queer-identified teams started to emerge one after another in 2015, I had already decided on studying football and sexuality, although my first proposal was more focused on women footballers playing in the institutional teams. I immediately changed my focus with the emergence of these queer-identified teams; in other words, I occupied an insider position, not only since the beginning of my study but also since the first days of the life of my study subject. This makes it hard for me to mark an exact start date for my fieldwork. Inevitably (and intentionally, I must admit), I adopted a mix of the qualitative methods of auto-ethnography and participant observation that in turn blurred the lines between fieldwork and the playfield even more.

Although I conducted my semi-structured in-depth interviews in the first half of 2017, I started observations before then and continued after the period of interviews (See Appendix A for the interview questions). Some other queer-identified teams formed after the completion of my interviews; therefore, I could not include these players as interviewees in my thesis, but their activism and the individual experiences of players have made invaluable contributions to this work. Three teams that are currently active but not represented by interviewees in this

thesis are Muamma from Mersin, Lolitop from Kocaeli, and Queerpool from Istanbul. The fact that completing my thesis took a long time obliged me to modify the scope of study and to update the content several times in such a brand-new and fast-growing field. Although I can foresee certain drawbacks to studying a very recent phenomenon, it has been quite an eye-opener for me to witness every moment of the process of how a *field* creates its own rules, limits, discourse, ethics, humor, and so forth in relation to changing external dynamics. I conceive of this thesis as an interim report, not a study that looks at a static condition or a past event; the very reason that the field of queer-identified teams has not reached a stable form yet [if ever this is possible] is why this thesis can be asserted as an intricate study which handles fine details.

I conducted 12 semi-structured in-depth interviews in total: 2 players from Lezyonerler, 2 from Sportif Lezbon, 2 from Kramponiçeler, 2 from Queer Park Rangers, and 4 from Atletik Dildo.³ My position as an insider undoubtedly smoothed the way for me to reach out to players who would like to be interviewed. I had two times more chance to arrange meetings with the players of Atletik Dildo because more people responded to my request for interviews for my thesis, which I interpret as an expected result of being in the same team. I reached out to players from other teams either directly or through intermediary personal contacts, rarely by means of mobile or social media profiles. I generally made my requests face-to-face at sports events where we came together. I asked for the consent of my participants each time before recording the interview so that a commonly established safe space

³ In Chapter 4, I convey the opinions of a teammate about a team event that *they* took responsibility in organizing with the financial support of a funding institution. This event was held in October 2018, long after I completed my in-depth interviews. In addition to this, my brief conversation with *them* was limited to this specific event. For these reasons, I did not include *them* in the group of interviewees.

could be maintained. I have also changed the names of my participant for the sake of confidentiality.

The interviews often opened up friendly informal conversations even when I had not met the participant previously. I preferred not to think of time as a limitation for the conversation and I rarely interrupted the participants. Except for two or three, all of the interviews lasted at least 2-3 hours, which considerably longer than of a typical interview. However, I perceived these interviews as semi-structured intimate conversations with no preset ending time; in this way, we could discuss very similar but also particular experiences and problems in the field.

As an insider, I was part of the data that I have collected, and I have always been aware of the fact that my presence, both as a researcher and a player in this very field, might influence the answers that I have received. Since I already knew some of my participants and I was at least familiar with what others talk about, it was inevitable that we had quite a lot of off-the-record chats during the interviews, and this was one thing that I had to assess responsibly in the process of producing knowledge from the hours-long conversations. As I did not occupy an objective position, I did not approach my participants as distant people who would provide me with some material but instead I learned quite a lot from them and together we reflected on many things that open my eyes. The way I asked questions and the order in which I asked them changed in every meeting depending on the particular characteristics of the participant. I was careful about collecting all the information that I considered important in the interviews, so I stuck to my checklist while at the same time I was careful not to direct my participants toward a certain path when they strayed a bit from the topic at hand.

1.3 Literature review

In order to offer a proper analysis of the sexuality politics on the football field, this thesis engages with a broad body of literature. The relevant works in the field of queer and sexuality studies have been reviewed with a particular focus on their dialogue with the anthropological fields of sports, body, and space. These broad fields within anthropology are often criticized by feminist and queer theorists for forgetting, ignoring, or stalling the discussion of sexuality (Halberstam, 2005, 2011; Knopp, 1992; Bell & Valentine, 1995; Massey, 1994). Therefore, over the course of investigating how queers take up sports by imposing, adjusting, and negotiating their sexual and spatial orientations, it was a challenge to find relevant works in the intersection of these areas. That generated another path in my thesis, toward explorations and experimentations on methodology in the studies of sport and sexuality. When the researched becomes the researcher, they face certain obstacles and prejudices; these methodological problems and alternative suggestions in ethnographic research are discussed by many scholars (Poulton, 2012; Browne & Nash, 2010; Woodward, 2008; McKenzie, 2009; Caudwell, 2007; Browne, 2006; King, 2008; Heckert, 2010; Enke, 2012).

The early 60s was the period that sports became a matter of sociology (Kenyon & Loy, 1965; McIntosh, 1963; Jokl, 1964). Sociology has been dealing with sports in various ways: while some works analyze sport in itself as a physical activity, the others widen the scope by including different aspects such as class (Bourdieu, 1978), fandom (Dunning, 2000), and nationality (Duke & Crolley, 1996). The origin and modernization of football have been widely discussed in sports sociology; the standardization and universalization of rules was a telling point for researchers to assert that they are regulated according to the space-bounded social norms of period

and thus they are open to being contested and transformed (Giulianotti, 1991; Guttman, 1978; Elias and Dunning, 1986). Besnier et al. claim that “modern sports is not just a product of the modern era; it helped to create it” (2018, p. 258). Another extensive debate on sport continues in the field of philosophy. The differences and similarities between real life and the playing field, whether sport is a game or just play, whether game and play are the same thing or not, and how seriously sport should be taken are among the many subjects at hand (Huizinga, 1955; Suits, 1967; Caillois, 2001 [1967]; Bateson, 1972 [1955]; Norbeck, 1974; Bourdieu, 1990; Connor, 2011).

As a bodily activity, sport is often treated as a means of regulating the individual and collective actions, which can be coercive or internalized (Keys, 2009; Forsyth, 2013). When it comes to the relationship between body and discipline, gender and sexuality inevitably appear to be two important concepts. In addition to the inestimable feminist and queer contributions on body and sexuality (Bordo, 2004; Grosz, 1994; Rich, 1980; Fausto-Sterling, 1985; Butler, 2011), the works that investigate body and its aptitudes by prominent scholars (e.g. Mauss, 1973; Asad, 1997; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Young, 2005; and Ahmed, 2006) have also been the valuable reference guides for my research. For this research, which digs for explanations of why and how certain bodies tend to take up certain spaces in relation to the sexual orientations, the above-mentioned scholars have been of vital importance. The multidimensional conversations between these fields manifest themselves in the ethnographic and anthropological studies on women’s football from all over the world (Jodai & Nogawa, 2012; Wedgwood, 2004; Caudwell, 1999; Koh, 2003; LeFeuvre, Stephenson, & Walcott, 2013; Cox & Thompson, 2003;

Harkness, 2012; Fasting, 2003; Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2003; Fozooni, 2008; Liston, 2006).

I also examined works on the relationship between space and sexuality since my focus was on how bodies move in and around the football field, which is a (hetero)sexualized space, and I encountered numerous remarkable works with complex analyses and intricate arguments (Hargreaves & Anderson, 2014; Valentine, 2003, 2004; Howell, 2007). Bell and Valentine (1995) warn us about the difference between feminist geography and queer geography, while Brown (2006) also asserts that geographies of sexualities and queer geographies should be differentiated. Disciplining the individual body and controlling the mobilities of these bodies also have close connections with spatiality. “When gender, along with so many other signifiers, is a central feature of identity documentation, its legibility must be seen to be contingent on and produced by global movement and border control” (Enke, 2012, p. 14). The literature on sexualities with a specific focus on sports spaces must be also exemplified at this point: considering sex as pre-discursive is problematized by its consequences for non-conforming sporting bodies (Caudwell, 2003); the feminization of football as a common strategy in women’s association football⁴ is criticized in a similar logic (Ranc, 2013); a transgressive and plural reconceptualization of femme subjectivity is also proposed for referring to the lesbian-identified and queer-identified teams (Caudwell, 2007); LGBTI+ sports events are also critically analyzed since their demand for inclusion often carries the risk of constructing ‘proper’ and fixed identities for non-heterosexual bodies, which leads to further exclusion of the remaining non-conforming bodies (Drury, 2014).

⁴ The term “association football” is used to differentiate the most popular version of football from other versions such as American football and rugby football. In this thesis, I use this term to refer to the modern football which is played today all over the world with standardized rules whenever I need to emphasize that I talk about the institutional football space.

Before moving any further, I consider it important to briefly describe what feminization of football means and why it is critically approached by some scholars. The increasing interest in women's football and the growing number of women's footballers and fans are described as examples of the feminization of football, and at first glance they received a positive reaction for challenging the gendered field of football (Pfister, 2018). The expansion of women's football and the increase in its visibility are the inevitable results of years-long struggles for equality and inclusion. On the other hand, social responsibility projects inspired by these struggles are shaped in conformity with the expectations of broader football institutions and with gender roles in society. The feminization of football, therefore, is a contested concept for me in that it refers to not only a linear improvement but also a process of constructing the image of the woman football player in a way that challenges the common perception that women footballers are manly since it equates women with femininity. This is not limited to a window dressing but rather has impacts on the self-making of women players who want to enter this space (Hacısoftaoğlu, 2015; Öztürk, 2017), as an example for "patriarchal bargain" (Kandiyoti, 1988). Shaping the scene of women's football around the concept of conventional femininity does not eliminate obstacles to the non-conforming bodies who aim to enter this space.

Besnier et al. claim that "the exclusion of women from a particular sport is often more a result of cultural definitions of a sport as 'masculine' and less a result of women's physiological inability to compete," though the latter, as a common perception, still results in exclusion, and they add that this dualistic understanding, combined with foundational exclusion, is a constitutive element of modern sports, with reference to how Coubertin, the founder of the modern Olympic Games, was against women's participation in sports (2018, pp. 144-145). The relatively new field

of masculinity studies has already made remarkable contributions to our way of thinking on gender and sexuality (Halberstam, 1998, 2005; Harris & Crocker, 1997), and it is surely an important channel for looking at sporting bodies (Caudwell, 2007; Vaczi, 2016; Robidoux, 2006; Drury, 2014). Nuhra (2017) problematizes the fact that women in male-dominated sports fields have been analyzed only through their relations with hegemonic masculinity, whether they embrace masculinity or femininity. This criticism is followed by the suggestion of a pluralistic understanding of masculinities and femininities: there are multiple elaborate ways of how women struggle for their space in sports, and they should be meticulously approached.

In the context of Turkey, sport sociology can be traced back to the end of the 1970s (Erkal, 1978), but its discussion as a gendered and sexualized space barely started in the 2000s and has escalated in the most recent decade (Nuhra, 2013; Nuhra, 2018; Yara, 2015; Koca & Öztürk, 2015; Hacısöftaoğlu, Akçan, & Bulgu, 2015; Koca, 2016). There are numerous works on the relationship between sexuality and space in Turkey, and they are important for acknowledging sexuality in a co-constructive relationship with urban space (Özbay, 2010; Alkan 2009; Başdaş, 2010; Zengin, 2016; Özbay & Bartu-Candan, 2014). Research that connects sports to space and sexuality is a recent phenomenon with very few works, and this is surely linked to the lack of data on women athletes, which in turn is due to institutional sexism in sports.

When one thinks of the interrelationship between football, space, and masculinities, artificial turfs⁵ inevitably come to mind; therefore, in this thesis, I allocate space for a debate on how gender-non-conforming bodies relate to artificial turfs. Even though its particular local characteristics render this space an attractive

⁵ One of the names given for artificial football fields. In this thesis, the term refers to *halı saha*, in Turkish.

research topic in Turkey, the only comprehensive work that I encountered on this topic was by Kıvanç (1993) until a very recent contribution to this literature was made by Engil (2019). While Kıvanç takes the male-only structure of artificial turf for granted, Engil intends to unfold masculinized and heterosexualized structure of the artificial turfs in Istanbul. Finally, the community-building processes and queers' relationship with the sense of belonging—which can sound paradoxical given the rootless and volatile character of the notion of queer—is discussed in my thesis with the help of other queer scholars (Özbay & Savcı, 2018; Cabadağ, 2016).

Drury (2014, p. 315), in her discussion about how gay sports spaces can transgress heteronormativity, points out that one's ability to play football is “not contingent upon heterosexual identity.” Reversing this question, whether the ability of a woman to play football is contingent upon her non-heterosexual identity, as the worldwide stereotypical claim suggests, was the first question that motivated me to engage in this field. By following this question and extending the scope of the study from women to gender non-conforming footballing bodies, I offer a multifaceted analysis of the relationship between the football fields and queer sexuality.

1.4 The language of LGBTI+ and queer movements

The vocabulary of LGBTI+ and queer movements is constantly evolving in relation to the collective processes of knowledge production based on first-hand experiences and the relevant research. While the enriching vocabulary enables more and more individuals to find ways to define themselves, it is also criticized for being unintelligible to the wider public and thus politically ineffective. In order to ensure that the reader can follow the text, I consider it necessary to explain some of the terms and concepts which might remain relatively unfamiliar and, in addition to this,

to clarify my usage of certain words which might be conflicting and/or confusing for some readers.

One would notice that I use the word queer in different but interrelated ways throughout the text: as an identity (queer people, queers, and queer-identified teams); as an adjective which refers to the anti-hegemonic and/or transgressive features of the subject (queer movement and queer theory); an action (queering the field and queering the methodology); and so forth. The act of attributing multiple meanings to the word is an informed choice in order to point out the inseparable and long-discussed elements of what queer is: a queer-identified team or person by definition adopts queerness as an identity and this could be criticized stating that queer is inherently anti-identitarian, let alone being an identity category. My answer to this criticism would be that wherever I use queer to define a person, a concept, or an object, I do not aim to construct a stable identity; on the contrary, I emphasize the impossibility of this very act for the given volatile subject. For example, a queer-identified team is identified as such for three main reasons: it consists mostly of gender-non-conforming bodies; it does not have all the makings of a team (see Chapter 2), and it entails the action of queering the game whenever it is on the field.

The way I use the word woman in the text is definitely not limited to the hegemonic and normative womanhood, which has the characteristics of being white, cisgender, straight, able-bodied, feminine, and belonging to upper middle-class social class. This image represents only one of the combinations among many diverse forms of womanhood, but I, on the contrary, use the word with all the possible meanings one can attach to it in *their* self-identification process. If so, why do I use phrases “women and queers,” “women and LGBTI+ people” and “women and gender-non-conforming bodies” in the text? Do I intend to say that the categories

of women and the following are mutually exclusive so that someone who defines herself as woman is no longer queer? Furthermore, do I mean that no gender-non-conforming body is woman and all women always conform with the norms? Of course not. These would not only unfairly exclude countless experiences of womanhood and would also fail to notice where these categories overlap. The reason why I specify both categories in all these phrases is to avoid sloppy clusters which would erase certain particularities, especially when the study is mostly about the particularities which locate in the intersection points of these categories.

The term cisgender might sound unfamiliar to the general reader, but it is a widely used term to define the individuals who are not transgender, in other words, who identify themselves with the gender that is assigned at birth. Enke (2012, pp. 60-61) states that the term was first used in this sense by the biologist Dana Leland Defosse in 1994, explaining the relation as “within molecular biology, cis- is used as a prefix (as in cis-acting) to describe something that acts from the same molecule (intramolecular) in contrast to trans-acting things that act from different molecules (intermolecular).”

“Queer-identified teams” is how I define the teams that I analyze in this thesis, and I consistently use this title throughout the text. A brief commentary on this concept and also a discussion on how well the concept of team fits to these communities are provided in Chapter 2.

I use the phrase “gender non-conforming bodies,” sometimes interchangeably with “non-conforming bodies,” for all individuals who experience discrimination and exclusion based on their sexuality (be it a gay man, a trans person, a cisgender woman, a cisgender straight man who does not perform hegemonic masculinity, etc.) and thus cannot conform to the conditions of the football field.

Singular *they* is used to refer to a person who does not identify with being a woman or a man, I prefer to use the pronoun *they* in the text when I talk about a non-binary person, and I italicize the word. Even though it is grammatically obvious when I refer to a single person and when I talk about a group of people, I prefer emphasizing that a non-binary person is speaking or that *they* is the subject of discussion at that very moment in order to ensure that the reader notices the existence of that person.

1.5 Thesis Outline

In the following chapter, I map the field in its entirety. I first discuss the ways in which sports has become a matter of investigation for social scientists and its relationship to other phenomena. I also review the sports literature in Turkey and highlight the scarcity of intersectional research which focuses on sexualities. After a broad literature review, I narrate the emergence and development of football in different contexts, with a particular focus on gender and sexuality. Zooming in on Turkey and on the problems that non-conforming bodies experience when they attempt to enter the football field, I introduce the dissident leagues and the queer-identified teams as among the most visible groups in the alternative spaces of football today.

As the title “a (new) site for resistance” suggests, in Chapter 3, I examine the resistance potential of football. As a contested space, sport—and football, in particular—has always had the potential of being a site of struggle; therefore, it would be wrong to state that football just starts taking on the aspect of resistance. Nevertheless, the present time can be claimed to be the first time in Turkey that such a diverse group of dissidents got organized to play together and raise their voices through football. Until recently, the football field, as a site of hegemonic masculinity,

excluded certain bodies even in the moments of resistance, and this is suggested as one of the main reasons why gender-non-conforming-bodies remained aloof from reclaiming the football field as a site of play and struggle for so long. I suggest and elaborate three types of resistance in relation to the football field: resistance *against*, *through*, and *for*. I argue that queer-identified teams are unique in embracing mostly the third category; stressing this point, I discuss their potential for disrupting and transforming the game itself. Within the larger picture of the changing political environment in the country, I also discuss ethnographic accounts of the Gezi Uprising in 2013 and of Pride Week in Istanbul, focusing on their conversation with the LGBTI+ movement.

In Chapter 4, I argue that gender-non-conforming bodies do not feel at ease with the football field as a (hetero)sexualized space and thus they either disclaim it or try to conform. However, as these recently emerging queer-identified teams prove, it is also possible to take up this space beyond the discourse of inclusion in a way that renders queer the rules, values, and borders of the game. Provocatively claiming that football is a sexual orientation, in this chapter I explore how sexual and spatial orientations confront on the football field through the mobilities of queer bodies and how this can lead to queer happenings. I also discuss the pitfalls of space-making practices by queer-identified teams in relation to the question of how the volatility of queer existence and the tendency of fixing in the notions of border-making and belonging can coexist. This part concludes with ethnographic examples of interventions in the very configuration of the game that have been made so far by these queer-identified teams.

CHAPTER 2

MAPPING THE FIELD

2.1 Mapping the field of sports sociology

Sports sociology has been considered a subfield of sociology for more than five decades. Although the phrase was used for the first time in 1921 by Heinz Risse as the title of his book, *Soziologie des Sports*, the early 1960s are the years when sport was institutionally acknowledged as a phenomenon to be scrutinized in the field of sociology.

Sport in Society (1963) by McIntosh, *Medical Sociology and Cultural Anthropology of Sport and Physical Education* (1964) by Jokl, and *Toward a Sociology of Sport: A plea for the study of physical activity as a sociological and social psychological phenomenon* (1965) by Kenyon, G. and Loy, J. are among the primary works in the field of sports sociology. As Jamieson and Smith (2016) state, the International Committee for the Sociology of Sport (ICSS), which was formed in 1964, was the first international organization on the issue. The first journal which analyzes sport from a sociological perspective, the *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* (IRSS), was launched in 1966. In addition to the first journal, which is still active, there are several other accredited journals such as *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* (JSSI), *Sport in Society*, and *Sociology of Sport Journal*.

Since the very beginning, sports sociologists have voiced criticism of the underestimation of sport in academic environments. As one of the most globalized activities in today's world, sport is still under-addressed as a social phenomenon and the ways that it is approached are quite limited given that it interacts with a great variety of social and political spheres. Apart from the works that examine sport in

itself, its figuration as a social activity and its distinctness from the other forms of physical activity, there are intersectional studies which discuss sport in relation to other topics such as gender, ethnicity, class, bodily techniques, rituals, modernization, globalization, migration, individual and collective identity construction, violence, media representation, and decision-making processes of groups. These studies vary in their approach to sport: some of them, especially the earlier ones (Elias, 1978), consider sport as a mere reflection of society and analyze how it contributes to the reproduction of social norms. While these studies claim that sport is used as a tool for maintaining social order, others (Gruneau, 1983) examine the power relations in the sports field by adopting a more nuanced approach, and they state that conflicts within this space carry the potential of social change and development, as well.

Bourdieu, in *Sport and Social Class* (1978), defines sport as a relatively autonomous field that “even when marked by the major events of economic and social history, has its own tempo, its own evolutionary laws, its own crises, in short, its specific chronology” (p. 821). It is an early intervention in the field which I find crucial in terms of creating space for various interpretations of the relationship between sport and society and of giving credit to the subjectivity of the sporting actors for the potential of social resistance. Drawing on his terminology, I use the word [football] field on purpose, to refer to an area where footballing bodies move and to a space that has a heteronomous relationship with the social order but also has its own relative autonomy.

Sport is described by many theorists today as a contested space. Even though the role of sport in the reproduction of hegemonic power relations is not completely rejected, sporting bodies are claimed to have capacity to resist against or negotiate

with these dynamics. Its contested characteristics are discussed primarily in relation to its marketization and institutionalization (Gratton & Henry, 2001; Horne, 2006), the reproduction of gender roles in society (Kay & Jeanes, 2015; Hargreaves, 1994) and how the meaning of fandom and spectatorship has changed through mediation of the sports events (Dunning, 2000; Brown, 1998).

The studies which deal with the gendered and gendering aspects of sport have been outnumbered for a long time, and they were generally limited to the analysis of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995; Messner & Sabo, 1990). Even in the research which criticizes the normative figuration of the sports field and problematizes its male dominance, masculinity has always been associated with the cis-gendered man and has negative connotations such as oppression and violence. An interrogation of masculinity should, in my opinion, also problematize the taken-for-granted gender categories and the characteristics attributed to them in a neutralized and ahistoricized manner. Together with the emphasis on the importance of intersectionality in gender and sexuality studies, a pluralistic point of view toward masculinities and femininities has been increasingly adopted (Kimmel, Hearn, & Connell, 2005; Petersen, 2003). The focus of masculinity studies is no longer limited to a certain gender; analyses of femininity do not presumptively associate being feminine with being weak.

The issues raised above are valid for football as well. As the most widespread and commercialized branch of sport, which is largely played by men, football is open to investigation from a broad array of perspectives. Apart from the studies which put football as a matter of sociological research (Giulianotti, 1999; Cleland, 2015), there is a consistently growing body of work which scrutinizes different aspects of the football scene, using cross-disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches. Fandom in

football is frequently discussed by the sports sociologists (Armstrong, 2003; Giulianotti, 2005; Spaaij, 2006); migration (McManus, 2015), violence (Giulianotti, 2004), nationality (Duke & Crolley, 1996; Armstrong & Giulianotti, 2001), globalization (Goldblatt, 2008) are several other topics which are analyzed in relation to football.

Even though intersectional studies on football and gender arrived relatively late to the field and remain rather limited to masculinity studies which focus on male fans and male footballers, there is also a considerable amount of work on a variety of gender and sexuality-related topics. When I decided to conduct academic research which combines gender and sexuality studies with my life-long interest, football, I was worried that it might sound like a trivial topic and that my discussions and dilemmas would not have corresponded to any theoretical work. As I have gone deeper in this field, I have come across people from different geographies who have debated similar issues. Knijnik (2015) mentions different attitudes adopted by Brazilian women football players in their efforts to survive in the field of football:

Some women use football to resist the hegemonic gender order in the sport; they love the nation's cultural icon and they will fight for their right to play. Others argue for the importance of complying with a normative femininity in order to be acceptable to sport managers, agents, the press and the general public. Still others refuse a normative femininity and fight for the "naturalness" of women in football. (p. 54)

Similarly, the number of case studies on women's football increases day by day, coming from quite disparate parts of the world such as Australia (Wedgwood, 2004), the UK (Caudwell, 1999), Korea (Koh, 2003), the USA (Lefevre, Stephenson, & Walcott, 2013), New Zealand (Cox & Thompson, 2003), Iraq (Harkness, 2012), Norway (Fasting, 2003), the Netherlands (Knoppers & Anthonissen, 2003), and Iran (Fozooni, 2008).

Following the contributions of feminist theorists to this field in terms of body and sexuality, queer studies have also made some game-changing interventions such as thinking about physical competitiveness beyond gender binary; involvement of gender non-conforming bodies in the academic discussions; problematizing homonormativity as well as heteronormativity; suggesting “masculinities” and “femininities” instead of homogenous, fixed, and binarized categories; and proposing an intersectional approach which discusses power relations in the society as complex and intricate dynamics.

Jayne Caudwell (2002), through her own experience and analysis of stereotypes about women football players, asserts that lesbian sexuality within football environments has validity, and she relates this presence to the potential of football to open safe spaces for ones who cannot conform to the feminine heteronormativity. While lesbianism as a sexual orientation and female masculinity as a body expression should not be equated, it is important to discuss them as ways in which non-normative footballing bodies express themselves. If masculinity is performed by a woman, it is often interpreted as a strategy to stay in a male-dominant field. While male femininity is seen as a part of identity construction and a part of male homosocial cultures, “female masculinity is generally received by hetero- and homo-normative cultures as a pathological sign of misidentification and maladjustment” (Halberstam, 1998; p. 9), as “the outcome of failed femininity, or as the result of pathetic and unsuccessful male mimicry” (Halberstam, 2005; p. 17). Similarly, femininity has been understood pejoratively (Harris & Crocker, 1997), even within feminism, which is mostly because of the constant effort of feminization of women by football industry and mainstream media. However, recent texts on lesbian-identified or queer-identified teams propose that femme subjectivity is a

complex issue, for which reason they call for a reconsideration of femininity as subversive, empowering, transgressive, disruptive and chosen (Caudwell, 2007).

Caudwell problematizes the “lack of critique of how sex is understood as pre-given” (2003), which is important because considering sex as something pre-discursive results in the categorizations in sport based on sexual differentiation, and in the making up certain footballing bodies while excluding others. Caudwell also states that “bodies that resist the sexed body binary offer sites/sights where we can begin to theorize and critique dimorphic sex.”

As feminist and queer scholars have become more interested in sport, they have encountered certain difficulties penetrating a considerably male-dominant space. Therefore, many studies have emerged in recent years which discuss methodological obstacles to being a woman researcher in sports studies and suggest queer ways of doing ethnographic research in the sports field. While Poulton (2012) emphasizes the emotional labor and performative presentation of self as a female researcher in a hyper-masculine space, Woodward (2008) reflects on her positionality as a situated researcher at a men’s boxing gym. Browne & Nash (2010), McKenzie (2009) and King (2008) are examples of other scholars who work through the reflexive and alternative methodological approaches in the field.

The sports literature in Turkey largely comprises historical accounts of sports events, biographies of prominent sports figures, and compilations of articles by newspaper columnists. The first sociological study on sport in Turkey is *Sports from a Sociological Perspective (Sosyolojik Açıdan Spor)* by Mustafa Erkal (1978). Although the number of sociological studies on football increase day by day, the gendered and gendering aspects of football are not still studied enough to constitute a literature. Neither the opinion essays on the relationship between sport and society

nor the academic research on sports sociology give adequate place to the experiences and problems of women on the field. One of the most prominent sports writers ever in Turkey, İslam Çupı, is worth-emphasizing since he speaks of the then (in 1994) newly formed women's football league in his column (2002; p. 68) in a supportive manner yet still refers to the players as fairies and the matches as "striking parades of another kind of fashion collection." Most of the reputable studies on football have focused hitherto on masculinity, fandom, fair play, and violence (Nuhurat, 2013; Talimciler, 2012; Erhart, 2013; Bora, 2006.). Therefore, I find it important to proliferate the ways of discussion on football and sexuality and to suggest links between the football field, academia, and queer and feminist politics, because the football field, or sport in general, is a space where an interplay of social and political forces is witnessed but mostly neglected.

The scarcity of studies focusing on the intersection of gender and football is not surprising given the fact that it is difficult to be able to reach even simple data about women's association football in Turkey. A few scholars have investigated the impacts of normative gender roles and stereotypes on the participation of women and LGBTI+ people in physical activities and sports institutions (Koca & Aşçı, 2005; Koca & Öztürk, 2015; Arslan & Koca, 2007; Hacısoftaoğlu, Akçan, & Bulgu, 2015). There is also an increasing interest by non-governmental organizations toward the discrimination against women and LGBTI+ people on the field. The Turkish Association of Sport and Physical Activity for Women (KASFAD),⁶ founded in 2012, conducts activities and research in order to provide equality in sports fields. Many other NGOs, whose main focus is not sport, organize panels and symposiums⁷

⁶ <http://www.kasfad.org/> (Retrieved May 27, 2017).

⁷ Association for Struggle Against Sexual Violence organized a symposium on sexual violence and discrimination in football in 2017, May. <http://futbolherkesicindir.blogspot.com.tr/> (Retrieved May 27, 2017).

where the main actors come together and work to create solutions to the major problems in the field. After many years of excluding the football field from the spaces of feminist struggles, these are significant steps which show that sexuality-based discrimination in football has started to be a topic in the agenda of both sociological research and dissident groups.

2.2 Mapping the football field

2.2.1 Theoretical background

Football is a physical activity through which people come together, form two rival teams, and compete against each other by means of a ball. Its determinant characteristics and rules result in long-term debates in various disciplines, although they are taken for granted by most people. One of the main debates in football, addressed by numerous scholars, is whether it is a sport or a game, which is of course a philosophical discussion.

Unlike a game, which can be described as more flexible, “sports must always involve material conditions” as Connor (2011; p. 16) states; there should be a specific place, a temporal dimension, and physical bodies. And while a game is associated with being childish and trivial for having an open space where limits are not strictly defined, sport [and especially modern sports] imposes certain requirements to enter the field and certain rules to obey during the activity. Except for the condition of doing sport by oneself, sport requires at least two competing people, in other words a compulsory rivalry, and by extension, winning and losing parties. Games, on the other hand, do not require competition; people who are in the game, regardless of their number, and collaborate and struggle toward a common

Asolis Laboratory organized a panel on the gender discrimination in sports in 2016, December. <https://www.facebook.com/events/786553461486034> (Retrieved May 27, 2017).

goal. Caillois (2001 [1967]) indicates six prerequisites for defining a game: it must be free (no coercion), isolated from daily life, unpredictable, unprofitable (no aim for creating economic value), regulated (having rules and laws) and fictional.

Considering all these together with football as we know it, as an extremely commercialized and globalized activity, it is quite difficult to describe football as “just a game.” However, another option would be to review the different perspectives on the characteristics of game which suggest definitions beyond a clear-cut separation between game and sport. For instance, Bourdieu (1990) claims that people who take part in a game acknowledge what is at stake, they invest in the game (illusio) and they make a “commitment to the presuppositions of the game” (doxa). This conceptualization presents a more serious approach to games, and it may lead to a semantic extension of the word. When football is considered a game in the sense of Bourdieu’s conceptualization, those who do sport become people who play the game using their cards (capital) and their bodies become an embodied version of capital.

At that point, another main debate in the field, which is whether sport is disciplinary or emancipatory, arises. This point will be elaborated in the next chapter, where I will discuss the relationship between sport and dissident groups. However, I believe that the contested nature of sport should be briefly mentioned here, as well.

Connor (2011) states:

Sports are games that involve exertion, implying both constraint and the attempt to overcome it. The body is very form of this ambivalence, since the body is both what constrains us, requiring us to live finitely in particular times, places and conditions, and also what seems to offer us the chance of overcoming or going beyond those conditions. (p. 16)

Sport contains different kinds of obstacles to overcome and different kinds of elements to fight against: one should force the limits of their body and the limits of the field, and one should obey the rules to be able to stay in the game but also push

these rules to their limit. One should respect the duration of the game but should use the time in an efficient and creative way. The contested nature of sport makes the activity one of a kind in terms of being both a regulatory tool for the benefit of status quo and carrying the potential of reconfiguration of its predetermined features.

2.2.2 Historical background

2.2.2.1 Origin of the game

The search for an origin of football takes the researcher to many different geographies and temporalities; however, as Giulianotti (1991) notes, whether any of these games can be directly shown as the origin of football remains obscure. The game called *tsu chu* in Chinese (meaning kicking the ball), which history dates back to the third century BC, is noted as the oldest game which shows similarities to modern football (FIFA, n.d.). On the other hand, research shows that almost in every part of the world, including Japan, ancient Greece and Rome, the Americas, Australia, France, and Italy, there were games in which the players tried to carry the ball by means of their feet to the goal of the other party (Harris, 1972; Nauright & Parrish, 2012). Depending on the class who played this game and the religious or cultural practices of the given geography, there were differences in terms of violence, rhythm, rules, and aims of the games. For instance, in the game named *kemari*, played in Japan in the seventh century, the ball symbolized the sun, and players tried not to drop the ball on the ground (Guttmann, 2011).

2.2.2.2 Emergence of the association football

The foundation of the Football Association (FA) in 1863 in England is known as the beginning of modern football history. England is not a coincidental location given

that the industrial revolution also started in that region. The overseas commerce of colonial Britain in that period makes it difficult to identify exactly which games and which cultures have had significant influences on the modern association football; it is quite possible that modern football contains elements from a variety of games created in different cultures. Colonial characteristics also helped Britain with the dissemination of the rules and standards of association football to many regions of the world. Before the foundation of FA and the standardization of the rules, football was particularly welcomed because of its violent features. However, its inevitable popularity demanded that several steps be taken to control and tame the game.

Guttmann (1978) specifies seven characteristics that distinguish modern sports from the former versions of the game: secularism, equality [of opportunity to compete], specialization of roles, rationalization, bureaucratic organization, quantification, and a quest for records. These characteristics, in relation to the rise of modernization, have appeared as tools of the mechanization of human bodies, standardization of the game, and regulation of social behavior through the release of excitement.

Even though a monopolized version of the game emerged at the end of nineteenth century, the rules and values changed throughout the years. Elias and Dunning (1986) claim that there should be an “agreement among the players on their adherence to a unified set of rules” but at the same time, a balance should be pursued “between fixity and elasticity of rules;” otherwise, each game would be the same. For instance, even though the standardization of rules was something that governing bodies wanted as a way of decreasing the level of violence, both in the game and the society, the initial discussion on hacking in the FA did not lead to an abolition of hacking because one side strongly argued that abolition would make the game unmanly. Given that hacking is strictly forbidden in today’s football and the values

of the game are defined with respect to being fair, it can be stated that there are no predetermined laws of the game but rather a constant readjustment, depending on the social norms and acceptable behaviors of the period.

2.2.2.3 Turkey

It is known that football has been played since the late nineteenth century in present-day Turkey, but the city and the when the first match was played is still debated. Yüce's *Ottoman Angels (Osmanlı Melekleri, 2014)* takes us to the earliest date recorded so far; he refers to a 1881 newspaper article which mentions a football match played in Istanbul the association rules; however, it is evident from the text that this match was not the first one. Considering that Muslims were forbidden to play football for religious and political reasons and that Britain, as the birthplace of football, was the main transporter of the game to different regions through its colonial activities, the first football players in Ottoman Empire were unsurprisingly from the non-Muslim community and British merchants. However, the game soon became tremendously popular among Muslims as well. After Black Stockings, which is known as the first football team founded by Turks but was shut down right after their first match, Galatasaray was founded in 1905. With the fall of the Ottoman Empire and the increase in nationalism among Turks, this team was able to survive, and several other teams were also founded, one after another. Since the very first years of the Republic, the popularity and political power of football have been noticed by the state. While the other kinds of sport were being promoted through a healthy body/nation discourse, football was also used as a symbol in fighting the enemies of Turkish nation (Irak, 2010).

The first men's football league was founded in 1959, under the Turkish Football Federation (TFF), one of the first state institutions in Turkey. After the foundation of the second and third leagues in 1963 and 1967, respectively, the number of provincial teams proliferated throughout the country. Today, there are four professional leagues in men's football, where more than 120 teams compete. The number of certified male football players is 610,020.⁸

2.2.3 *Herstorical* background: Women on and off the field

The history of women's football in the world dates back to 1895, to the first known women's football match, held in England. However, we see that the discourse of linear development is not applicable to women's football. The progress of women's football has been discontinuous in many parts of the world, including Turkey. When we look at the three countries that have had the strongest impact on the emergence and development of this game—the UK, Germany, and Brazil—we see that organizing women's football teams was forbidden for many decades.⁹ Therefore, recording the moments of absence of women from the field is as important as recording their presence. An account of women's football, in my opinion, should cover the footsteps of women both on and off the field. For instance, despite the number of women who play football and the degree of public interest toward women's football in England, where football was born, the FA decided to interrupt its institutional development in 1921. Almost fifty years later, a considerable number of women's football clubs came together and founded the Women's Football Association (WFA), whose first meeting was held in 1970. Their pressure quickly convinced the FA to rescind the ban on women's football.

⁸ <http://sgm.gsb.gov.tr/> (The data belongs to the year 2015. Retrieved May 28, 2017).

⁹ Women were not allowed to play association football in UK between 1921-1971, in Germany between 1955-1970, and in Brazil between 1941-1970. (Koca, 2016).

Women's presence in the field of sports has always necessitated struggle and negotiation. Decision-making positions are difficult for women to reach because of discriminatory practices such as "homosocial reproduction" (Pfister, 2015, p. 181). In relation to gender roles and assigned responsibilities in society, women are assumed to have no time, no flexibility, no power, and no qualification to participate in the field. Until recently, all-male committees and their decisions on the bodies and games of women athletes were not even problematized. As Williams (2007, p. 12) notes, "the longest women's event, the 800 meters, had been banned because of its supposedly exhausting nature and did not reappear until 1960." Male sports figures considered themselves entitled to comment on the value of women athletes, regardless of the year or the sports branch. Women footballers in today's USA, which is one of the countries with the best opportunities for women who want to play football, still struggle for equal pay for equal work. Women in different geographies encounter different kinds and levels of difficulty; however, they continue fighting for the game to be open to everyone. In a radically different way, international governing bodies of football promote the participation of young girls and women in football more than ever, in relation to the universalized and constructed European values of the decade. FIFA started using gender-neutral pronouns in 2016 in its "Laws of the Game," the standardized set of rules of association football across the world, by stating that "the Laws are now 'gender neutral', reflecting the importance of women in football today".¹⁰ Up until 2016, the male pronoun was used with respect to referees, players and officials "for simplification".¹¹

¹⁰ Laws of the Game 2016/17:

http://www.fifa.com/mm/document/footballdevelopment/refereeing/02/79/92/44/laws.of.the.game.2016.2017_neutral.pdf (Retrieved May 29, 2017).

¹¹ Laws of the Game 2015/16:

http://www.fifa.com/mm/Document/FootballDevelopment/Refereeing/02/36/01/11/Lawsofthegamewe bEN_Neutral.pdf (Retrieved May 29, 2017).

As for Turkey, the regulations on the participation of women in the sports field has always been in line with the efforts on founding a modern nation-state. In the beginning of the 1900s, sporting women were either members of non-Muslim minorities or the daughters of elite modernization supporters (Yarar, 2015). The reasons why women are invited to the public space through sport are rather related to the disciplining and creating female bodies who are supposed to be the carriers of healthy generations. Since sport has been an impactful tool for the arrangement of bodies in an open space and on the regulation of these bodies to sustain the harmony in society, the image of women doing sport was not a threat to the order; on the contrary, these women were the symbols of modernization of Turkish nation. And it was a way for women to use the public space in a socially acceptable way. But of course, “proper” and “improper” sports for women were determined by the institutional [and male-dominant] authorities and these decisions have largely regulated the participation of women in sports.¹² Moreover, women coming from different social classes were expected to practice different kinds of sport: while the middle and upper classes were expected to practice ones which were not harmful to their beauty and reproductive health, lower social classes were supposed to choose martial arts and defense sports, which would provide them a chance for survival and enhance their socioeconomic status (Yarar, 2015).

Women’s football in Turkey has a relatively long history, but it is unsurprisingly not a visible or bright one. The first known women’s football match in Turkey was played between an Izmir team and an Istanbul team in 1954, as part of an organization called Sports Festival in the Mithatpaşa district of Istanbul. After one more edition, no trace of this festival remained. In 1969, another women’s football

¹² An article worriedly talks about that women in the West are getting more interested in football and wrestling and this can harm their beauty and reproductive capacity. (Hürriyet Newspaper. March 6, 1953).

team was founded in Ankara, called Women's Sports Club (*Kadınlar Spor Kulübü*), but there is not much further information about it. The Kınalıada Girls' Football Team (*Kınalıada Kız Futbol Takımı*) is also known to be founded in 1969, and there is Çalıspor in Bursa in 1970s, and a couple of teams are also seen in these years. According to the Turkish Football Federation (TFF), the first women's football team in Turkey was Istanbul Girls' Football Team (*İstanbul Kız Futbol Takımı*), which is the same team as Kınalıada; the name was changed to Dostlukspor in 1972. The first women's football tournament was held with the participation of three teams in 1984. There was an increase in the number of teams in the beginning of 1990s; at about the same time, there were rumors that a women's league was going to be founded, and in 1994, the Women's Football League kicked off. One year later, the national women's football team was founded. While new teams emerged until 2003, others closed due to financial problems, lack of support, or unsatisfactory performance (Orta, 2014). There is never a linear progression; little improvements are immediately followed by backlashes. The winner of the first four years of women's league, the Dinarsu Women's Football Team, withdrew from league, saying, "this league is not functioning," and Fenerbahçe shut down its women's team on the grounds that the team could never become a champion, around same years, 1997-98. In 2003, the league was shut down for three seasons by the federation, and the certifications of players were cancelled because of rumors of lesbian affairs, mismanagement, abuse by trainers, etc. The league relaunched in 2006 with the slogan of "for a healthy league"¹³ and it was called the Ladies' League (*Bayanlar Ligi*) until 2011.¹⁴ It was also forbidden for primary and high school girls to form

¹³ <http://www.habervitrini.com/spor/bayan-futbol-liginde-lezbiyenlik-skandali-97636> (Retrieved May 29, 2017).

¹⁴ <http://tff.org/default.aspx?pageID=341&ftxtID=11239> (Retrieved Mar 20, 2019).

football teams until 2006,¹⁵ which had a direct negative impact on women's participation on the football field. Data on women's football in Turkey is virtually nonexistent except for a few recent studies, several accounts of personal experiences, short news and opinion essays, and so forth. *Turkish Football History* (1992; 1996; 1999; 2002; 2007), the 6-volume series published by the TFF, consists of 1,364 pages in total. However, there is not a single item of historical information about women's football except for some match results of women's teams.

2.2.4 Who is on the field today?

2.2.4.1 Visibility and problems of women's football

With the change of political attitudes of governing bodies toward women's football in relation to women's struggle all over the world, the number of women footballers increases day by day. Today, there are 26 million women players¹⁶ worldwide, although this figure is still less than ten percent of the total number of people who play football. The increase in number does not mean that the football environment is a bed of roses today. Women all over the world tackle many problems; while each culture harbors unique obstacles and potentials, there are commonalities in the problems that women encounter in different geographies. An overview of the literature shows that women football players experience financial difficulties and need to find a "real" job to earn money, both in Turkey and Japan (Jodai & Nogawa, 2012); they are labeled as lesbian for doing a male-dominant sport (Liston, 2006). At the same time, non-straight women and queer people in football experience a severe level of sexuality-based discrimination, which manifests itself mostly in the efforts toward the feminization of football (Vaczi, 2016). The non-conforming bodies in

¹⁵ <https://bianet.org/biamag/kadin/73831-kadinlar-futbolda-da-gorunur-olacak> (Retrieved May 2017).

¹⁶ https://www.fifa.com/mm/document/fifafacts/bcoffsurv/emaga_9384_10704.pdf (Retrieved May 29, 2017).

sport are exposed to inhuman sex policing in the name of fair competition, and they are deprived of their right to compete (Sanchez, Martinez-Patino, & Vilain, 2013). Sexual harassment in sport is a universal problem (Fasting, 2015), and high levels of harassment are reported, but it is known that there are more cases which remain hidden (Kirby, Greaves, & Hankivsky, 2000). Fasting (2015) reveals that the rate of women who experience sexual abuse in sports field is 19% in the USA, 21% in the UK, 56% in Turkey, 25% in Denmark. She also states that the rate of sexual harassment in sport is not different from the rate reported by women in the spheres of education and work. Kirby et al. (2000) specify several reasons for which sports players do not report cases of harassment. These include the fear of exclusion and being accused of lying, feelings of shame, and having no one to talk to.

As Donnelly (2015) states, democratization through sport and the democratization of sport are two different processes. The studies and projects about maintaining social and gender equality through sport have increased rapidly in the recent years, but if the structure and organization of football and other sports are not sufficiently problematized, sport might still carry the risk of remaining as a regulatory space where social inequalities and gender roles are reproduced. A queer approach to sport and alternative ways of formation of sports field (discussed in detail in the following chapters) would offer new paths to these two processes operating simultaneously.

Today, there are three leagues with 120 teams and more than 5,000¹⁷ players in Turkey. Despite a consistent increase in the number of women football players, very few are regularly paid. They compete in amateur status under the Football Development Directorate, unlike professional leagues in men's football. The budgets

¹⁷ <http://sgm.gsb.gov.tr/> (The data belongs to the year 2015. Retrieved May 28, 2017).

allocated to women's football teams both in the federation and in clubs are incredibly low compared to men's football; it is unequal treatment that affects many aspects of the game from the conditions of fields, locker rooms, and jerseys to the quality and duration of training, publicity, transfer opportunities, travel costs, etc. If the players want to continue their career in the association football environment after retirement, they usually face inherently gender-discriminating structures of football institutions, and most of them choose to be a physical education teacher since their post-secondary educational background is most often physical education and sport (*beden eğitimi ve spor yüksekokulu*). Women's football is not visible in the public eye; a few matches were broadcast live last season with the effort of certain clubs, but there is not enough media coverage. And of course, in addition to all these financial and structural inequalities, there is widespread sexism and sexuality-based discrimination which are directed to and reproduced by the bodies of these players. Despite all the factors which make the football field an unwelcoming space for women, they continue playing football and they struggle against widely disseminated doxa that women cannot play football by just being present on the field. However, as one would rightly intervene, these women football players should not be described as rebellious figures that fight against patriarchy as a whole because we see that the players themselves may also be complicit in the production and reproduction of a heteronormative gender matrix, together with the institutional football environment, media, and the rest of society. In 1995, for instance, three players of the Dostlukspor women's football club were banned from playing for three matches because they swore at the referee. The players protested the punishment by taping their mouths and they rejected the accusation, stating that swearing at an older man does not

reflect their sports mentality and morality.¹⁸ This shows that, for women, the actions during the game, including ways of objection, are defined based on the interplay between the rules of the game as a physical activity and the unwritten moral values and gender roles in the society. Therefore, women and other genders and sexualities who are non-conforming footballing bodies in a male-dominant sphere have to negotiate and sometimes adopt these pre-determined values to be able to survive in the field.

Drawing on reported and narrated experiences¹⁹ of registered players on internalized homophobia, I would like to raise the question of whether it is accurate to mention that lesbian, bisexual, and trans players stay silent in the face of sexism and sexual discrimination in order to protect their non-heteronormative and liberated space. Throughout my thesis, I try to conceptualize football field as a transformative space where divergent sexualities can take shelter. Therefore, I prefer not to characterize the behaviors of non-straight people in women's football leagues as hypocritical; rather, I believe that people might have different strategies and tools to deal with normativity and homophobia in the field and to protect themselves against sexual harassment, bullying, and so forth.

2.2.4.2 We write our stories: Alternative spaces for football

In addition to what happens and the kinds of strategies that are adopted to survive inside the borders of association football, there is also another football scene where women and LGBTI+ people come together, form amateur teams, and compete with each other. There has been a remarkable increase in the number of independent leagues and teams in the last couple of years.

¹⁸ "Interesting Protest by Ladies" (Original Title: Bayanlardan İlginç Protesto). Milliyet Newspaper. May 4, 1995.

¹⁹ <http://kaosglidergi.com/dosyasayfa.php?id=2844> (Retrieved May 30, 2017).

Karşı Lig, as the first and biggest gender-mixed amateur football league, was founded in the first half of 2014. The encounters between fan groups and feminist/LGBTI+ activists in the Gezi Uprising was one of the main triggering motives for such a league to emerge. Before that period, there were already several fan communities which opposed the existing football environment that has almost always been a tool for the dissemination of nationalistic and racist state politics and that has been extremely commercialized. However, the male-dominant football atmosphere, which can be traced in every part of the field from the administrators to players, referees, and media images, was also explicit in the stands of the football stadiums, within these fan communities, and there was not a strong, organized opposition to this situation. Neither fan communities nor feminists and LGBTI+ activists adopted a critical approach to the football field as one of the spheres of their struggle. Here I should mention the case of Halil İbrahim Dinçdağ as an exception. In 2009, his license as a football referee was not renewed because of a health report which exempted him from compulsory military service: the Turkish Army considers homosexuality a psychosexual disorder (Karakaş & Çakır, 2013). When Dinçdağ lost his job, he filed a lawsuit against the TFF, and he has become a public figure in this process. In 2015, he finally won the case and interpreted this result as a victory for the struggle against homophobia in Turkey.²⁰ During that period, a solidarity match and a discussion on football and homophobia were organized.²¹ This is worth noting as a significant event for LGBTI+ people, who have long considered football as the field of the perpetrator.

²⁰ <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/halil-ibrahim-dincdag-tffye-actigi-davayi-kazandi-40033252> (Retrieved Mar 20, 2019).

²¹ <http://bianet.org/biamag/lgbti/152047-escinselligin-mucadele-alani-olarak-futbol> (Retrieved Mar 20, 2019).

The Gezi Uprising, which was initially an effort to prevent the demolition of a central public park, transformed into a layer through which various parts of society and different dissident groups interacted. Gezi Park, the initial cause of the resistance, also functioned as the space of coming together. One of the interactions, which was realized for the first time thanks to Gezi, occurred between football fans and feminist/LGBTI+ activists. Nuhurat (2018) states the following:

Football fans' presence in Gezi must be understood as a function of their embodied subjectivities and resulting agencies stemming from years of repression and being subjected to police violence. These experiences allowed fans and some other groups to organize and mobilize quickly when Gezi broke out, mainly because they were already experienced in imagining their collective subjectivities and agencies as positioned against the police. (p. 133)

What Nuhurat claims as a “corporeal know-how” (2018, p. 133) stimulatingly provides us with the clue of a juncture between fan groups and the LGBTI+ movement since the LGBT Blok, especially the trans community inside, had argued that the reason they were so organized and visible in Gezi is the fact that they were accustomed to everyday police violence and that they could easily take immediate action.²²

The dominant masculine and sexist discourse of left-wing politics is not limited to dissident fan groups, and it has always created a tension between feminists and certain groups. In Gezi Park, there was established a ground for a face to face dialogue on this issue. In a workshop organized in the Feminist Tent, two of the most representative slogans of Gezi were created: “do not swear at women, fags and whores!” and “resist with tenacity, not with swear words!”²³ These were the claims made by the feminist and LGBTI+ activists of Gezi to the other occupants who chose the conventional way of humiliating the marginal and disadvantaged groups while

²² Kanka Productions (Producer), & Buşki, R. (Director). (2016). #direnayol (Documentary). Turkey.

²³ “Kadına, ibneye, orospuya küfretme!” & “Küfürle değil, inatla diren!”
<http://www.sosyalistfeministkolektif.org/kampanyalar/parcas-olduklar-m-z/gezi/ana-akim-kufurler-karsisinda-cinsiyetci-olmayan-alternatifler-istiyoruz/> (Retrieved June 2, 2017).

expressing their anger toward the authorities. An intersectional way of resistance was experienced by large groups of people, for the first time in their lives, and it led the way to many future collaborations and creative grassroots movements. Karşı Lig was one of these groups. The word *karşı*, which means “against,” was chosen as the name of the league because they defined themselves as “against industrialized football, racism and nationalism, sexism, any kind of hate speech and discrimination”.²⁴ Right after the Karşı Lig was a similar initiative in Ankara, under the name of Özgür Lig, with the same motive. They too position themselves against industrial football, e-ticket (Passolig), sexism, fascism, racism, capitalism, oppression, and homophobia.²⁵ Both leagues had 16 teams in their last season; while Karşı Lig completed its fourth season, Özgür Lig completed the third one. The teams in both leagues were formed by different dissident groups, including fan communities, LGBTI+ people, vegan activists, neighborhood solidarity groups, municipality workers, and librarians. These leagues provided a space for different groups to get to know each other and to experience transformations as a result of conflicting or unfamiliar political agendas. The leagues are important since they were also the first and most organized initiatives of women’s participation in football. There are older leagues such as Efendi Lig²⁶ and Gazoz Ligi,²⁷ which combine different dissident groups, but they do not have practical, concrete actions against sexism and the male-dominance of the football field, while Karşı Lig and Özgür Lig oblige the participating teams to have women players on their teams.

²⁴ The whole version of their manifest can be found in their facebook page in Turkish language: <https://www.facebook.com/karsilig/posts/612950355442480> (Retrieved June 4, 2017).

²⁵ The whole version of their manifest can be found in their facebook page in Turkish language: <https://www.facebook.com/OzgurLigAnkara/photos/a.684515715012232.1073741829.684175261712944/858006410996494/?type=3> (Retrieved June 4, 2017).

²⁶ <http://www.efendilig.com/> (Retrieved June 4, 2017).

²⁷ <http://www.gazozligi.com/> (Retrieved June 4, 2017).

Before moving to the queer-identified teams in and out of these two leagues, I would like to briefly mention another group that can be considered in the alternative football sphere in Turkey. *Kızlar Sahada*,²⁸ which means “Girls on the Field,” was the first women’s football tournament, organized in 2013. More than forty teams compete in two different categories: one of these categories consists of teams formed by individual players, and the other is a corporate category, where women working in the same company form a team and join the tournament. *Kızlar Sahada* introduces its aims and motivations as empowering women of all ages through sport and increasing the participation of women in football. What differentiates this tournament from the previously mentioned football activities is the fact that it is presented as a social responsibility project. Even though Karşı Lig and Özgür Lig also organize solidarity actions by means of the money collected during the season, there are visible differences in terms of how they approach the concept of responsibility and how they establish the bonds of solidarity. *Kızlar Sahada* activities are organized by a “corporate wellness company to help companies organize sports events for their employees”;²⁹ the teams sign up for the tournament for a fee, and the organization funds projects which aim to raise awareness in families about gender equality and to support pre-school education of girls. It is the biggest football event ever for women in Turkey, and it serves many different purposes; these characteristics make it a strong project which should not be excluded from this analysis. While it surely provides an alternative space for women who want to pursue their long-forgotten dreams, some of the images and slogans it circulates incorporate the gender-binary structure of the sports field and are obstacles for many gender non-conforming bodies. “We often get a run in our pantyhose but we never miss a chance

²⁸ <https://www.kizlarsahada.com/tr> (Retrieved June 4, 2017).

²⁹ In the own words of Melis Abacıoğlu, the founder of Actifit Company and *Kızlar Sahada*. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3B-Cl32vr_E (Retrieved June 9, 2017).

to score a goal” (*çok çorap kaçırmayız ama hiç gol kaçırmayız*); “we match our clothes for the love of football” (*futbol aşkına pişti olduk*); “buy a football for my dowry” (*çeyizime futbol topu alsana*) are examples of combining football with supposedly shared features of womanhood. The images and statements which show the power of women generally associate womanhood with femininity. For instance, in a video posted on the Facebook page of Kızlar Sahada, we hear a player saying that “women should always be pretty. She should take care of herself even when she is on the field. We are here to show that women can do everything” (*Kadın her zaman güzel olmalı. Sahada top oynarken bile bakımlı olmalı bana göre. Kadınların her şeyi yapabileceğini göstermek için buradayız*).³⁰ The modernist idea which considers woman as one of the constituent elements of a nation is emphasized in the social media accounts of the tournament. In the above-mentioned video, we also hear the words of the then-Mayor of Beşiktaş, Murat Hazinedar: “society is like a bird with two wings. There are men on one wing and women at the other. If both wings are equally strong, then we can go higher and we can fly better” (*Toplumlar bir kuş gibi, iki kanadı var. İki kanadın birinde erkekler birinde kadınlar var, her iki kanat aynı oranda güçlü olduğça o kadar daha yükseğe çıkabilir, daha güzel uçabiliriz*). It is seen that neither the gender roles in society nor the influence of nationalism and capitalism on the mainstream football are radically problematized in the tournament. And this is one of the significant differences of Kızlar Sahada from the other alternative football spaces, which are comparatively more intersectional and thus more welcoming for all kinds of oppressed and silenced groups to express their identities and to voice their claims. Nevertheless, Kızlar Sahada, as a project aiming to empower women and civil society, has already claimed its place in history by

³⁰ <https://www.facebook.com/kizlarsahada/videos/628525424018691/> (Retrieved June 9, 2017).

creating a remarkable visibility and a shift in perspective on women's football in Turkey.

Apart from the contestants in this tournament, there are many other women-only football teams which play regularly in the artificial turfs all around Istanbul. I argue that artificial turfs, which can be found in almost every neighborhood today, provide a space for women and LGBTI+ people to play football. Since the construction of the first artificial turf by Dinarsu in the second half of the 1980s (Kıvanç, 1993: p. 385), these turfs continue to multiply in number. According to the Istanbul Sports Inventory³¹ developed by the Istanbul Metropolitan Municipality in 2012, there are more than five hundred artificial turfs in Istanbul today. The unique characteristics of artificial turfs, together with the increase in their number and the broadening participation of women in the public space in general, may have facilitated the entrance of women and LGBTI+ people to the football field. Fluidity of temporal and spatial borders of street football seems to provide freedom for the players in a way that they can modify the field markings during the game, or they can play from morning till night; however, while openness and fluidity bring liberty for cisgender men, they might be asserted as reasons why public space is dangerous for gender-non-conforming bodies. In this respect, artificial turfs can be described as enclosed spaces of football due to their specified borders and time slots, which create the proper conditions for women and queers. I argue that the increase in the number of regulated and priced spaces, regardless of whether they are indoor or outdoor, provides a safer zone where women and queers can move and extend their bodies as they wish, so long as they remain within the limits of the field. Engil (2019) emphasizes that the relatively isolated status and in-betweenness of artificial turfs in

³¹ <http://www.istanbulsporenvanteri.com/tr/istanbuldaki-spor-yatirimlari.html> (Retrieved June 1, 2017).

terms of the public-private dichotomy might eliminate unwanted external influences at least during the reserved time. The role of artificial turfs in the emergence and development of alternative football communities, for me, is quite a fresh and important topic that deserves more attention.

Out of all the teams, leagues, and tournaments, I focus on five teams, which can roughly be classified as queer-identified football teams: Atletik Dildoa, Sportif Lezbon, Queer Park Rangers, Lezyonerler, and Kramponiçeler. I have had interviews with players from these five teams, but several other teams were formed after my fieldwork and they should be unhesitatingly cited within this category. Muamma in Mersin, Lolitop in Kocaeli, and Queerpool in Istanbul are among these teams.

Entitling all these teams as queer-identified is quite open to debate. However, given the shared characteristics of the teams and statements made in interviews on how to name these teams as a group, this definition comes up as the most appropriate term. Before moving on to the discussion of why I analyzed them as a group, how they are similar and how they are different from other teams, I would like to introduce each one of them in order to make it easier for the reader to follow the discussion.

Sportif Lezbon³² was formed in the beginning of 2015 and they are competing in the Özgür Lig in Ankara. Sportif Lezbon is the oldest among the teams which are currently active in the field. However, many players of Sportif Lezbon refer to a former team named Strap-on FC as the first initiative by a group of lesbian and bisexual women, which paved the way for subsequent teams even though it existed for a very short time in Ankara in 2013. Atletik Dildoa was formed right after Pride Week in July 2015. They describe themselves as “an amateur football team

³² <https://www.facebook.com/sportiflezbon/> (Retrieved June 11, 2017).

which consists mostly of women and LGBTI+ people, based on Tatavla”.³³ Both their group description and field choice make reference to the locality, which encourages me to include the matter of spatiality in the discussion. In the very beginning, the majority of Atletik Dildoa were friends who lived in Istanbul’s Tatavla district,³⁴ where there was a significant Greek and Armenian population until a few decades ago. Therefore, the team chooses to imply the Turkification process of state by using the Greek name of the district in their self-description. Queer Park Rangers³⁵ also started around the same time, and they compete in Karşı Lig, in Istanbul, with a mixed group. The last two teams in my analysis are Lezyonerler and Kramponiçeler, which are woman- and trans-only teams formed in the Kadıköy district of Istanbul.

Selecting these five teams and excluding some others was not an easy decision, and finding the right words for my justification was also quite difficult. To put my claim briefly, I chose these five teams because they do sexuality politics on the football field. It should not mean that other teams do not have a political position; that would be unfair. Even a very simple act by a woman, like calling the field to make a reservation, is regarded as a presumptuous intrusion to men’s world. Therefore, I believe that playing football, standing and acting in a place where it is a matter of time to experience discrimination, for a woman, is a political action in itself. However, as one of my participants, Seçkin, stated, “it is more than just playing football woman-to-woman”.³⁶ These teams, in addition to playing football in a male-dominant space, raise their claims by means of their social media accounts

³³ “Tatavla’da düzenli maç yapan, çoğunluğu LGBTI+lerden ve kadınlardan oluşan futbol takımı.” https://www.facebook.com/pg/atletikdildoa/about/?ref=page_internal (Retrieved June 11, 2017).

³⁴ Current name of the district is Kurtuluş, meaning “salvation.”

³⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/queerparkrangers/> (Retrieved in June 11, 2017).

³⁶ “Kadın kadına futbol oynamaktan daha fazlası.”

and their banners before and after matches. These claims are mostly about—but are not limited to—LGBTI+ and feminist politics.

I would like to note that all of these groups which I define as teams, are not fully structured bodies. These teams rather appear as channels through which abjected bodies can reach the field and play football. For instance, Lezyonerler was initially a number of women who were already organizing weekly matches through a WhatsApp group. When they decided to join the football tournament in Pride Week 2016, they came up with their current name and designed a team logo. In addition to this, the players of both Sportif Lezbon and Queer Park Rangers emphasized in the interviews that having a team structure plays a key role in maintaining regular matches in the chaotic urban life.

In the light of these examples, my field can be claimed to contain a certain kind of teams formed by people who want to react against the unequal and discriminating practices on the football field, to play football, and to adopt the football field as a space of LGBTI+ and feminist resistance.

Flexible boundaries, varying perceptions and expectations of players, changing team components depending on the principles or the performance level of the opposing team in order to sustain an equal playing field, acting against a common enemy in solidarity instead of rivalling each other... The concept of team for these queer-identified teams is not the same as the concept that is widely seen in the industrialized and institutionalized football scene, where loyalty and a sense of belonging that community members feel for their team, are assessed by how much they spend or how much profit they bring for their team. My research field, which is also my play field, is differentiated from the industrialized side, where team identity is consistently created through many elements such as jerseys, logos, slogans,

anthems, rivals, etc. Rather, the participants of the field in question construct their sense of togetherness by means of a variety of bodily actions, either for the game or against the broader political agenda, but always through the game. The following chapter is devoted to the examination of the different ways and spaces of this relationship.

CHAPTER 3

A (NEW) SITE FOR RESISTANCE

3.1 Varying relations between dissident groups and football

Football, because it is intensely used as a tool by the state and market nexus, is considered as the opium of the masses and thus many dissident groups remain distant from it. Especially for feminist and LGBTI+ groups, it is a social sphere assigned for the interplay of hegemonic masculinity and nationalism. Given the long-standing antagonism between dissident groups and football, the recent interest in these groups in football is worth scrutinizing. As introduced in the previous chapter, many leagues and teams have emerged in recent years, and they try to do their politics and raise their claims on the football field. While doing that, groups adopt different strategies based on their aims and positions. In this chapter, my initial aim is to analyze varying approaches and orientations of dissident groups on the football field. After this analysis, I delve into the moments of encounters, by focusing predominantly on the experiences of women and LGBTI+ people. When it comes to the relationship between football and politics, there is a dominant discourse about an essence that has been corrupted due to the involvement of politics on the football field. I then intend to dwell on how gender-non-conforming players relate to this discourse and orient themselves on the field accordingly.

In the analysis of varying approaches of dissident groups to the football field as a space of resistance, I propose three categories: resistance *against* football, resistance *through* football, and resistance *for* football. I do not claim that these categories are mutually exclusive or that they thoroughly cover the relationship between dissident groups and the football scene; different dissident groups might

adopt the same strategy, or one group might have multiple strategies at the same time while taking the field. These three categories are proposed mainly for the sake of highlighting the distinct orientation of gender-non-conforming bodies towards football. By “resist *against* football,” I mean that there are groups which oppose the long-established structure of the football field. Association football is constituted in a way that the people who want to play the game are obliged to comply with certain rules and restrictions which leads to the exclusion of particular groups. The rituals of association football restrain and regulate the behaviors of people on the field; moreover, the regulated behaviors are not limited to game-related movements. In the current situation of the football scene in Turkey, it is almost impossible for a certified player to react against militarist practices circulating in the field, to be critical about the dominant masculine and/or nationalist discourses, to be open about their sexual orientation if they are not straight (Yıldız, 2015),³⁷ or to survive in the field without choosing one of the two genders. For instance, a Kurdish-German football player, Deniz Naki, received many threats during his career in Turkey based on his support for the Kurdish struggle and his criticism of the Turkish state. He left Gençlerbirliği after he was beaten in the street by three men who shouted racist remarks; he then moved to Diyarbakır to play for Amed SK. While he was playing there, he dedicated a team victory to the Kurdish struggle in his social media account, which caused the TFF to ban him for three years and six months from all competitive matches for spreading “separatist and ideological propaganda”.³⁸

I argue that this category consists of the groups which struggle for reclaiming the field and changing the structures to a certain extent so that several discriminating

³⁷ As also mentioned in the second chapter, TFF shut down the women’s football league in 2003 for three seasons showing the allegations of lesbian relationships among the players as one of the reasons.

³⁸ <http://www.dw.com/en/turkey-bans-deniz-naki-from-professional-football/a-42370473> (Retrieved May 7, 2018).

features such as homophobia, sexism, and militarism, which are considered inherent to the essence of football, could be eliminated. However, I should note that these interventions and reactions do not aim to entirely reconfigure the game itself. There are other groups which resist *through* football: teams with different political agendas, which will be elaborated later, have increased in the recent years, and they use the football field as an instrument for conveying their claims to the wider public. Football is not one of the determinant features of the resistance in this category; another kind of sport or even a completely different activity or space could be adopted as a tool instead of the football field, although whether the wide popularity of football has played a role in this particular choice is open to debate. Most of the teams in the alternative leagues introduced in the previous chapter might be counted in this category.

The last category that I propose in terms of how different dissident groups relate to football is “resistance *for* football.” I claim that being against the existing structure of football and using this game as an instrument are approaches which relate to the game from a distance, and they are what dissident groups mostly choose. As for the last category, the distance between game and body disappears. Here, the footballing body is neither against football nor aiming to reach a further target through football; it is a person whose main aim is to play football. The increasing interest of feminist and LGBTI+ movements in football, in my opinion, belongs to the third category, even though these movements also feature in the other two categories. Claiming that the main aim of this group is to play football might sound like a simplification, but a closer relationship with the game is what creates a variety of possibilities for footballing bodies to extend the limits of their bodies—and forming new spatialities to help the body extend its motility is what the queer

movement strives for. In that point, similar to the long-standing debate on whether the concept should be sexual orientation or sexual preference, in other words, whether we should consider the route of our desires as something ascribed or give credit for the social and cultural dynamics on shaping our desires, I argue that the interest of gender-non-conforming bodies in football can also be investigated from this perspective. The relationship between sexual and spatial orientation is a core issue that I analyze in more detail in the next chapter, drawing on notable scholars on the phenomenology of body, including Merleau-Ponty (1962), Sara Ahmed (2006), and Iris Marion Young (2005); therefore, I would like to stop this discussion here as an introduction to the further analysis, where I consider the football field as a detour from the straight line of life, as an extension of the body, and as a productive space where queer happenings can blossom.

Regardless of the adopted approach, the striking fact is that there is a rapidly growing interest of dissident groups in football. The football environment has been strictly regulated by governments for almost the entire history of Turkey³⁹ and any behavior or declaration which contradicts the dominant ideology of Turkish football have been overtly criticized and silenced if possible;⁴⁰ there is a common knowledge about association football in Turkey that people's football and post-football careers depend on how much their expressed political views match up with the party in

³⁹ The ruling party of the 50s, The Democratic Party, placed a great importance on football as the sports of the masses in Turkey. The sports institutions got considerable financial support from the government in this period. Spor Toto was brought to Turkey; the department for physical education was attached to the Ministry of Education. Even though professionalization and marketization of football highly increased at that time, dependency of the clubs on the political and financial support of the state remained significant (Yarar, 2015).

⁴⁰ "Despite intensifying transnationalism and the presence of multiple, transient national identities, the dogma of singular national identity survives in various social sites in Turkey, one of which is football" (Nuhrat, 2015; p. 131). Nuhrat states that the sports media and many Turkish fans reacted strongly when the football player Mesut Özil, born and raised in Germany, decided to wear German national team jersey. She illustrates this reaction as the frustration over the negotiations of the transnational migrant identity, who is not embracing Turkishness at all levels.

power.⁴¹ Even though there have been a few players and team coaches who could express their views on the history of football in Turkey, there are also active fan groups which use the stands of the football stadiums as spaces to oppose the fallacies in the football environment or any instance of injustice in the country,⁴² the football fields were not considered as space of resistance by the footballing bodies until recently. I argue that it is related to general indifference among intellectuals and dissident groups to sports for several reasons: one of the biggest is its crucial role in the biometric policies on the foundation of modern nation-states. The production of docile athletic bodies through physical education and the celebration of healthy bodies who serve their country are exemplified in the history of many modern states today. In Turkey, every child has to learn about militarist figures as part of the curriculum of physical education lessons in primary schools. The Nazis coined their own term, *politische Leibeserziehung*, meaning political physical education, for one of the main elements of the body politics of the era which aimed to inscribe social norms and values to the body in a non-coercive way (Keys, 2009). A specific set of exercises was invented by Swedish physical trainer Per Henrik Ling to maintain the equilibrium, harmony, and health among soldiers (Pfister, 2013). Physical education

⁴¹ One of the first names which come to mind in this regard is Hakan Şükür. He was born in 1971 and joined Galatasaray FC, one of the three biggest clubs in Turkey, at the age of 21 as an aspiring talent. He played in this team as a striker until his retirement in 2008, except three seasons in Italy. He was the top scorer for three times in the Super Lig (the major league of Turkey) and he played in the national games of Turkey for 112 times. He is known as "the king" in the football history of the country. His relationship with the government was so close throughout his career that he was elected as a parliament member from the ruling party, AKP (Justice and Development Party) in 2011 and he also appeared as a sports commentator in state TV, TRT, for several years. In his first marriage in 1995, then Prime Minister Tansu Çiller persuaded the woman and her family to marriage. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, then mayor of Istanbul, conducted the wedding ceremony. Fethullah Gülen was Şükür's witness. And the wedding was broadcasted live on TV. Şükür's affinity with Gülen Movement has always been known and this started to become a problem in parallel with the increasing tension between Gülen Movement and the government, who were once inseparables. Şükür resigned from the AKP in 2013 and continued being vocal in his objections to the government. He was charged with insulting the Prime Minister Erdoğan on Twitter in the beginning of 2016 and after the coup attempt in July, he was charged with being a member of the armed terror group, Fetö, and supporting them financially. He has exiled to the USA in the same year and he is still living there.

⁴² Çarşı is the most popular of the left-wing fan groups in Turkey. Tek Yumruk, Sol Açık, KaraKızıl, and Mor Barikat are among the other examples.

in Canada, whether in residential schools that have served as places of assimilation of indigenous people, or public schools aiming for integration, was an effective method of producing docile bodies who internalized self-regulation practices (Forsyth, 2013). These geographically diverse examples show that the indifference of dissident groups to sports in general and their contempt for football in particular can be explained on historical and political grounds. One of the participants of the present study, Eren, recounted his detachedness from the physical activities at school:

Physical education lessons were not exciting for me at all; one feels fear and unhappiness in physical training lessons. We were getting undressed... For example, physical training was the first lesson for one year. I was very happy because I could go there wearing my sports clothes, so I was using the locker room once. We were doing stupid things, military stuff. The next lesson was free sports or sometimes training. Count from the right, silly things. (See Appendix B, 1)

The fact that sports and games were not considered as matters of social analysis for a very long time might have had an influence on the distant positioning of dissident groups to sports. The etymology of the word “sports” gives us clues about the common perception of sports as a leisure time activity, which is not worth analyzing or struggling for. It derives from the old French word *desport*, which means pleasure and privilege. The verb *desporter* means to “to seek amusement” and “to carry away”.⁴³ With such an origin, sport has often been considered an escape from serious matters, something trivial, diverting, and childish. Yet as one of the most globalized and popular activities today, sport incorporates further meanings for the societies beyond being a physical activity. Even before the emergence of modern sports, people were attributing various meanings to the games in their culture. Indigenous ball games, for instance, had multiple meanings such as celebrations for any

⁴³ <https://www.etymonline.com/word/sport> (Retrieved May 8, 2018).

important event, as prayers to bring good fortune, and as healing remedies; they also served the purpose of gambling, enjoyment, physical well-being, and preparation for war (Oxendine, 1988, p. 38). That being the case, confining sports to the sphere of leisure activities in modern societies might be put forward as another reason why dissident groups very seldom reckon football fields as spaces of resistance.

Together with the commercialization of the football field, this sports branch has gradually become a competitive mega-event which necessitates a more complex interpretation of a leisure time activity. Coming back to the origin of the word, the individual who seeks amusement and who wants to escape from the duties no longer has free time. The sphere of leisure activities and the time being spent on them are commodified and highly regulated through a number of actors. In the case of football fandom in Turkey, supporting a certain club often means being a part of the market through buying licensed products, watching league matches on satellite TV platforms or in the stadium with Passolig cards, which have access to the personal data of the fans. Moreover, fan identities function not only as support sites *for* teams but mostly as embodied spaces of conflict and hostility where two sides position themselves *against* each other. They maintain and contribute to the competitive logic of modern football, which requires a dualistic relationship between success and failure; the teams are positioned on opposite sides which can never win at the same time or can never set up a play in solidarity. Without doubt, the discourse of rivalry is a source of revenue for the football industry, so the TFF and the government have made several regulations that are claimed to reduce violence in the stands of the football stadiums. Law number 6222 on the Prevention of Violence and Disorder in Sport was passed in 2011, and the electronic ticketing system mentioned above, Passolig, was introduced in 2014 despite wide criticism and objections from the fans. These are two

significant moments in the process of the governmentalization of the football field through policing and information-gathering in relation to the neoliberal policies of the state on every layer of public space (Nuhurat, 2016). Nuhurat states that the Violence Law eliminates “not just violent fans but also those who cannot (because they lack the monetary means) or will not (because they prefer to conserve a certain social disposition or a set of conventions about fandom) attend football matches that are reorganized in this fashion” (2016, p. 77) being a bourgeois goal to rearrange the fan culture. Passolig functions like a tool for breaking the solidarity among the fan community by obligating individuals to buy privatized electronic cards so that they cannot exchange tickets, which is interpreted by one of the participants of Nuhurat’s study as an action that “shows how much they genuinely care about each other” in what way? Exchanging tickets? (2016, p. 82). The cooperation of state power and market ethics for mutual interests, as a typical characteristic of neoliberalism (Harvey, 2007), is at work also in the football environment in Turkey, and that is another noteworthy reason for the rare engagement of the social and political movements with football. A former Galatasaray fan, Yağmur, tells how she gave up following the league and supporting a team:

I was trying to go to matches when I came here for university. I was a Galatasaray fan. Then I stopped watching Turkish football because of its current situation. You should either buy Lig TV or go to shitty places to watch it. Swears and so on, I stopped totally instead of watching it in extremely masculine places. I really cannot understand why you swear at the television. I did it once, thinking I would be more accepted. She is a woman, but she is one of us, they would say. At the end of high school, beginning of university. After the match-fixing things and Galatasaray’s reaction, I stopped being a fan. I said to myself that all this is absurd. It was a political decision. I decided not to support since watching it would not bring me any good. (See Appendix B, 2)

During the three seasons between 2011 and 2014, women and children were allowed to enter the stadium at no charge when a team was punished by having to play

without their usual spectators. This policy shows, according to Nuhurat, “that women are not considered real fans...according to this policy, women’s presence in the stadium is a means to punish men...yet women’s actual spectatorship of football or support for a team remains illegible and invisible” (2017, p. 36). Considering Nuhurat’s argument on the feminization of fairness together with Çoban’s claim that football has been embraced as a masculinity-affirming activity by working-class, we achieve a nuanced perspective on the male-dominant dissident groups in the stands of the football stadiums. Çoban states that the male needs to create homosocial spaces to feel more manly against the power-relations and class exploitation, which feminize him (2008) and, in my opinion, football provides this space for men in Turkey, including the dissident ones. While the stands of the football stadiums have long been a space for resistance against inequalities in and beyond football, the field part mostly witnessed masculine performances either in association football or in the leisure time activities of dissident people. I argue that until recently, criticism of football coming from dissidents has not been able to reach a point of self-reflection on their existence, actions, and expressions. On the contrary, the lack of self-criticism of the “malestream” (O’Brien, 1981), football fields have apparently played a significant role on the exclusion of non-male bodies.

In this regard, 2013 Spring in Turkey can be pointed out as a milestone in the relationship of dissident groups with football and as the most visible and organized period of the sexuality politics on the alternative football field. In addition to the teams and leagues that emerged one after another, fan clubs of three nemeses in the football world in Turkey, Beşiktaş Çarşı, Fenerbahçe Sol Açık and Galatasaray Tek Yumruk, came together under the name of Istanbul United during the Gezi Uprising. Emre, Çoban, and Şener (2014) stated that football-based humor in Gezi attracted the

masses to the park, a rare example of the popularity of football creating a mobilization of the masses in the counter-direction of state ideology. Emre et al.

(2014) give examples of graffiti that humorously refer to football in the Gezi

Uprising:

‘PES’te hep Barçayı alan Tayyip’ which means ‘Tayyip who always selects Barça in PES’ (PES–Pro-Evolution Soccer, a simulated console game), ‘Allahını seven defansa gelsin - Jamiryo’ [For God’s sake, someone take the defence! - Jamiroquai], ‘Holosko + Bir miktar para verelim HÜKÜMETİ VERİN!’ [We give you Hološko + some money and you GIVE US THE GOVERNMENT!], ‘Bir de Beşiktaş’ın savunması kötü diyordunuz’ [Huh, once you said Beşiktaş’s defence was bad!], ‘Biber gazı bir Alex değil ama portakal gazı bir Hagi resmen’ [Tear gas is not as good as Alex but orange gas is literally as good as Hagi], ‘Alex gitti, sen mi gitmiyecen aq’ [Even Alex is gone, so how the fvck you think you’ll stay?], ‘Çare Drogba’ [Hope lies in the hands of Drogba], ‘Gazları Sabri’ye attırmayın’ [Don’t let Sabri shoot the canisters]. (pp. 443-444)

Gezi radically changed the strategies of using public space and has proliferated the ways and spaces of resistance. Intersectionality and solidarity among different dissident groups were established during that period more than ever. Feminist Tent and the LGBT Blok, as two of the most visible groups in the park, intervened in the sexist discourses circulating in the resistance language; they suggested a workshop with the fan groups which often constructed their political slogans on the rough binary relation of “penetrated” (feminine) and “penetrator” (masculine) the rival (opponent team or the state power) and themselves. As mentioned in the previous chapter, several gender-mixed amateur leagues and many anti-sexist teams also emerged after Gezi. Returning to the categorization at the beginning of this chapter, it can be stated that the fields and the stands of the football stadiums alike have increasingly become the spaces of resistance *against* and *through* football. The characteristics of Gezi, which allowed encounters as an open and public space in the center of Istanbul, created an unprecedented opportunity for different groups to communicate and share with each other, which unavoidably led to the shattering of

rigid prejudices on both sides. David and Toktamış (2015) describe the Gezi Uprising as “...more than an environmental resistance located in one urban park.” They state that “it was a series of popular uprisings and demonstrations throughout Turkey, particularly between 31 May and 25 June, with participants from a wide array of social groups” and a “peaceful co-existence between [...] very diverse and, until then, antagonistic groups” (2015, p. 20).

The impact of close ties between different groups has manifested itself in the demonstrations that followed, as well. A few days after Gezi was over, the police attacked people who opposed the construction of a new police station in Lice⁴⁴ and one person was killed.⁴⁵ While demonstrations and other activities that were organized for solidarity with the Kurdish region were ignored by the vast majority of the country, this time people cared and made noise in the streets in many cities. In Istanbul, Turkish flags accompanied the flags of PKK, YPG, PYD.⁴⁶ “Kurdistan will be the grave of fascism”⁴⁷ was one of the slogans shouted by the crowd. When many TV channels failed to display the police brutality and one of the main TV channels in Turkey, CNN Turk, screened a penguin documentary instead of live coverage of thousands occupying the park, many people started for the first time to problematize the so-called objectivity of the mainstream media. This skepticism quickly broadened its scope to the validity of the news reported (and not reported) on the Kurdish question by the same media for decades. Looking at how public space is regulated today and how these regulations affect social and political life, it is hard to

⁴⁴ It is a district of Diyarbakır (Amed in Kurdish), a city in the southeast part of Turkey. With the predominantly Kurdish population and the strong presence of PKK (Kurdistan Worker’s Party), the city often witnesses conflicts, state violence, and government repression over political institutions and civil society in the region.

⁴⁵ <https://bianet.org/bianet/insan-haklari/148068-uzerine-ates-acilan-liceliler-baris-istiyoruz-pankartiyla-yuruyordu> (Retrieved May 22, 2018)

⁴⁶ PKK in Kurdish stands for “The Kurdistan Workers’ Party” which is mostly active in Turkey since the late 70s, PYD is “Democratic Union Party” and YPG, which stands for “People’s Protection Units,” is the armed wing of PYD.

⁴⁷ In Turkish, “Kürdistan faşizme mezar olacak.”

confidently make claims about whether the “Gezi Spirit” is still somewhere in society waiting to be reawakened or whether “those good old days” were irreversibly replaced by an ever more oppressive state power and militarized society.

Nevertheless, it was an unforeseen uprising which had permanent impacts on the organizational structures, vocabulary, and strategies of dissident groups; these therefore warrant investigation.

In the same month, we witnessed the most impressive and crowded pride march in the LGBTI+ history of Turkey. The 2014 Pride March was even more crowded than the previous year, which can be suggested as an evidence to that Gezi was not an ephemeral moment. Yet the following year, the people who came to the 2015 Pride March were exposed to police brutality all day long, including the attacks to the closing parties at night. Pride marches are always held in the last week of June in Taksim, and they are organized and announced without prior permission since it is recognized by law as a right.⁴⁸ However, the state attacked the queers and allies who came together in 2015, showing as an excuse that it was an unauthorized demonstration and could therefore not be permitted for security reasons since it coincided with the month of Ramadan. After these remarkable years of resistance and celebration, the pride committee came up with a clever and equally controversial statement in 2016: We Are Dispersing!⁴⁹ Considering that the police attacked the 2015 Pride March and the 2016 Trans Pride March,⁵⁰ and that the governor publicly banned the 2016 Pride March, it was obvious that the police would not let people come together in the city center and walk down Istiklal Avenue as one huge body of

⁴⁸ http://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---ed_protect/---protrav/---ilo_aids/documents/legaldocument/wcms_127495.pdf (Retrieved May 20, 2018).

⁴⁹ <https://LGBTInewsturkey.com/2016/06/24/istanbul-LGBTI-pride-committee-statement-we-are-dispersing/> (Retrieved June 1, 2018).

⁵⁰ Trans Pride is organized one week before Pride March by the trans organizations in the city with the aim of making visible particular demands and problems of trans community.

protestors. Therefore, the pride committee stated that they would obey the police who asked them to please disperse and allow life to go back to its normal course. People who came to Taksim that day dispersed to every single corner of the area, organized protests and read press statement in the streets, in shops, in homes, as small groups or as individuals, and they streamed online all these actions during the day. For the police, it was a confusing and unusual resistance which had no central point and was thus hard to stop.

The Gezi Uprising was significant because it furnished a large part of society with abundant knowledge and instruments necessary to create and transfer alternative ways and spaces of collectivity and resistance. Hierarchical power relationships in the conventional ways of doing politics and the authority of a central power over the masses, even if it is a dissident one, started to be questioned more than ever. The conviviality of collectivity and ingenuity led to many ways and spaces through which people came together, discuss, create, challenge, deconstruct, and sometimes just have fun. While the dissemination of spaces of resistance accommodates an advantage of perplexing the state forces since there was neither a control room nor a central decision mechanism, it also risked isolating and weakening the movements. If people are not allowed to gather in the streets and instead form small communities focusing on their struggles, how can they make their claims visible to the public eye and how can the communication among diverse groups continue? Social media and citizen journalism came into play at this point: social media platforms connected struggles so that a local resistance in a small district, for instance, could reach the large masses; individuals used their social media accounts to document a human rights abuse, broadcast a demonstration, or state their opinions on a social issue; furthermore, new forms of media works not only showed a tangible event on a

digitalized platform but also to created online communities and online struggles. Collective actions such as changing the profile pictures on social media accounts (on Pride Week, Trans Visibility Day, Armenian Genocide Remembrance Day, etc.) or using hashtags to raise a particular topic⁵¹ might bring a considerable visibility in the eyes of online audience. Creating a YouTube channel and informing millions of people on LGBTI+ politics and queer theory was a peculiar opportunity of our times, through which a single activist might exceed thousands of people protesting in the streets for decades in terms of reachability.

I argue that the football field has been one of the spaces of decentralized resistance where individuals are informed about one another mainly through internet. Whether the respective increase is in the number of groups that do sexuality politics on the football field or in their visibility is not an easy question, especially given the previous existence of women and LGBTI+ people on the field. For sure there were women who occasionally came together to play football before the Gezi Uprising;⁵² the women's football league has continued since 1994 under the TFF; there have been a few moments when LGBTI+ people claimed the football fields in the past (the best known is Strap-on FC, as mentioned in the second chapter). That is to say, suggesting spring 2013 as the origin of sexuality politics on the football field is not a deliberate false historicizing for the sake of argumentation which ignores the past events where women and LGBTI+ people got the field. I instead claim that the interest of non-male bodies on the football field has transformed into a collective political claim in a more organized, sustainable, and visible manner in relation to the

⁵¹ Two of the most popular social media campaigns are #sendeanlat and #bacaklarınıtopla: https://www.bbc.com/turkce/haberler/2015/02/150212_sen_de_anlat; http://www.cumhuriyet.com.tr/haber/turkiye/61583/Bacaklarini_topla_yerimi_igal_etme.html (Retrieved May 23, 2018).

⁵² One of them was a group that were communicating through a closed Facebook group entitled "Women Look Good in the Artificial Turf" ("Kadınlar Halı Sahaya Yakışır"). It started in 2010 in Moda and remained active for years; me and two participants of my study also played in this group for various periods.

encounters in Gezi, the voluntary and coercive dispersion of central resistance afterwards, and the increase in social media activism.

But what are the significant features of the football field, in both a spatial and structural sense, which has made it more than one among the many as a space of resistance for women and LGBTI+ people? The answers, below, are propositions compiled from the interviews conducted during my research, and they demonstrate that queer-identified teams adopt all three ways of relating to the football field, namely resist *against* football, resist *through* football, and resist *for* football.

As the most popular sport in Turkey, football is where all the dynamics of society can be observed and are often reproduced. The indifference of feminist and LGBTI+ movements to football has been long explained by the sexist and homo-bi-transphobic environment of this sport. The incidents, interactions, and new teams witnessed in recent years, however, show that indifference is being replaced by a stance *against* the existing structure of football. “A sport that everyone knows but which we cannot play” says Niki, speaking about the widely accepted patriarchal environment of football. Acknowledgment of sexual discrimination and gender inequality on the football field as a structural problem that feminism should deal with is quite a recent phenomenon; women and queers started resisting it one after another in many places around the world, both in and out of the field. Footballers struggle for equal salaries and prizes⁵³ many campaigns are organized to overcome prejudices against women’s football; activists and footballers determinedly fight against sexual

⁵³ Norway: <https://www.independent.co.uk/sport/football/international/norway-footballers-equal-pay-agreement-a8112016.html>; the USA: <https://www.theguardian.com/football/2016/nov/21/uswnt-60-minutes-equal-pay-us-soccer-dispute> (Both retrieved Oct 7, 2018).

abuse and discriminating attitudes.⁵⁴ Seçkin defines the close ties between football and patriarchy as “something we try to break”:

It is because a woman footballer, Dicle, died a couple of days ago in a bus accident.⁵⁵ We were deciding together with the players in our team about what to write in our banner and we were angry because we know that it is because they are a women’s team. If they were a male team, they would travel by plane or by big buses. What kills this woman is basically sexism because they are not treated equally. (See Appendix B, 3)

Football, as described above, is not only a backdrop against which women and queers shape their actions; it is also adopted as a tool of strategic resistance for many reasons. Miran talks about its popularity in Turkey as the biggest reason it has always been the preferred sport. Its popularity as a game and a spectacle provides women and queers with a powerful tool to deconstruct gender roles in society and increases the visibility and impact of their actions. In terms of its figuration, setting a football game is comparatively easy; with the only constitutive element being the rule that one cannot use their hands, two stones and a round object enable anyone to play football anywhere. This surely influences its popularity, and my participants stated that its accessibility might also be an important element for other activist groups such as Forza Yeldeğirmeni⁵⁶ and 1917 Spartaküs⁵⁷ in selecting it, but it is not another sport branch as a tool of resistance.

The argument that the Gezi Uprising was an impetus for people to head for the football fields found a voice also in my interviews. Niki: “I started going to matches right after Gezi and I thought a lot about it, so probably there is a connection. This desire was always there, but I did not care until Gezi told me “come

⁵⁴ <http://cinselsiddetlemucadele.org/2018/07/23/sporda-siddetin-onlenmesinde-bir-turlu-degismeyen-bakis-acisi/> (Retrieved Oct 7, 2018).

⁵⁵ <http://www.iha.com.tr/haber-kazada-yaralanan-kadin-futbolcu-dicle-aslan-hayatini-kaybetti-631343/> (Retrieved Oct 7, 2018).

⁵⁶ <https://www.facebook.com/ForzaYeldegirmeni/> (Retrieved Mar 20, 2019).

⁵⁷ <https://www.facebook.com/1917Spartakus/> (Retrieved Mar 20, 2019).

on, you are going there”.⁵⁸ In addition to the fact that it mobilized people, Gezi also brought with it a toolkit which had a considerable effect on the ways and spaces of resistance from then on. Diversification in the ways and spaces of resistance, however, cannot be explained solely by “disproportionate intelligence”.⁵⁹ This was also a compulsory change in a climate of increasing social and political repression in Turkey, as Mavi thoroughly explains:

Recently, it has been a problem to come together with fifty people in order to make a demonstration or to read a press statement. For example, police attacked the March 8 Demonstration in Ankara. Undercover police officers watch us in the opening days of the Özgür Lig every year. We come together in Ahmed Arif Park, which is 15-20 minutes away from the football field on foot. Each team writes their own banners and then we walk to the field all together. We chant slogans about sports or more political topics. There are 3-5 undercover police in every opening day; they even took pictures this year. While they do not take us that seriously, they too are confused. They cannot directly interfere... The last couple of years, actually the period after Gezi, taught us how to politicize everywhere we exist. They taught us the possibility of politicization of football field after Gezi—think about Karşı Lig. They do not allow us to be in a certain space, they do not allow us to be in Taksim Square or Kızılay Square. Then we meet in neighborhoods, be it a football field or a park, not necessarily a square. Our state taught us to be political in every sense. (See Appendix B, 4)

Similar to the account above, what several of my participants stated was that the increasing oppression forced people to find safe spaces and non-conventional strategies to deal with the present situation. Football, as one of these strategies, provides a space where one can simultaneously do politics and have fun in a safe space. These amateur teams also occasionally attracted people who played professional football but who had not been able to come out and feel comfortable because of the homo/transphobic environment of that world.

⁵⁸ “Ben de bu maçlara tam Gezi sürecinin devamında gitmeye başladım, bir yandan öyle bir şey var, bunu da çok düşündüm, bir ilgisi galiba var. Orada duruyor ama ilgilenmediğim, bastıracağım bir şeyken ‘hadi kalk gidiyorsun’ diye motive edici bir yerden ilgisi oldu sanırım.”

⁵⁹ This term was created during Gezi Uprising to describe the humorous and creative methods of resistance against the disproportionate use of violence by the police force.

In addition to the temporal relationship between Gezi and the emergence of these teams one after another, Işık also talks about the increase in the visibility and impact of the LGBTI+ movement in Turkey as a relevant factor in the timing:

People gain awareness and become activists at an earlier age. A friend of mine has a 12-year-old daughter, and she says, “I have homophobic friends.” It is also related to the proliferation of knowledge. It might sound funny for this generation to hear that I realized that I am lesbian when I was 27. This is surely a very good thing. I get so happy when I see 16-year-olds in pride marches with a claim about themselves. When I was young, it was not like that at all... Women’s football is also gaining a reputation in many parts of the world. There is a girls’ football team in the secondary school of my niece, which means that she can play football if she wants. These days the field is more accessible to girls. (See Appendix B, 5).

Searching for the reasons why football has been adopted as a means of coming together and resistance, in my opinion, should not remain limited to the codes and connotations of football in the social, political, and historical spheres; it should also pay attention to the characteristics of the game itself. A further analysis on the relationship between the features of the game and its selection as a space of resistance is performed in the next chapter, where I discuss the potentials of the football field for queer happenings.

3.2 Encounters: Conflict and transformation

The encounters in Gezi were undoubtedly important in terms of the origin of sexuality politics on the football field, as proposed in this thesis. However, these encounters are not indicators of an accomplished transformation. As described in the previous chapter, people from different political backgrounds formed teams and came together in alternative leagues; this was an extremely exciting phenomenon since most of these groups were unfamiliar with each other until they met in these leagues (except for the small encounters in Gezi). For women and queers, football is a space of constant struggle against a variety of elements, and these leagues are not

exceptional. Differences in ways of playing the game and of doing politics on the football field sometimes spark conflicts, which might also lead to transformation in the end. In this section, these encounters are compiled into several categories to show that the entrance of women and queers to the football field is often not a smooth process and that it requires a continuous reclamation of space.

3.2.1 Encounters with members of other dissident groups

Here, at the very beginning of this section, it is crucial to reiterate the diversity of queer-identified teams interviewed in this research. In relation to their encounters with members of other dissident groups that are not familiar with feminism or the LGBTI+ movement, it should be noted that these teams have different opinions about participating in a mixed league. While the Queer Park Rangers and Sportif Lezbon compete in mixed leagues in Istanbul and Ankara, Atletik Dildoa, Lezyonerler and Kramponiçeler do not. As a women-and-trans-only team, Lezyonerler have never been in a mixed league, nor have they ever played against a mixed team. Atletik Dildoa wanted to join a then-newly formed mixed league in 2015, and the team agreed on its name in this process. The team name stirred controversy among other teams in the league, which led to a long and exhausting period of meetings and discussions that ended in the withdrawal of Atletik Dildoa from the league. In a league meeting to which Atletik Dildoa was not invited, it was decided by a majority of votes that the team should change its name in order to be able to join the league, stating that its name is not appropriate. The team then withdrew, declaring that what they faced was homo/transphobia and sexism. Several entities, including Özgür Lig,⁶⁰ issued statements of solidarity, and a solidarity match

⁶⁰<https://www.facebook.com/OzgurLigAnkara/photos/a.684515715012232/708529832610820/?type=3&theater> (Retrieved June 1, 2018).

was organized by Karşı Lig.⁶¹ Several teams in the league that Atletik Dildoa wanted to join saw no harm in the name and continued discussing within the league even after the team left. When the league changed their decision about the name and invited the team to re-join the league, this was interpreted as a political gain for the queer community. It had the support of many teams from different dissident groups, so the team decided to return to the league. However, the league dissolved shortly thereafter because of other problems that had nothing to do with the queer community. In the end, the team decided not to join any of the existing mixed leagues ever again. One of the team members, Eren, narrates his own experience as following:

It might be a very good thing in the long term, but this league was not like that. It was an important occasion for a closer contact, but what we encountered was nonsense. We were trying to approach them logically but I got bored after a while. I felt that our languages were very different, and we could never understand each other. I was sure that it was an overrated place. (See Appendix B, 6)

It was not only the problems and discriminating arguments experienced during the meetings that were interpreted as signs of language difference by many team players, but also bodily actions on the field. These leagues often have a gender quota, for instance, which is decided by a general consensus as a way of securing women's inclusion, but all these teams, whether they play in a league or not, approach this practice with caution. Semra stated:

It is good to play in a league. It is good to be crowded. It is nice that there are a lot of people from many different backgrounds and with different opinions. Playing in the same team or in the same league increases the level of tolerance towards each other. However, not everything is settled; the patriarchal mentality is not completely erased. In one of the games, we were playing with four women and the opponent team had four men on the field. When we were leading the game, they stopped passing the ball to women in

⁶¹ Photo album of the solidarity match between Atletik Dildoa and Karşı Lig: https://www.facebook.com/pg/karsilig/photos/?tab=album&album_id=949845385086307 (Retrieved Oct 7, 2018).

their team in order to beat us. That is why we did not have fun in this game.
(See Appendix B, 7)

Gender quotas are controversial in themselves because the acts of positive discrimination always risk reproducing the very ideology which necessitated this kind of act in the first place. Putting a gender quota in these 7-aside matches, saying that each team should have at least two or three women on the field during the game, means accepting that football fields belong to men, despite the fact that it is surely an attempt at inclusion. In addition to the contradiction inherent in the quota practice as a binary and heteronormative act, what is even worse is that the decision to impose a quota might not always be practiced, or the teams reserve the right to replace the women on the field with men when they start losing control of the game. Seçkin also talks about one of their experiences in the league: “We were playing with a team and our performance was better, so the men started replacing women on the field. I got really angry because everything was going alright but they kicked women out when they started losing the game”.⁶² She also stresses the fact that the team constantly has to deal with discussions related to sexism and homo/transphobia in the league. While in the beginning they were the “colors of the league,” she says, they got recognition after showing that they play well. Mavi confirms that the league is a space of struggle in itself but proposes a more hopeful interpretation:

It is a space of struggle but at least you find someone to complain to about your troubles. We do not claim that here is a rose garden free from discrimination. On the contrary, I have never expected a beautiful view because of the fact that it is a football league says a lot about what to expect. But that is the reason why we are in this league. And it is not fair to paint a hopeless picture because encounters in fact brought many positive results. For example, fan groups joined the Meeting Against Homophobia this year and we get in contact with them whenever there is an event. Maybe there would be no chance for us to meet if this league did not exist. Where else in the

⁶² “Bir takımla oynuyoruz ve biz onları yenmeye başladık diye kadınları çıkartıp erkekleri alıyorlar ve o an gerçekten öfkeleniyorum çünkü o ana kadar her şey yolunda, güzel güzel maç yapıyoruz. Yenilmeye başlayınca kadınları oradan kovuyor olmak, onlara pas atmıyorlar.”

world could LGBTI+ people and fan groups come together and discuss? (See Appendix B, 8)

As stated in the beginning, the teams have different opinions about mixed leagues, and Niki explains her position as the following:

My biggest motivation is playing football as a woman who has just started playing at this age. I just want to play football and therefore I want to come together with people who have the same feelings and same motives. I do not want to spend my energy for transforming the environment in a mixed league. I want to play football, I want to play better, but in this way. (See Appendix B, 9)

3.2.2 Encounters with cis-males

The second category, encounters with cis-males, is a more specific version of encounters in mixed leagues. While I believe that the moments of conflict and transformations in mixed leagues are largely due to the fact that they are gendered spaces which are resistant to being organized in more gender-neutral ways, I consider it important to focus separately on the presence of cisgender straight males in these leagues and in the queer-identified teams. I prefer this in order to better understand how varying sexualities, unlike the structural and ideological discrepancies regardless of one's sexuality, bring along shifts in the pace of the game, and they necessitate structural or immediate readjustments. Eren says that “whenever a straight male friend of mine comes to our match, he feels the difference” and he talks about the impact of their presence on the overall performance:

It is sometimes even more comfortable to have them, but it also decreases diversity and lets them show off. I feel that there is an unspoken rule in our game and you comply with it. I don't know how I learned it. Even though our team is completely open to cis straight males, I also know that it cannot afford after a certain number, even four. Then the team gives the alarm; sometimes we even gossip during the game. (See Appendix B, 10)

A quota for cis-male players was discussed in the interviews and people have varying opinions. There are people who do not care about it and there are people who want to play in [and with/against] women- and trans-only teams. When the welcoming side argues that they do not want to interrogate others' sexualities and that it is a political action to transform cis-males, the other side claims that a team of their own allows a more autonomous and creative game. Miran prefers to play in a team consisting of women and trans people since they think that there is a big difference: "Without cis-males, we set a pressure-free game and we are more comfortable in tackling. In other case, we can only play when they give the ball to us".⁶³ Işık says that she does not like the presence of a cis-male on the field no matter how he acts: "We never have the same mentality. In the best case, they blatantly act in a passive way to show that they can do much better, but they let us play".⁶⁴ Eren also states that as cisgender straight men on the field decrease in number, group dynamics strengthen and there is less selfish play anymore. Linking this claim with the other discussions about a cis-male quota in queer-identified teams, a shared opinion stands out that a cis-male is more likely to show respect to game regulations in a queer-identified team when he does not feel he is in the majority on the football field. "When habitus encounters a social world of which it is the product," says Bourdieu, "it is like a "fish in water": it does not feel the weight of the water, and it takes the world about itself for granted" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, pp. 127-128). Therefore, a cis-male joining a queer-identified team by leaving the world that he has taken for granted for a long time might also be showing that he is willing to give up

⁶³ "Onlar olmayınca daha baskısız bir oyun kuruyoruz, toplu mücadeleye girerken daha rahat girebiliyorsun, toptan kaçmıyorsun. Öteki türlü sadece sana denk gelirse pozisyona girebiliyorsun."

⁶⁴ "Hiçbir zaman tam aynı mantalitede olmuyoruz yani. En iyi ihtimalle ben daha iyisini yapabilirim ama sizin için yapmıyorum tavrında oynuyorlar, siz oynayın diye buradayım gibi."

the privileges of the comfort zone. Many of my participants explained that cisgender straight males joining their teams transformed in time. Mavi said:

It is beneficial both for me and for that straight guy. He gains the experience of playing with a lesbian woman and thus understands the point that you might not be able to explain even if you try for hours. Our friends in the team have changed a lot throughout the process and I love this change. His masculinity is validated as he plays with other men, but another kind of game appears when he starts playing with women. (See Appendix B, 11)

Although many agree that playing in a queer-identified team as a cisgender straight male is giving up a privilege, this “sacrifice” of men does not always bring with it pleasant results for women and trans people. Some of my participants perceive the care and protection on the field performed by cis-males as a public declaration and reproduction of power inequality. Can said:

It makes me very nervous, we already talked about it a lot. Flattering a woman on the field is associated with incompetence, in my opinion. It is often performed by guys and this is not a coincidence. I find these things fake. Okay, there are cisgender gay friends in our team, they are all very sweet and careful. I do not have bad memories with them. But whenever comes a cis-male who is very comfortable with the ball as if it is a part of his body, I get goose bumps. The acts of caring stemmed from a difference in performance do not make me feel good. Running across the field until the goal post and then searching for a woman there to make her score a goal is not a nice gesture. It is a disguised version of sexism. (See Appendix B, 12)

As might be expected, there are overt versions of sexism as well: my participants gave dozens of examples about male players who started to play harsher and more selfishly and they stopped passing the ball to the women in their team when the queer-identified teams take the lead. Rüzgâr explained:

Sometimes male friends come to our matches. You see the verbal and physical thing when they cannot beat me. They try to dribble past me instead of passing the ball to someone else. You hear some words after a match that they lost; like they got lost on purpose because we are women. Of course, it is not true! (See Appendix B, 13)

Hacking, as a strategy of hegemonic masculinity, is actually performed quite often against women, which is paradoxical, given that women are believed to be in need of

protection in a patriarchal society. In a workshop we organized this year with a colleague,⁶⁵ it was shocking to see that three of five participants had had injuries caused by cis-males in matches while these participants were leading the game. One of my participants, Seçkin, narrated a similar experience:

A couple of months ago, we played with a team which was formed by middle-aged men. Somehow, that day on the field all the players were men in their 20s. And there was no woman. First, they did not take us seriously but when we took the lead, they became furious. A player of our team had a rib fractured, I had a ball kicked in my ear, etc. The game ended in a draw and it felt like we won. (See Appendix B, 14)

The interpretation of these narratives of masculinity expression must be attentive to the easy association between men and aggressive behavior as a natural portrayal of the football field. The interpretation also needs to be sensitive to the historical and geographical differences in the construction and connotations of masculinity, more specifically hegemonic masculinity. As mentioned in the previous chapter, some of the rule makers in the beginning were passionate defenders of hacking because eliminating it from football would make the game unmanly. An example of how values and connotations of masculine behavior change across the cultures would be that sporting cultures in First Nations context associate the responses of anger and resentment in the face of a physical pain with weakness and vulnerability and therefore interpret them as inconsistent with traditional male responses. “If a player responds by fighting” instead of acknowledging the violence through laughter, “even if proven victorious, the initial incident remains cogent, as it prompts the other player into action and anger,” claims Robidoux, who adds that these historical constructions are influential on the features of hegemonic masculinity in Canada (2006, p. 280). In addition to the need to be careful about the diverse facets of masculinity, the acts that

⁶⁵ Aktan, D. N. and Doğan, M. G. Workshop: “Oyunbazlık Hakkı ve Sahanın Sınırları,” Karaburun Bilim Kongresi, İzmir. 2018.

expose and challenge the performances of hegemonic masculinity on the football field in Turkey can also become diversified by acknowledging these differences.

Almost everyone I interviewed gave more or less the same answer to the question of whether men are better at football. They accept that men often play better, but they relate this to the gender inequality in society: sex-segregated child games, differences in physical activity based on gender norms, unbalanced budgeting in association football. Mavi, who also played football as a certified player, explains why she started playing football at the age of 15 while many boys start at the age of 7:

There was only one football school in our neighborhood and it was only for boys. There was one for girls but on the European side, so I could not start at that time. You can barely express your passion for football; how can you join a team when everyone around thinks that it will provide no return? (See Appendix B, 15)

A quite different perspective on the absence and presence of cis-male players on the field is proposed by Eren, a cisgender gay male who plays in one of these teams:

For a certain period, the cis-male population decreased. I was the only cis-male on the field for two or three games in a row. It reminded me of the days when I was feeling uncomfortable in my volleyball team in secondary school, which was extremely dominated by hegemonic masculinity. I do not know how these two opposite environments could overlap in my mind. I did not want to focus on this feeling not to be alienated but I immediately remembered it when you asked me. I was feeling uneasy with my girl friends since I was there for being excluded from other spaces. If I think about why I have felt uncomfortable as the only cis-male in this field, I think about two possible answers. First, I feel like disrupting the integral nature of the team there. The second possibility is that it reminds me of childhood memories where I am playing volleyball with girls because I cannot play with the boys. (See Appendix B, 16)

I find Eren's account quite important for several reasons. First of all, it gives an example of how our emotional capacity is charged with memories related to childhood play, and these memories influence our present-day bodily interactions with other people in sports spaces. Taken together with the three intersection points

between dissident groups and sports which are proposed in the beginning part of this chapter, his account helps us assert that queer-identified sports spaces and all the attempts at queering the sports fields are to be interpreted not only as ways and spaces of resistance *against* and *through* sports but also, and maybe above all, they are spaces of collective well-being and of resistance *for* sports. Another intriguing point in this account is that he feels like disrupting the integral nature of the team when he enters the field. How is it possible that a queer-identified team has the integrity to be disrupted by a cisgender gay male identity? And what kind of integrity is this? These are questions to be dwelt on in the following chapter, where the main discussion is on the characteristics of these novel football spaces and how they carry the potential for queer happenings.

3.2.3 Encounters on the artificial turf

Under this sub-heading, one can talk about encounters with several different actors such as managers of artificial turfs, other teams renting the field, passersby and spontaneous audiences. The road to the football field is a proud march for many players. As long as it does not reach a disturbing level, the gaze at the footballer body who does not seem like a cisgender straight male as expected is enjoyed by many players since it is a gaze filled with surprise. Niki said:

Sometimes I feel a gaze on me but never more than this. I feel very good on my way to the field. I like walking with football shoes on and I like it when other people notice. I feel something like pride. Look at us, we know how to play football! Being a woman who goes to play football also has a role in this feeling of pride. I have never lost my excitement. (See Appendix B, 17)

Similarly, Mavi said that she preferred to walk with her football shoes on and that it was a deliberate act:

I have lived in one of the most central streets of Ankara for 7 years and I like that it is noticeable. There is an old street vendor at the beginning of our street

who greets me every time I pass by. Once he told me that he saw me going to sport but he never thought that it would be football. I like this surprising encounter. Yes, we do something on the field but in the street, it is different. For men, it is normal that they walk with football clothes from home to field, but it is interesting for people around when a woman does the same. (See Appendix B, 18)

Queer-identified teams, which often play on outdoor artificial turfs, attract an audience from time to time. These audiences consist mostly of passersby who just realize that something unusual is happening on the football field and thus stop there for a moment to make sense of it. Miran says that once they heard someone shouting “lesbians are playing” and adds that not all of them were lesbians, which is a telling example of stereotypes in football; Işık talks about people who make fun of the fact that they are women, who laugh loudly, who show them to each other; Niki says that people often take photos as if they are in a zoo; Toprak recounts a moment when a group of guys who were going to play in the next slot stopped warming up for their own game and instead watched Toprak and her friends. She is not sure why they were laughing all that time but states that it did not make her feel good in any case; even if they laugh because they like it, it is alienating, she says. Can stated:

A total confusion. People watch none of the other games but ours. It is because most of us, especially with our football clothes on, are not easily definable. They are confused about whether we are boys or girls, they are curious about how well we can play... The visibility does not have to be a feminist act, but it is different than just a bunch of girls playing football. There are other mixed teams playing in this field, but we look more *ibne*.⁶⁶ Sissy boys with tiny shorts, butch girls with short hair... (See Appendix B, 19)

Seçkin related their experience with passersby:

There is a taxi stand next to our field and taxi drivers there watch our games together. Sometimes children come and watch too. There is always some audience, but we never have any dialogue even though we always hang some posters on fences around the field. Only once an old woman watched and started shouting: “what kind of thing is it? Women and men are not equal,

⁶⁶ A word could be translated as “faggot.” Although it is used in society in a pejorative manner, queers reclaim the word.

how can you play?” We said that obviously we can play, and she might also join us, but she got very angry and left. (See Appendix B, 20)

As for encounters with staff members, Rüzgâr is the only participant who gave a negative account:

Once we played in a field in Caddebostan. The employee from whom I asked the key to the locker room mockingly asked me why on earth I started playing football. I found it strange that someone working there makes such a comment. Probably he never saw someone like me, he is not used to it. (See Appendix B, 21)

All the other participants expressed good relations with staff members. One from Istanbul mentions about that the staff offered traditional sweets once, while another player from Ankara says that the management never tries to censor any political activity during their games. Eren said:

We encounter at least three different teams when we go to the field. Once a guy catcalled a woman and the management was immediately informed. Staff apologized, warned that team, and it did not repeat again. If it did so, we would change the field. On the contrary, it felt like they stood with us and encouraged us. As if someone called them and ordered them to treat us very well. Maybe they just liked how sincere we are. Maybe we are the cute one. (See Appendix B, 22)

Niki states that their overall experience is also surprisingly pleasant, but she thinks that it might result from a management strategy to deliver consumer satisfaction:

The managers of our field are very conservative, but we always behave in a relaxed manner, just the way we are. They are never unkind to us probably because they approach us as customers, first of all. They meet our demands too. For example, there was no trashcan in the bathrooms and they put them in when we asked. I think there are not so many people who come to this field and they do not want to lose customers. (See Appendix B, 23)

As I argue in the previous chapter, artificial turf seems to take on a facilitating role for women and queers to play football compared to the completely open and flexible public spaces. Yağmur said:

There was a dirt field. Boys used to play there, but I went there only once. And my mom followed me to see where I was going. I had never seriously thought about playing there. I rather used to play in the schoolyard, in front of

our block, I mean, in a defined place. I think there is a difference between playing football in an open area at night and playing on artificial turf at night. (See Appendix B, 24)

3.3 Revealing the essence of the game on artificial turf

Artificial turf, as regulated and priced spaces, provides a degree of safety which women and queers often prioritize in their public interactions. While spatial and temporal regulations are respected by these teams in order to hold the space, managers of the artificial turfs are also attentive to the demands and satisfaction of this new consumer group that seems to grow day by day.

Kıvanç (2015, p. 398) also considers managing an artificial turf as a business. Artificial turfs in Turkey appeared in the second half of 1980s and grew rapidly. As a part of urban development, artificial turfs have been built next to highways, in small neighborhoods, on the lands where once open-air cinemas were (Kıvanç, 2015). It is an artificial football space, which above all provides a reproductive environment for hegemonic masculinity through its temporal and spatial configuration. Men enjoy power struggles on the field and “manly jokes” in the locker room. The peak hours are either early morning or night, since its main consumer group is middle-class urban men. This profit-minded sector, which is still in business with a consumer group much more diversified than ever, is yet another example of the fact that there is no such thing as linearity when it comes to the relationship between humankind and development. While urbanization and “financialization” (Epstein, 2005) is making the poor poorer, and while gentrification processes displace those with lower income, some developments about urban planning such as expanding and interconnecting transportation networks, better street lighting and so forth might also enable certain marginalized groups to get access to social activities in the city. I argue that artificial turfs are contested spaces which function as a channel for women

and queer people who want to play football. Given also that one of the reasons why artificial turfs became quickly widespread in Turkey in the 1980s was that it was not considered “a dangerous occupation” as Kivanç claims (2015, p. 389), the contradiction gets bigger. Artificial turfs are the very platforms where alternative leagues kick off each year with the slogan “football is beautiful in streets, not in stock markets,”⁶⁷ which is obviously an objection to the commercialization of football. Ironically enough, these artificial substitutes are more accessible to non-conforming bodies than streets where football was once beautiful for some.

The circulating discourse such as bringing back the essence of the game and remembering the inherent values of the game are mostly adopted by dissident groups which largely resist *against* football. The call for the essence bases itself largely on the critique of commercialization and over-politicization of the game, while aggression and masculine expression, which are claimed to be inherent in football, find a way to survive in the field through this discourse. As explained above, resisting *against* football means opposing the present-day structure of the football field and its corruption. As for queer-identified teams, I argue that claiming the right to the field is not properly a reclamation. The variety of opinions elicited in my interviews brings to mind the question of whether it is also a comeback for queers or whether we need a different perspective in our analysis of queers entering the field.

Seçkin said:

I started playing football in this team. Maybe once I played football in my childhood but that’s all. We were in secondary school. [Except for football] girls and boys were playing together, but then girls gradually stood back. We were the only family not working on a farm; my father was a teacher, thus me and my sister were still in the playground. You know children wrestling with each other, boys there reminded me that I was a girl. You cannot do it

⁶⁷ “Futbol arsada güzel, borsada değil.” It is a very popular statement raised by Metin Kurt, a revolutionary football player. It is still often used as a slogan by dissident groups: <http://www.diken.com.tr/futbol-borsada-degil-arsada-guzel-karsi-ligin-yeni-sezonu-basliyor/> (Retrieved Oct 5, 2018.)

because that's what you are. This made me think and stand back. (See Appendix B, 25)

Even though some of my participants said that they played street football from morning till night in their childhood, they pointed to a certain moment of halting that resulted from a mismatch between their [assumed] sexuality and football. Yağmur said:

The times that I could go out and run were when I was four or five, before primary school. It continued until the fourth grade with no problem but then they told me “no, you cannot play” when my breasts started to grow and when I got my period. (See Appendix B, 26)

Eren said:

I first played football in primary school, not a period when you feel masculinity that much. But it was different in secondary school, then I was at a point when I cannot play football anymore. Let alone playing football, I was made uncomfortable in the men's locker room in physical education lessons. I don't know what they were expecting. I am not a trans person; I define myself as a gay man. I don't know how feminine I am, but they found it strange that I was using that room. (See Appendix B, 27)

Toprak remembers a misogynistic game from *their* childhood:

Our home was in a side street, not on the highway. We used to find an empty parking spot between two cars and consider it as a goal post. Now I remember: the name of our game was 9-month,⁶⁸ gosh! We used to pause when a car approached and then continue again. We used to play until it got so dark that we were unable to see the cars. (See Appendix B, 28)

Can said that she also used to play football a lot in her childhood:

Even in the first years when I was playing in street, when I was around six years old, they used to make me goalkeeper and kick on me really hard. But I played for years anyway. Boys used to build a goal post in the carpark and girls used to skip rope. My eye was always on football. When a boy would get out the game, they used to call me but make me goalkeeper. But when we moved to our next home, I became almost a team captain. Our block was D16 and we used to hold matches with D15. I remember that they told each other: “dude, that was a girl!” I remember that they touched my pussy in the park, which is obviously a harassment. They were the older boys in the neighborhood. I was playing so well that they could not believe it. I was getting a short haircut in the summer and I was looking forward to having it each year. They used to mistake me for a boy because of my hair and also

⁶⁸ The name refers to a woman who is 9 months pregnant. The goalkeeper becomes 1-month pregnant each time they receive a goal.

because I was playing football very well. I stopped playing after that period, when I was around eleven. (See Appendix B, 29)

Mavi said:

It was not something that I chose. Why did I play football? For me, it was normal. It was same for me as it is for a boy. I was not thinking like let me play football and protest something. I just wanted to play and did it impulsively. Can we not play football? I realized that what I was doing was strange when people started to be surprised... When my mom did not let me and my sister go out, children used to knock on our door to convince my mom. We proved that we knew the game. It was not a favor to us, we were better than most of the boys. (See Appendix B, 30)

All these accounts support the idea proposed in the beginning of this chapter—that the reasons why certain individuals position themselves against current football environment vary. While many dissidents remain aloof from football as a gesture of opposition to its commercialization and over-politicization, women and queers remain distant first because of its extremely gendered figuration apart from the abovementioned ideological disagreements. Thus, entering the field for women and queers is not only a protest *against* or *through* football and it is not a demand of inclusion; it is a radical intervention to the basics of the game above all, an effort to transform the game into ways in which all bodies and [all and non-] genders can take shelter.

In a booklet produced for the “Queer Olympix Istanbul” event,⁶⁹ Atletik Dildoa writes: “for us, playing a game is neither a leisure nor a nostalgia for beautiful childhood memories. It is a right that we still try to claim and protect by creating new spaces for ourselves”.⁷⁰ Notwithstanding, several participants in my research argue that football is essentially just a game and thus, everyone can play it. The phrase “just a game” evokes being flexible, childish, playful, unserious, and so forth. This

⁶⁹ It is a 3-day event organized by Atletik Dildoa. The first one was organized in 2017 and it has already become an annual event in Istanbul: <http://bantmag.com/istanbul-2-queer-olympix-deneyimine-hazirlaniyor/> (Retrieved Oct 6, 2018).

⁷⁰ “Bizim için oyun oynamak bir boş zaman aktivitesi değil, güzel hatıralarla dolu bir çocukluk nostaljisi değil, bugün hala kendimize alanlar açarak kazanmaya ve korumaya çalıştığımız bir hak.”

phrase calls the addressee to let go of the rules and prerequisites for playing the game. Considered also that the word sport has origins such as carrying away, diverting, and having pleasure, claiming the right to play this sports branch might be easily labeled as a demand out of the field of politics. In order to phrase better why I would disagree with this labeling, let me also briefly explain another popular argument.

“Involvement of politics in sports”,⁷¹ a phrase with negative connotations, is widely heard in Turkish sports environments, especially in football. It mostly refers to the interventions of political parties on the decisions of TFF, match-fixing cases involving top government officials, and conspicuously close relations between managers of major teams and politicians. The state also uses this phrase to criminalize certain fan groups or players who raise opinions conflicting with the dominant ideology. Popularity of this sports branch, which is also known as the “opium of the masses,” has made it a convenient space for states to execute their political actions and Turkey was not an exception. Football served to awaken nationalist sentiments in the first years of the Republic; after the years of focus on physical education and mass sports with a militarist point of view, professionalism in sports started in 1951 and then the competitive sports, primarily football, gained momentum; especially after the 1980 coup, the state showed strong interest in football as a popular activity which would divert the masses from purportedly dangerous political activities and keep them in order. While works on infrastructure development in football increased in this period, the influence of local politicians, media, and state over the domain of football have been felt more than ever. The dominant feature of football in the 90s’ Turkey has been the rise and transformation

⁷¹ In Turkish, “spora siyaset karıştırmak.”

of football fandom with respect to commercialization of football by means of ticket revenues, TV spectatorship, betting, sponsorship agreements, and licensed products (Talimciler, 2005). Football maintained its importance as a playground of politics in the following years of neoliberalism. As Nuhurat states:

Besides aggressive urban regeneration projects, the use of new demographic and surveillance techniques for the entire population, top-down changes to the education system and the desire to standardize gender relations, reproduction, sexual and family lives, football has served as a site of governance for several governmental projects since 2010. (2018, p. 129)

Politics and football are two words that not many people are willing to put together since this combination is claimed to bring along actions that reproduce social norms and consolidate state power through football institutions. Excessive involvement of politics in football scene is criticized by the participants of my field research; emphasizing that it is “just a game” also shows the desire to protect this sport from further corruption, in my opinion. However, the entrance of women and queers in an organized way to a tremendously male-dominant environment which is regulated according to the gender binary categories is without doubt a political intervention. “Women cannot play football” is a long-established judgment that blocks the road to the football field for certain bodies and what happens in the last couple of years in Turkey is an invasion of the football fields by the unwelcome. Mavi said:

We don’t have more than 3 male players in our team. When we started using social media a bit more actively, the women found us. The most important thing for me was that lesbian and bisexual women, who had never contacted with the LGBTI+ organizations, involved in this movement through football. (See Appendix B, 31)

Semra stated:

I don’t know who started it, but they made a great thing. Many invisible identities are comfortably coming out on the field. This is very precious. And you don’t get hurt; on the contrary, you are supported. So, you suggest it to other people and make them come there as well and it gets more fun when you get crowded. I wish it could be in every city. (See Appendix B, 32)

Seçkin explained:

We discuss a lot in the team whether we are a football team or a community which does LGBTI+ politics. I think we are both. We play football, we play it very well. We also do politics. Showing that there are many women who play football very well is also something that shatters the gender norms. In addition to this, we always have different things to raise when we entered the field. We send our messages through that field. Moreover, we sometimes organize friendly matches. All of these are politics. (See Appendix B, 33)

Innocence and harmlessness that the phrase “just a game” implies and all the negative connotations that the phrase “involvement of politics in sports” is charged with might enable one to claim that playing football is just a bodily activity that has nothing to do with politics. Revealing the politics hidden in the processes of meaning-making of the football field, which are naturalized by means of the phrase “just a game,” might help us to understand the production and reproduction of ingredients, including “what-goes-without-saying” (Barthes, 1972; p. 10), of a culture. Burstyn explains how modern sport as a “secular religion” has been central to the constitution of many aspects of social and political order such as gender relations, militarization, division of labor, and industrialization. She further claims that all these connections led to a sports culture which shares a lot with the “industrial masculinism” (1999, p. 56). Invisible and naturalized acts that create the field also determine the limits of bodies; in this case, performing a bodily activity that is labeled “improper” or “unexpected” or even mere entrance to the field as an unwelcomed body intervene in the organization of public domain and pave the way for multifold social and political transformation.

In the next chapter, this act of entrance is examined thoroughly: what is transformed on the football field, in the ways of doing politics by feminist and LGBTI+ movements, and in the own lives of these women and queers? What are the pathways that arrive at the field and what are the footsteps inside the field? What are

dislocated in the setting of the game and what are deconstructed in its logic by the arrival of women and queers? A phenomenological analysis of entrance of women and queers to the football field, which has become a site for queer happenings, is performed in the following chapter.

CHAPTER 4

A NEW SITE FOR QUEER HAPPENINGS

As explained in the previous chapter, the consideration of football as an opium of the masses has been quite common among dissident groups, especially feminist and queer communities, and thus, it has almost never been seen as a site of resistance by these groups until recently. Since football is one of the most solid pillars of patriarchy for many feminists and queers, they have maintained their distance from this domain where traumatic childhood memories are harbored.

Interestingly, however, labeling women footballers as lesbian is a persistent stereotype both in Turkey and elsewhere in the world. While a male footballer is expected to be masculine, the same performance of masculinity by a woman raises doubts about her (hetero)sexuality (Drury, 2014). This unequal treatment brings with it further marginalization and discrimination of non-heterosexual bodies instead of providing a welcoming space. Although improvements have been made towards gender equality, the institutional spheres of football constantly feature feminine footballing bodies in their public relations in order to show that it is possible to preserve femininity as a woman football player. The equation of femininity and womanhood by international football authorities does not serve to challenge a stereotype but rather to exclude gender expressions which do not match normative womanhood.

Normative and binary positioning of genders in football and in many other sports spheres is one of the main reasons why women and gender-non-conforming bodies have remained aloof from football or have experienced difficulties in accessing that space. Coming back to the categorization that I formerly proposed on

the relations between dissident groups and football— resistance *against/through/for* football—I argue that queer interventions in the field and game might help non-conforming bodies to transgress the borders of the field which are not only material but also sexual (i.e., sexualized). What I propose by the category of resistance *for* football is beyond the discourse of inclusion; it rather contains all the efforts made by the queer-identified teams for collective space-making and for re-figuration of the game in harmony with their sexual and spatial orientations.

Recently, the emerging link between queer resistance and football, which is arguably the sport with the strongest discriminatory attitudes toward women and queer people, calls for a closer look at the field as a site of queer happenings formed through bodily movements, interactions, and proximities. With the aim of interrogating the contradictory nature of football, the last part of my study delved into the multiple meanings of “resistance *for* football” by engaging in dialogue with studies on sexuality, embodiment, queer phenomenology as well as drawing upon the personal experiences narrated in the interviews. After a brief comparison between identity politics and queer movements, an elaborate analysis of spatial and sexual orientations with respect to the football field is conducted. The discussion of space-making practices of non-conforming bodies on the field in relation to the perils and pitfalls of border-making processes in communities and the possibility of “queer commons” is followed by the last part, which discusses queering interventions by these teams in the very configuration and value system of the game.

4.1 Identity politics and queer movement: A comparison

Before embarking on a detailed analysis of the relationship between sexuality and spatiality with respect to the football field, I find it useful to show that the differences

in strategies and actions of LGBTI+ communities all around the world are linked with the long-term difference between identity politics and queer politics. Neither of these categories goes out of fashion and neither can be claimed as historically preceding the other. Considering these two ways of politics in a linear line and declaring queer politics as the up-to-date version of identity politics would ignore the decades-old contributions of feminist theory to the literature on body and sexuality. Similarly, presenting identity politics as more respectable and down-to-earth would reproduce the heteronormative gaze which categorizes and divides LGBTI+ individuals in terms of their conformity to the social order and thus has been rightfully criticized by queer activists. What is important to point out, in my opinion, is the temporal correlation between the dictionary of identity politics and the emergence of sexuality categories.

Foucault's path-breaking work that shows "how sexuality itself is a historically specific knowledge as well as a regime of disciplinary knowledge structuring society and social relations" (Browne & Nash, 2010, p. 5) describes these interactions between the sexual body and the state as "biopolitics" (Foucault, 2003 [1976]). Through these interactions, sexual conduct is regulated, and bodies as well as bodily actions are classified as normal or deviant. The gender opposition of woman/man and the sexual orientations and gender expressions defined according to this gender binary regulate not only the domain of civil society and social policies but also the methods and tools of struggle against discrimination. Adopting the discursive identity categories provides the activists with instruments to unveil the systematic discrimination against LGBTI+ individuals through statistical census data and to demand equal rights and benefits. While the politics of respectability with an emphasis of sameness help LGBTI+ individuals to be incorporated into categories of

“sexual citizenship” (Evans, 1993), gaining acceptance and respect in the public space necessitates compromises on certain social norms, and it brings along another division between normal and deviant, this time among the LGBTI+ individuals. The good and responsible homosexual is positioned in public institutions and in the mainstream media in contrast with the bad and threatening homosexual, which leads to the further marginalization of certain non-conforming bodies. “The incorporation of gay and lesbian politics into neoliberal economic agendas” (King, 2008, p. 436) can be defined as “homonormativity” (Duggan, 2003). Bodies become norms in a way that makes non-conforming and non-normative bodies feel out of place in these institutions or public spaces. The “spatialized framework of the normal/public and the perverse/private” (Valentine, 2003, p. 412) regulates the movement of nonheterosexual bodies in public space and those who can access to the public institutions are constituted as compliant with the conditions of market and nation-state. Halberstam (2011, p. 202) warns us against the mistaken pairing of gay sexuality and political radicalism stating that a certain sexual act does not guarantee a certain political orientation. On the contrary, the representation of “out and proud” non-heterosexual and/or trans subject in mainstream media and parliamentary politics in the Global North today is sometimes witnessed to be in harmony with the patriotic discourse and neoliberal regulations. What Leong (2012) names as commodification of identity is a trap that is difficult to avoid in the process of inclusion. Ahmed (2006) defines institutions as orientation devices which compel the subject to speak from an already-constituted position and to seek to reach a certain direction. Aspirations for equal rights and the normalization perforce extends bodies in line with the central interests and norms in what Tsing calls scalability (2015, p. 38).

Those who cannot comply with the central interests and norms and who speak from the margins demonstrate another way of doing sexual politics; this is typically defined as queer politics. Valentine (2003, p. 416) claims that “whereas equal-rights activists stress the sameness of lesbians and gay men to heterosexuals, queer activists highlight the differences.” Bearing in mind the continuous risk of appropriation and commodification of the differences also for those at the margins, queer might be described as the constant awareness of this risk and the aggregate of playful actions against hegemonic incorporation. In her discussion on the intersection between sport sociology and queer theory, King (2008, pp. 421-426) proposes five key features of queer: anti-identitarianism, poststructuralism and psychoanalysis, antinormative (sexual) politics, a critique of heteronormativity, and contingency and multiplicity. Her claims, like those of many prominent names in queer theory, maintain that queer struggle and queer theory are not easily separable from each other and they are not necessarily or solely about sexual politics; they are rather intersectional forms of resistance against what is legitimate and dominant. Queer politics and queer studies “investigate and denaturalize heterosexual identity and desire; interrogate, rather than assume, its difference from homosexuality; and explore how heterosexuality is produced and maintained, with what consequences, and for whose benefit” (King, 2008, p. 425) and their interrogation and subversion of these categories aim “to create and defend spaces for non-normative desires and practices” (King, 2008, p. 422). While identity politics and demands for inclusion are criticized for their susceptibility to assimilation and commodification, queer resistance and non-conforming actions are claimed to be isolated from the main spheres of political contestation and to create ghettos.

The implications of inner characteristics of identity politics and queer politics as well as the tension between them can be easily found in the actions of sexually dissident people within sports spaces. Investigating sexuality within a spatialized framework inevitably makes the sports field yet another of the domains of regulation and reproduction given that the excessive effort of measurements of biological and anatomical differences between sporting bodies in order to produce and maintain sex-segregations in competitions for the sake of fairness. Inclusion-driven events by LGBTI+ athletes strive for accessibility and challenging stereotypes however the visibility gained through these commercialized mega events often go together with mainstreaming of certain identities while discouraging less “appropriate” or “acceptable” sexualities (Drury, 2014).

Improvements towards gender equality requires an attentive approach since their negotiation with the sexist and heteronormative structure of sports might often result in limited and adjusted recognition in a gender binary system. The constant transformation of the biggest institution in the football world, FIFA, could be traced in several concrete achievements today.⁷² However, these improvements go together with the efforts toward feminizing football in many parts of the world (Ranc, 2013; Caudwell, 2011; Bora, 2009). The main reason behind these worldwide efforts is the anxiety of the labeling women footballers as lesbian. Challenging this stereotype is undeniably important because it is the stereotype that impedes the participation of many women on the football field (Pfister, 2015; Caudwell, 2007). Pfister (2015, p. 179) argues that equating manhood and masculinity through football helps boys affirm themselves whereas it obliges girls to defend their choice of playing this game where predominantly men and “lesbians” reside.

⁷² One of the most recent is the one-hundred percent increase in the winning prize in Women’s World Cup 2019 (<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-soccer-fifa-women/soccer-fifa-approves-prize-money-increase-for-2019-womens-world-cup-idUSKCN1N01RV>) (Retrieved Dec 1, 2018).

Caudwell suggests an intricate look at this stigmatization, claiming that “lesbian sexuality has real currency within football contexts” (2002, p. 1). Stressing the femininity of women footballers implies the effort of heterosexualizing the space. However, combining this with the visual signification of the butch/masculine body as authentic in women’s football results in the erasure of lesbian femininity (2007, p. 190). When I ask how they imagined a woman football player, most of my participants described a butch, i.e. a strong, short-haired figure; one of them, Rüzgâr, added: “one of us.” To my question about the relationship between football and lesbianism, most of the answers go without saying. Niki, who identifies as a lesbian, says: “Before playing football, I did not have any lesbian friends. I discovered my lesbian sexuality through football, through its environment.”⁷³ Seçkin likens football to a soft blanket on which people can express their masculinity freely, but at the same time, they can cover their non-conforming identities, adding that there are many closeted lesbians today in association football in Turkey.

Given that sport is one of the most effective tools of hegemonic power to regulate and reproduce normative bodies, research done in this field in relation to sexuality should have a robust queer perspective not to contribute to the binary assumptions and homonormative sexual politics (King, 2008). The acts of community-building and space-making by queer athletes instead of demanding inclusion and acceptance, which is examined in the following sections of this chapter, highlight the aspect of spatiality as another important player in the game. My fieldwork consists of queer-identified teams which refuse to be inside the commodified football spaces but at the same time want to play football. Therefore, they occupy and reterritorialize public spaces, as Valentine puts forward as a “queer

⁷³ “Futbola başlamadan önce lezbiyen arkadaşım yoktu. Lezbiyenliğimi futbol aracılığıyla, futbol ortamında keşfetmiş oldum biraz.”

tactic” (2003, p. 417). Ahmed (2006, p. 134) states that “to be comfortable is to be so at ease with one’s environment that it is hard to distinguish where one’s body ends and the world begins.” Applying this to the institutional and alternative football spaces, it can be seen that these newly emerging queer-identified teams do not seek to reach a state of being at ease within the demarcated and defined football spaces but rather intervene in the spatial figurations and transform them in a way that can harbor their bodies and bodily movements.

It is a struggle for non-conforming bodies, in any case, to survive in the common spaces of football. The fact that it is hard for non-conforming bodies to enter these spaces is a joint result of various aspects of institutional discrimination. There are times when they can enter or when they are accepted in these fields. However, at those moments, they are left with two choices: either to put in great effort to prove their qualification and that they deserve to be there or to challenge the very obligation of providing such proof. So, in either case, they do not fit in the space, and they do not smoothly harmonize with the characteristics of the space.

Ahmed states that “recognition is a form of straight hospitality, which in turn positions happy queers as guests in other people’s homes” (2010, p. 106) and expects gratitude for what it gives. The grateful guest contributes to keeping things in place since the gift demands a return and is never unrequited (Mauss, 1925). On the contrary, queer activism is the struggle for self-determination of one’s places, interactions, bodies, and so forth. In this regard, it could be argued that queers who recently build communities through football resist against the obligation of receiving a gift that will, in turn, shape their body and sexuality.

A player of our team wrote in her essay, “if we are not allowed to walk, we will aspire to run,” referring to the compulsory orientation of queers towards a

decentralized resistance due to the changes in the political environment of Turkey (Epik, 2018). It reminds us that queers did not all of a sudden develop a tendency towards football, but the close links between spatial and sexual aspects of queer football environments invite us to make more reasoning about the bodily movements of queers *towards* and *on* the field. What displays best that entering the football fields is more than a momentary and reactionary political choice for queers is the importance attached to the community-building processes such as creating safe-spaces for physical activity, organizing consciousness-raising meetings and socializing outside of the field. Forming intimate bonds of friendship and sexual partnership is often witnessed in these teams, and many participants in my study stress the life-changing and confidence-boosting effect of queer football spaces. In addition to community-building processes, interventions in the physical limits of space and its set of rules and values, which are elaborated in the last part of this chapter, demonstrate the transformative approach of queers to the field.

In parallel with the professionalization and mainstreaming of the LGBTI+ movement that started in the mid-1980s in many parts of the world (Valentine, 2003, p. 413), fundraising and lobbying have frequently been adopted as the means of sustainability by these groups. Considered that the funding organizations often target marginalized localities in the globalized world, queer-identified teams in Turkey are easily qualified as grantees. Even though these teams insist on creating their own spaces, rejecting the gift of recognition as argued above, all of these teams either organize activities owing to the grants given by funding organizations or they participate in those funded activities even if they are not directly involved in the decision-making and application processes. Under the political and economic conditions in the country, which render it impossible to create independent resources

and sustainable communities, queer activists tend to look for the means of survival and resistance outside the country. However, the interactions formed between these queer-identified teams and the NGOs often raise question marks on the effectiveness of these funds. An umbrella organization that aims to fight against racial and sexual discrimination in football, FARE network,⁷⁴ funds more than 1,500 activities from many parts of the world through their annual *Football People* action weeks. These weeks, considered the difficulties in covering expenses of envisaged events autonomously (accommodation and travel of the guest players from other cities, food, venue rental, etc.), are an opportunity for the queer-identified football teams in Turkey to raise their claims. However, one of the teammates, Bora, gives an account of *their* last experience with this organization as follows:

The first time we got engaged with FARE was on our first edition of Queer Olympix. I remember our long conversations through emails trying to prove how reliable we are in terms of organization. Collecting data such as photos, articles etc. They were at first hesitant to support us since it was not their funding period and also, we were applying to them for the first time. But somehow, we ended up receiving funds. But unlike the other funding we got, they first wanted to see our action, they wanted to make sure what they will “pay for” was worth doing somehow. At first, I thought that it made sense since we were a new funding partner but when we applied for the second time during their action week, it appeared that this was their regular process.

FARE sends fliers, jerseys, t-shirts, banners with their logo, and asks you to viably show their logos and slogans in your photos or announcements with hashtags, mentions etc. Sometimes this task becomes the main idea of the event; you as an organizer, in addition to all your stress, also have to make sure that you have clear photos of your event showing the logo of the organization, as if they are the ones organizing it and you are just an employer. I have also thought they are not experienced with non-registered initiatives and grassroots. Grassroots groups and initiatives don’t have a legal framework, so, for example, when sending a package for the event, it is important to ask the organizers on whose name this package will arrive, they didn’t. So, the package was sent to the name of Atletik Dildoa, and not surprisingly, it got stuck in customs.

The grantee is expected to comply with the terms and conditions of a contract whose content sometimes makes the players feel like they are organizing this event not for

⁷⁴ <http://farenet.org/about-fare/> (Retrieved Dec 1, 2018).

the interests of the queer community in the country but for the funder itself. These experiences show that a queer-identified team using funds as a political and survival tool inevitably generates a paradoxical situation that deserves further thought.

4.2 Space-making and sexuality: Football as a sexual orientation

Throughout the years, space has been conceptualized in various ways in social sciences. While the early understanding of space was limiting it to a physical surface, later on it was considered “the container of social relations and events” (Valentine, 2002, p. 145). It was the same period when social categories and identities were considered as given and fixed. From the 70s on, with the impact of poststructuralism, this perspective was abandoned, and space was “understood to play an active role in the constitution and reproduction of social identities and, vice versa, social identities, meanings and relations are recognized as producing material and symbolic or metaphorical spaces” (Valentine, 2002, p. 146). This transformation has been accompanied by the concept of mobility so that the field of geography started to pay more attention to people and objects moving rather than adopting a space-bound perspective that focuses on the necessary landscapes for such a movement (Creswell & Merriman, 2011).

The reciprocal and multidimensional interaction between space and social forces manifests itself also in the production and reproduction of sexualized bodies and spaces. To put it in general terms, bodies make spaces through their performances, mobilities and interactions; simultaneously spatialized features and attributed meanings in certain spaces shape the bodies who step in. Rejecting the idea that the material characteristics of spaces predetermine the internal power relationships is important because “it denaturalizes the presumed heterosexuality of

everyday spaces” (Valentine, 2002, p. 154). Valentine gives the examples of heterosexual couples kissing and holding hands, shop windows and billboards displaying happy nuclear families, conversations on heterosexual love in cafes or bus stops, and so forth as repetitive performances which (hetero)sexualize the common spaces.

It is helpful to introduce the concept of compulsory heterosexuality here since this form of sexual relations is “imposed, managed, organized, propagandized, and maintained” (Rich, 1980, p. 648) through multiple ways. Parallel to the focus of this research, contemplating the spatial practices of compulsory heterosexuality helps us carry the debate further to visualize the seemingly natural space together with what is inside as a locus “which allow straight bodies to extend into them” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 92). Eren states that his gayness, even though he had not discovered or conceptualized it back then, was in conflict with certain spaces that he involuntarily disclaimed due to a feeling of insecurity:

At the end of secondary school, I did not choose certain high schools just because the people who make fun of me and hurt me would choose there. And they were good schools. I made up some excuses for not choosing them. I didn’t want to be in the same school with those people. (See Appendix B, 34)

Heteronormative organization of spaces moves beyond the public domain, and those who live a non-heterosexual life are often expected to have an awareness of the heteronormative gaze and to regulate their relations accordingly, even in private spaces. As would resonate with many personal experiences, a cohabiting and closeted lesbian couple needs to be cautious in front of their neighbors, needs to hide their “suspicious” objects (sex toys, queer magazines, rainbow-colored items, intimate photographs, etc.) or to separate their bedrooms when a family member or stranger visits them, and so forth.

What constitutes a space is what bodies do. What gives the meaning and functions to a space or an object, and what determines the ways of relating to them are the actions and assemblages of bodies who (can) step in. “Doing things ‘at’ the table is what makes the table what it is and not some other thing” says Ahmed (2006, p. 45). Imagining a football field instead of a table would not be difficult within the context of sexualized spaces, given the male domination in this sport. What renders it “masculine” and keeps it such can be claimed as the repetitive “masculine” performances by the bodies inside. Miran said:

Think about all the features assigned to genders, assigned to us. Similarly, football, which is actually just a game, has a lot of things that are constructed. And what we do through these teams is deconstructing them. (See Appendix B, 35)

With reference to the claim that spaces and their contents are shaped by the aggregation of visible bodies and dominant relations inside, straight bodies appear in line since they are aligned with other lines (Ahmed, 2006). Ahmed talks about the “straight line of life.” She draws an analogy between the linearity of life and being straight/heterosexual, by claiming that a straight person’s body is aligned with the progression of everyday life. This alignment means that everything is in its proper place, therefore, the effort of straightening the things or “holding” them in place is rendered visible; things seem straight, on the vertical axis, they look like they were always like that, like there is no history or effort behind which gives them their present shape (Ahmed, 2006, p. 66). In contrast, those who do not feel at home either regulate their bodies accordingly, try to negotiate with the requirements, or disclaim those spaces.

The link between sexual and spatial orientations shapes the domain of what a body can do, both in terms of normativity and capacity. For Ahmed, “the point is simple: what we ‘do do’ affects what we ‘can do’” (2006, p. 59). What Husserl and

Merleau-Ponty describe as “sedimentation” (Steinbock, 1995, p. 36) and Bourdieu as “habitus” (1977) refer to the argument that histories of bodily (inter)actions inside a field affect the further possibilities, orientations, and tendencies of bodies. When a body takes up a space that it should not, it causes fear or surprise since it is not in line with the historicized, present and future configurations. On the correlation between football and lesbianism, Can stated:

Since gaydar⁷⁵ is based on social norms, it is activated when something deviates from the norm. A woman with a ball running on the football field activates the gaydar. It doesn’t matter whether she is feminine or not outside the field. (See Appendix B, 36)

Miran recounts how their family was always receiving complaints because *they* was playing football when *they* was a little girl and encouraging the other girls to play too: “The girls used to play in defense position, I was the only girl who played forward.”⁷⁶

The body that should not be in a certain space has difficulty in tending toward a certain direction or reaching to grasp necessary objects. “When orientation works, we are occupied. The failure of something to work is a matter of a *failed orientation*: a tool is used by a body for which it was not intended, or a body uses a tool that does not extend its capacity for action” (Ahmed, 2006, p. 51). It often happens that the statistically significant differences in the physical abilities and anatomical features of genders are presented as the natural results of biological differences with a binary approach. Fausto-Sterling (1985) challenges this judgment, showing several examples from various parts of the world about how visual-spatial ability of individuals depends on the scope of their previous environmental experiences regardless of their genders (p. 35). Adapting this hypothesis to gender differences in spatial abilities and particularly to the differences in athletic performance between

⁷⁵ The assumed ability of being able to sense when someone is gay.

⁷⁶ “Genelde kızları defansa koyuyorlardı. Bir tek ileride oynayan “kız” bendim.”

genders, it could be claimed that the frequency and intensity of spatial experiences enhance the capacities of bodies. And since women in many societies are expected to inhabit public space for shorter durations and within narrower distances and/or they choose to do so to protect themselves against external threats, lower athletic performance is quite probable. When I asked my participants if they agreed with the well-accepted statement that women are worse than men at football, almost everyone made a similar reasoning, which correlates the lack of experience in childhood with the present level of ability. Miran said:

There is a difference in talent since women didn't experience it in the street and they weren't able play football because of the pressures. Men dribble past easily; their foot is accustomed to the ball. But it is completely related to whether they were able to play in the street when they were a child or not. (See Appendix B, 37)

Two participants referred to hitting the ball with the head as something that their body has neither a memory of nor tendency to do. Can said:

Tending towards the ball is something masculine. Girls do not acknowledge the ball until it comes to their foot, until it hits their body. Boys run towards the ball, stop it, pass it back; they acknowledge it better. The meeting of our head with the ball is something new for us. (See Appendix B, 38)

Women cannot play football. If a woman is good at this game, she must be a lesbian. This is the concise rendition of assumptions about women and football, which brings us to the judgment that lesbians are good at football. This judgment is provocatively appropriated by many footballer-activists, and moreover, some scholars also argue that there is some truth in that (Caudwell, 2002). Being aware that these assumptions— often mistakenly—confuse masculinity with lesbianism, employ lesbianism as the umbrella term for a variety of deviant sexualities, singularize the diverse versions of masculinities, obscure the infinite possibilities of gender expressions and sexualities which cannot be labeled as either heterosexual woman or

lesbian woman, and so forth. I nevertheless find them instrumental in reflecting on the differences between individuals in terms of how they interact with the space. Leaving aside the futile efforts of seeking the truth in these stereotypes, I argue that our concern should be the effects that these stereotypes create in the lives, aptitudes, and decisions of non-conforming bodies. Most of my participants had childhood memories in which families or schools were afraid when the child had a liking for football. Yağmur said:

You are a girl, you grew up, your boobs are getting bigger, you had your period, so you can't play with boys... We were living in a housing estate and there were tennis lessons for children. My dad told me to quit playing football and start the tennis course because it is more suitable for girls. And my mom told me to play tennis, so she would buy me pretty skirts. I said that I don't have to wear skirts, but this became another problem. (See Appendix B, 39)

Another memory from Yağmur's secondary school years exemplifies how public institutions function as straightening devices:

I went to a secondary school which is affiliated with a religious group because my friends were also there. We were playing basketball all together in the sixth grade. Then the school administration called my family and told them to be careful because their daughter is very intimate with boys which can result in "different things." After this alarming conversation, my parents changed my school, but I don't know what the administration meant: if I would be a whore, a lesbian, or a trans man... (See Appendix B, 40)

Since all my participants had this stereotype in their mind, they sometimes retrospectively interpreted their childhood memories in relation to that. Being a queer child, even if you are not aware of what you are back then, is rife with compelling experiences. Childhood memories of a queer adult are subject to a constant reformation since the once incomprehensible pieces of puzzle take on new meanings as the individual grows up and gains new experiences. The feeling of surprise is commonly shared by many queers when they find the signs of their queerness sheltered in their memories from childhood after they come out. For instance, Can remembered a moment from her adolescence during our interview. She stopped

playing football in adolescence and also started to realize that she is not straight. In that period, she says, whenever a ball came toward her in the schoolyard, she did not want to control it with her feet. She instead kneeled down and picked up the ball with her hands. She intuitively felt that if she revealed that she knew how to interact with the ball with her feet, she would also reveal her lesbianism. She described this feeling as “as if my clothes would suddenly fall off,”⁷⁷ which is an on-point expression given the double-meaning of the word habit as being both predisposition and clothing.⁷⁸ As this example also shows, the stereotypical relationship between football and lesbianism not only created anxiety in the surroundings of the children, but the children themselves also sometimes moved away from the football field for their heterosexual performance to be approved.

In parallel with the claim of what we do makes the space, a further claim can be made as what we do and which spaces we occupy make our bodies. “The directedness of the body toward an action is how the body ‘appears,’” says Ahmed (2006, p. 130). It could also be argued that the directedness of an assumedly female body toward football is how it appears as a lesbian. Whereas playing football during childhood assigns to the body a potential queerness, this link might remain valid also in the adulthood and adjust the distance of the body from the football field. Niki, a lesbian woman who met her current life partner on the football field, was once married to a man and was hesitant to enter the field while she was in the closet:

It all started with a Facebook group in 2010. I was in this group since the beginning, but I didn’t go to the matches for three years. It is really strange; I don’t know if I attributed some meanings. I remember that I felt like I made a big decision when I decided to go there for the first time. I think there is a kind of preparation in this delay, though it sounds like a psychoanalytical explanation... I didn’t have lesbian friends back then so maybe it was challenging for me to enter that space even if it was not a conscious

⁷⁷ “Kıyafetlerim düşecekmiş gibi birden.”

⁷⁸ Ahmed, 2006, p. 196.

judgment. This explanation really fits, considering that I discovered new things about my sexuality in that space. (See Appendix B, 41)

I have stated that compulsory heterosexuality shapes the normative social spaces as well as these (hetero)sexualized spaces that regulate bodies and their relations inside. Through these practices, heterosexuality is neutralized. Ahmed (2006) talks about “contact sexuality” saying that “straight orientations are shaped by contact with others who are constructed as reachable as love objects by the lines of social and familial inheritance” (p. 94). In the same manner, some other spatial formations, though not as many as heterosexualized spaces, might allow other kinds of contact which lead to different orientations. Until recently, LGBTI+ activists were supporting the word “orientation” instead of “preference” for stressing the authenticity of non-heterosexual identities. However, with the effect of queer movement and theoretical works on phenomenology and body, today this is a more flexible domain, where the rights of an individual to “prefer” to be something are also reserved. Being inspired by the conundrum of this debate, I present the question of whether football is an orientation or a preference in order to claim further that football is a sexual orientation since neither orientation refers to an essential tendency nor preference has to be completely conscious.

With a brief look at the demographic features of the queer-identified teams which this study analyzes, one can see that they consist predominantly of lesbian and bisexual women, non-binary individuals and trans men. While clustering these groups in order to arrive at a generalizable argument is by no means necessary or possible, asking their opinions on this situation has provided me a variety of thought-provoking answers: being the most popular sport in the country renders it an effective tool; its existing structure humiliates the bodies who do not or cannot perform hegemonic masculinity, and this provokes a counter-action; these non-

conforming bodies are accustomed to experiencing discrimination in everyday life, and this makes them less hesitant in reclaiming certain spaces from which they were excluded; heterosexual women might be staying away from this field thinking that they do not belong there or avoiding being labeled as lesbian; as it continues to be sexualized in this way, it becomes a space for LGBTI+ socialization, and this process maintains the reproduction of non-conforming bodies on the field.

The understanding of sexuality as a spatial formation leads me to consider the relationship between queer sexualities and the football field as a detour from the straight line of life by which non-conforming bodies orient themselves in spaces different than what is expected, and thus queer happenings can blossom. The tendencies and capacities of bodies have been discussed so far with respect to the interactions between space and bodies. Looking at queer-identified teams provides us with a perspective on the struggles and space-making acts of queers on the football field through their togetherness and mobilities. “To move is to do something” says Cresswell and Merriman (2011, p. 5), and they claim that the space-making processes “are best approached as ‘verbs’ rather than as ‘nouns’” (p. 7). Queers who take the field interrupt the ongoing reproduction and thus have the potential to create new lines, new objects, and new bodies (Ahmed, 2006). What kind of communities, commons, and alliances emerge by such queer arrivals and what is transformed in the field are discussed in the last part of this chapter.

4.3 Queer community and border-making

The layers of the history of sports are full of examples of LGBTI+ sports communities that emerge out of need for discrimination-free spaces. Among the reasons that Drury (2014) presents in her study on why people choose to play in gay-

identified teams are “the social aspect of participation in gay sports communities” and “the non-competitive and inclusive ethos that underpinned many gay football teams” (p. 312). Her participants describe the team as an extended family and mention that their participation helped them in gaining self-confidence in the process of coming out.

Several participants in my study stated that it was important for them to create a football field without heterosexual cis-males. The combination of the male-dominated football fields and the male-dominated political environments are mentioned as the biggest obstacles for many women, non-binary, and trans individuals to be able to breathe easily, even in the domains of activism and recreation. Creating LGBTI+ football spaces often receives criticism for carrying the risk of ghettoization in parallel to the general debate on inclusion in the LGBTI+ movement. However, the expression of the need for these safe spaces was never equated by my participants with giving up the struggle against heteronormativity. Nowadays there is a variety of LGBTI+ sports events⁷⁹ in different scales and with different objectives, which complicates the picture and impels us to perform a thorough analysis of the perils and pitfalls of LGBTI+ sports spaces. The process of space-making and community-building in LGBTI+ sports activism is not homogeneous, and thus the particularities should be approached attentively in terms of the risk of their commercialization or isolation.

The similarity is remarkable between the reasons for participation in these teams that Drury puts forward and the answers of my participants to the question of why they are playing in these teams and what are the positive aspects of being in such a community. I have realized that it is not possible to strictly segregate these

⁷⁹ Among them are Gay Games, The World Outgames, and Eurogames.

answers under headings such as sense of enjoyment, socialization, creating safe-spaces, and so forth, and I argue that the inseparability of these categories is closely related to the overall mismatch between queer ways of life and the normative organization of public and private spaces. Socialization in these teams is often intertwined with consciousness-raising meetings, one of the methods of feminist and queer activism; playing or drinking together as a team can lead to intimacies among players which can smooth the coming-out process; being able to have fun in these teams—and not in another mixed team which does not have a particular emphasis on dissident sexualities—does not refer to politics-free leisure time but rather to feeling at home through the collective creation of a safe space. All these examples of entanglement of politics and leisure in queer ways lead to empowering communities and a strong sense of belonging among the players. Eren said:

It is not happiness but more like a feeling of triumph. The reason it makes me feel good is that I feel more triumphant when I see a capability in others rather than in myself. Since I am aware of how difficult it is for us to be in the field, it might be eroding the pieces of childhood traumas. Maybe the others do not consider these teams as important or effective, but for the people inside, it means a lot. It is liberating. When I come across a teammate in a public space, I feel extremely powerful. (See Appendix B, 42)

Yağmur explains how she made room for football in her life:

I had a few LGBTI+ friends back then. I wasn't able to socialize since I was working very hard. Luckily, I met my best friend at work and then through his boyfriend, I've met someone who plays in such a team. So, I started to play. I selected our match day as my leaving day at work. On match days, I was preparing my bag and sports clothes carefully and I was crossing the bridge earlier not to be stranded in traffic. Then I decided to collect some money to buy cleats. (See Appendix B, 43)

There are many other people who started to socialize in LGBTI+ environments by joining these football teams. Seçkin talks about a closeted lesbian teammate who is now able to freely play football in their team after years of rupture with no need of hiding her identity. Mavi calls attention to the importance of social media channels in

reaching non-heterosexual women who have never come into contact with LGBTI+ organizations. As many participants state, the football fields are safe spaces, or *queertarılmış sahalar*,⁸⁰ as these teams call them. Niki said, “I remember my first match; I was very impressed and excited. I knew only one person, but I felt very good from the first moment.”⁸¹ Işık also explains how this space helped her open up:

Playing football provided me with a great area both in terms of sport and socialization. I was much more introverted before. For a long time, I just sat quietly in the drinking gatherings after matches. By pushing myself not to quit, I kept coming to play football and we slowly started to talk about our common problems. I don’t claim a direct causality between my opening up and football, but I think it facilitated my socialization with other people. At that time, I was living a very isolated life. I had a partner with whom I was together 24/7. Football appeared as an option around the same period when I wanted to get out of that relationship. (See Appendix B, 44)

As discussed by some queer theorists, a more intricate perspective on geography is needed when it comes to queer ways of life. Valentine (2002) states that the border between workplace and home is thicker for queers since it is rarely possible for them to invite colleagues home for dinner or to talk about their love affairs at work with no need to hide or modify details. Considering this difficulty of bringing private matters to the public eye, queers often adjust the private space in a way that can host community meetings in order to share intimacies and to discuss and take action on political issues. I argue that what happens in the entanglement of the ways in which queers relate to the football field, which is ostensibly a public space, is a similar process of blurring the lines between public and private. As already mentioned in the previous chapters (and which will be discussed in the last part of this chapter with respect to the interventions in the game configurations), it is very rare to see an excessively competitive environment in matches between queer-identified teams since they constitute the antagonistic relationship, which is declared to be a *sine qua*

⁸⁰ It is a wordplay which means both “the fields that have been made queer” and “saved fields.”

⁸¹ “İlk maçımı hatırlıyorum; çok etkilenmiştim, çok heyecanlıydım. Takımda sadece bir kişiyi tanıyordum ama ilk andan çok iyi hissettim.”

non in the logic of football if not all sports branches, with heteronormativity and state oppression. How they relate to each other is rather focused on expanding the borders and strengthening the bonds of community. Players often go to a close-by pub to drink and chat after matches; these conversations start with evaluations about the match of that day, but they can last for hours and contain a wide range of topics from the most serious to the lightest. The hardest topics are discussed with *gullüm*;⁸² common problems are shared with a mix of friendship and activism. Niki states that the after-match conversations did not only help her in her coming out process, but they brought her many good friends who are still in her life. Several participants put joy as the most intense feeling that they perceive in the team. Toprak asserts that the one-hour duration of the match is the only time when *they* do not think anything else than to whom *they* should pass the ball:

Even in bed, I can't stop thinking about "should I do it like this," "should I have done this like that," "where to start tomorrow," there is always something negative to think about ... But in that one hour, neither the country nor my tasks come to my mind. I just do sports and become a part of something, and I enjoy it a lot. (See Appendix B, 45)

Yağmur similarly recounts how she gets rid of stress when she is on the field:

I am comfortable on the field, I do not feel shy or nervous. I am more nervous in the bus since I care about personal space a lot and I don't want to be touched. But when it comes to football, being joyful about the same thing, standing shoulder to shoulder, shaking hands, and hugging each other even if you don't know that person... It is a place where I become more sociable than I often am. And it comes naturally, I am not forced to be like this. (See Appendix B, 46)

Drury claims that "in gay football contexts levels of skill are inconsequential to a players' acceptance within the team" (2014, pp. 313-314). Some of my participants

⁸² "Gullüm" can be defined as "fun" in the simplest way but it has a deeper sense, could be claimed as a coping mechanism with the systemic oppression towards LGBTI+ people, particularly towards trans people. It is a word from *Lubunca*, which is the slang language of LGBTI+ people today but actually a mixture of languages of 'outcasts' such as Romani, Kurdish, and Greek people. Trans people were using it for many years and it wasn't known by the general public, but in the recent years it got popularized by the LGBTI+ community (Kontovas, 2012).

also affirmed that a non-exclusionary competitive environment is what they had needed, and they found it through these teams. Eren said:

There is even a self-therapeutic aspect, I would say. You perform something against what you have learned. That you don't have to hit the ball hard is very relieving. That there is not such a competition where some people are excluded. Ours is not a matter of life and death. There is not such a thing that you will stay outside if you are not good enough. I don't experience this feeling. (See Appendix B, 47)

Niki expresses her opinions about the notion of competition in general and how the football field helped her relate to this notion in a different way:

Failure is something that I have been thinking about a lot recently; I am trying to make peace with failure, embrace it, not to give too much importance to it, and so on. The effort of not making a mistake makes me tired; and I feel very bad when I make a mistake. I've come to grips with this for a while now. And I learn a lot in football because this struggle is very visible there. When I see that we can create such an attentive alternative on the football field, I feel like we can do anything we want. What we do is not so easy I guess; realizing this makes me very powerful since it is something incredible that is created by the presence of each one of us. (See Appendix B, 48)

The visible emphasis on togetherness and community in the interviews that I conducted compels me as a researcher to be careful about the pitfalls of creating communities, as well. First of all, it is important to note that all of these communities have been created as channels with a variety of motivations such as doing politics, socialization, and playing football and they differ from the regular team concept even if I group them under the heading of queer-identified teams for the sake of consistency and comprehensibility. What brings these people together is not a preexisting fixed community that lets the familiar definitions of fandom and rivalry impose themselves upon the relations within and among these teams. The players recount that Lezyonerler was born when a group of women wanted to join the football tournament organized in Pride Week 2016; they quickly chose a name and designed jerseys. Atletik Dildoa similarly emerged as a team when a group of friends who were already playing together for a while, heard that there is a new alternative

league starting soon.⁸³ The loose grounds that these teams have, however, might sometimes result in organizational delays or incidents; for example, a few people in the teams might carry too much responsibility or have to make decisions for all since there is not a clarified distribution of roles and most of the players only come to play football in the weekly meetings. I have been told by several participants that this has been experienced in all of the teams at different levels; whereas some participants put it forward as a serious problem, some others emphasized that theirs is not a complaint and they do it voluntarily. It should also be stated that entering certain structures helps these teams get organized. For instance, two of the teams play in mixed leagues, so they are part of a collectively organized league table and they have to be on the field every week in a defined time to compete, which pushes them to find enough players every week and most of the time to organize a training apart from the match day. On the contrary, it is quite difficult for other teams to find enough people and even to agree on a match day that suits everyone, which, in the end, leads to more flexible and less frequent meetings.

Today Atletik Dildoa organizes Queer Olympix, which is an annual sports event that brings different players from within and outside Turkey and includes competitions in many different sports branches as well as workshops, panels, and film screenings. This is a big event that requires a considerable number of volunteers and external financial support to be sustainable; therefore, this team, even though they still do not compete in a mixed league during the year, has to be more consistent and self-disciplined in organizational matters. Getting bigger, receiving funds, and regulating internal relations appear as necessities to continue and strengthen queer activism but at the same time they present a risk to queer imaginings because of the

⁸³ See the third chapter for an account on the censoring efforts within the league.

acts of standardizing the discourse and reifying the team borders. This risk is valid for all the groups who claim to do queer activism since the efforts of space-making, in order to avoid unsafe and heterosexualized spaces, bring along a process of border-making. These queer-identified teams, though all rightfully argue to be against industrial and patriotic forms of football, nevertheless have jerseys, titles, slogans as well as local particularities, which can lead to the “imaginings of sameness” (Valentine, 2003, p. 410) that construct team identities and position them as different from each other within this large community. Defining the borders of a team and thus defining who can enter or not has not been a huge matter of debate so far among these teams however it is quite easy to enjoy the insidious feeling of belonging to a community and it poses a real challenge for all of us. The concept of queer commons is crucial to insert at this point, which can be defined as “a radical rethinking of self and community, and thus a radical rethinking of belonging and the concept of commons itself” (Özbay & Savcı, 2018, p. 520). Holding onto our commons for survival might be a process maintained at the expense of others. The Istanbul neighborhood in which our team was born, Kurtuluş, has been increasing its LGBTI+ population in recent years because its multi-ethnic demographic structure provides a considerably tolerant environment and also because of its geographic proximity to Taksim Square, which has been the center for queer socialization for decades. As several studies assert that Beyoğlu is a district where women are perceived as expanding the limits of their sexuality (Başdaş, 2010) and where trans women feel at home for various reasons (Zengin, 2014), Kurtuluş is also claimed to be a relatively safe zone for LGBTI+ people to live and organize neighborhood-based political action (Cabadağ, 2016). The arrival of a significant number of LGBTI+ individuals in a certain location renders the place a gay ghetto (Valentine,

2003) or a gayborhood (Ghaziani, 2014), and this arrival is often followed by a gentrification process (Knopp, 1992; Namaste, 1996; Califia, 2000). In Kurtuluş, it is easy to see the signs of this process; there are art workshops, hipster pubs, boutique cafes, and increasing rents but still, Cabadağ (2016), argues it is not a typical one since it is neither promoted as part of a “cleaning” project by the municipality nor addressing the out-and-proud gay community, which can be a public strategy in this context.

The neighborhood as common needs to be defended against the heteronormative regulation of public and private spaces but at the same time the defender should be very attentive to the risk of displacing and dispossessing others inhabiting there. What Özbay and Savcı (2018, p. 521) argue as “the unrelenting recognition of whom our struggle for survival might harm” is obviously not an easy task and it necessitates an incessant act of unlearning our tendencies to protect our comfort zones. They claim that the contribution of queer to commons is a set of community practices that does not “take racist, xenophobic, anti-immigrant, and otherwise exclusionary forms” and what commons contribute to queer is the awareness and refusal of “the increased securitization of peoples and borders.”

4.4 Queering the pitch

In the last part of this chapter, I briefly examine what these queer-identified teams change in the very configuration of the game. The line of the life, which targets success and happiness, is straight and the act of straightening this line renders it rough for queers to relate to what is presumed to be desired in the point of arrival. What Halberstam depicted as a queer art, which is “failure,” is often presented by queer scholars to be embraced as a way of doing since it has the potential of opening

up new sites (Halberstam, 2011; Heckert, 2010; Ahmed, 2006). Halberstam (2011) argues that failing under certain conditions as well as losing, forgetting, not knowing can offer much more creative, collective and surprising ways of inhabiting the world. Heckert problematizes the same situation reversely: “What visions, what possibilities, what lives remain hidden when the mind is focused on, driven toward, success?” (2010, p. 42). It is possible to adapt these words to the norms and regulations dominant on the football field. A score-oriented team draws a line with a clarified destination, regardless of the complexity of their tactics, which restricts the range of possible movements as well as the area they occupied on the field. The queer-identified teams analyzed in this study are significant also because of their interventions in the scoring criteria and the value system of the decades-long game.

One of the biggest differences between a normative football field and a queer-identified football environment is that winning and losing are not of vital importance for the latter. For instance, the theme of the football tournament held in Pride Week 2016 was “The Tournament of Those Who Like to Concede Goals”⁸⁴ and almost all the queer-identified teams that existed at that time participated in the tournament. Corroborating what many other participants stated, Deniz talked about her team’s stance in a mixed league:

Scorekeeping is something there to follow the procedure. As a team, we are not interested in this at all; we don’t even know the score most of the time. What matters for us is to play a good game, to have fun, to create a space for a woman to liberate herself, etc. (See Appendix B, 49)

It would be a misrepresentation to claim that these teams never aim to win. Scoring a goal is the fundamental aim of the game and when at least one of the teams on the field has zero interest in scoring, this fundamental aim, together with the game structure itself, falls into danger. If the other team wants to play football in the

⁸⁴ “Gol Yemeyi Sevenler Turnuvası”: <https://www.facebook.com/events/1116503141754733/> (Retrieved Dec 6, 2018).

typical way, problems might arise due to conflicting interests and the shaky game structure. This was most recently experienced in the Queer Olympix. The event committee experimented on the scoring criteria of the football tournament for two years and received both positive and negative criticism. The winner of the football tournament is identified according to five criteria: equal distribution of passes (team play), harsh/dangerous game, discriminatory language, scores (regardless of the number of goal scored, the side which scores most receives two points and the other side receives one point), and the points that teams give to each other. To make a fair assessment, each match is observed by two players from another team who do not play at that moment. As can be seen, these scoring criteria reduce the importance of winning in the typical way almost to the level of zero, which is an intervention that shakes the ground of the field and thus the movements and orientations of the bodies inside.

The negotiations in these experiments are worth discussing because they pave the paths of a new logic and a new value system for the game. As Bourdieu stated (1993, p. 436), "...a new way of practicing an already established sport (e.g. the 'invention' of the crawl by Trudgen in 1893) causes a restructuring of the space of sporting practices and a more or less complete redefinition of the meaning attached to the various practices." Having fun is one of the mostly commonly stated objectives for many teams; however, its meaning might be quite subjective. While a team has fun using the football field for a completely different purpose such as dancing, as witnessed in the Queer Olympix, another team might have more fun when they see that their sportive performance is improving. When the aspect of having fun starts crippling the motivation for playing a game, in which both sides agree on the rules and compete for the same goal, the teams come into conflict.

Disagreements on where to draw the line for a harsh/dangerous game are also experienced time to time within or between teams. Compared to the material standards of the game such as the height of the goal post, the number of players in the game, the duration of the halves, and so forth, these conflicting points remain relatively abstract, which makes it difficult to find an agreement on the meanings of some phrases such as “do not play so harsh,” “we do not like competition,” “it is just to have fun,” etc. Mavi remarked on this issue:

One of the things that make me crazy is that I am labeled as “playing like a man” when I get ambitious in the game. I want to play better, I play right-wing, so I want to cross the ball into the penalty area properly and I get angry when I can’t do it. It is not an anger of losing, it is more about why I couldn’t hit the ball well enough. And I don’t accept to be “like a man” when I get ambitious or angry. A woman can be ambitious too.” (See Appendix B, 50)

Suits asserted:

The decision to draw an arbitrary line with respect to permissible means need not itself be an arbitrary decision. The decision to be arbitrary may have a purpose, and the purpose may be to play a game. And it seems to be the case that the lines drawn in games are not actually arbitrary at all. Not only that the lines are drawn, but also where they are drawn, has important consequences not only for the type, but also for the quality of the game. (1967, p. 154)

This phrase, coming from a philosophy text that was written decades ago, unexpectedly helps us to think about football and sexuality together since the purposes of [the positions of] arbitrary lines are telling in terms of where to locate the bodies and how to limit their movements in order to prevent them transgressing these lines. In parallel with Mavi’s complaints, Halberstam asks the question of “what makes it so difficult not to presume an essential relation between masculinity and men?” while talking about female masculinity (1998, p. 14). As gender is considered as a repetitive performance with no original reference (Butler, 2011), sexualities might be claimed as being regulated and reproduced on the football field through the arbitrary lines which are not necessarily arbitrarily drawn.

All these lively discussions, as well as some common grounds such as having no referee, no team captain, or no coach, are constantly negotiated in order to achieve an accessible and open field. However, one should be aware of and contemplate the tension between the efforts for achieving these targets through promoting fair play and the need for standardization. Miran says that there is no need for a leader since some rules are spontaneously defined through discussions during the game. Eren also specifies that there is no written rule about anything, but he also states that there is a more or less agreed upper limit of harshness among the players which drive them—almost instinctively—to warn the others when necessary.

Connor provocatively describes the act of playing a game as “the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles” (2011, p. 24). The embodied struggle of the queer-identified teams that continues on the football field prompts me to interpret this phrase in relation to the opportunities that football provides for queers. As a relatively simple sport, football makes room for players to improvise within the 90-minute game. Staying inside the field markings, a team can decide on their mobility as they wish. By means of a persistent struggle for a change on the meanings, rules, and values of the game, I argue that non-conforming bodies can expand the area they occupy on the football fields and they can make these fields more participatory for everyone.

Referring again to Bourdieu’s conceptualization of “field,” it can be claimed that the football field is one of the countless other fields in which people are constantly mobile and thus struggle never ends (cited in Koca, 2016, p. 21). The football field cannot be described as oppressive or emancipatory in itself. Considering the aspect of sexualities, instead of perceiving this field as a static environment where pre-discursively fixed identities locate, I prefer to perceive it as a

playing field which offers the potential of exceeding the sexual boundaries. The struggle of LGBTI+ people and women is not primarily to be included in the prevalent football sphere but rather to deconstruct the centralized regulation of the game and to proliferate its potential for queer happenings that are only possible by setting the convenient conditions for the entrance of those who have been marginalized. In this chapter, the straight lines of the football field have been revealed to emphasize the achievability of new paths on the field through the mobilities of queer bodies; in addition to this, the possibility of a non-commercialized as well as non-ghettoized alterity in queer communities, by also including the probable shortcomings, has been interrogated.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

I remember my surprise when I learned about the three-season suspension of the women's football league in Turkey in 2003 due to rumors of lesbian affairs and mismanagement. It was not a moment of confusion for having encountered the supposed impossible; on the contrary, it was the moment when the untold part of Turkey's football history appeared to me for the first time with such clarity. It was also the moment when I realized that it was a story that I wanted to trace in more detail. The revelation of how extensively and intensively the link between sexuality and football has been constructed and thus regulates bodily actions on many different levels, from a child's play in a small neighborhood to the mega events within far-reaching institutions, resonated with my personal life as well, as I explain at the very beginning of this thesis.

A satisfactory debate on the impact that the relationship between spatial and sexual orientations has on what body is allowed and able to do should incorporate the social and political configurations of the relevant surrounding. This being one of my fundamental concerns in framing this study, taking into account the current sociopolitical context in Turkey has necessarily embodied an analysis on the ways in which different groups consider the football field as a site of resistance.

Sports studies in social sciences have always been outnumbered and the moments when the politics entered the field (if it indeed ever left) generally prove the popularity and reproductive power of sports over the masses rather than its resistance potential for those who are left in the margins. The fact that sports, and football in particular, were not considered as matters of social analysis for a very

long time might have an influence on the distant positioning of dissident groups to sports. And this distant positioning might have further prevented scholars from realizing the resistance potentials of the game and caused the existing body of work to remain limited to the approach which considers football a reflection of society and a regulatory instrument of the power of the state.

We currently witness a rapid change in this tangled, negative situation. As more and more dissident groups take to the football field, the need for an analytical approach arises. In this regard, I proposed three non-mutually exclusive ways of relating to the football field as a site of resistance, namely resist *against* football, resist *through* football, and resist *for* football. By “resist *against* football,” I mean that there are groups which oppose the long-established structure of the football field. By “resist *through* football,” I argue that there are teams that use the football field as an instrument for conveying their political claims to the wider public. As for the last category, “resist *for* football,” it refers to the desire and struggle for being able to play football, which might be claimed to be the most fundamental one.

During my fieldwork, I collected narratives about the encounters that the players of the queer-identified teams had on the field with a variety of actors such as other dissident groups, cisgender males both in their own team and in the opponent team, the managers of artificial turfs, the other teams renting the field, and passersby during the games. While these encounters have occasionally created conflicts, at other times they became the means of transforming the football field and the footballing bodies inside. Interestingly, no matter whether they are positive or negative encounters, they often contained practices and performances which contribute to position the queer subject as the guest.

In order to clarify why I argue for a different approach than resistance *against* football and resistance *through* football to analyze the sexuality politics done by the queer-identified teams on the football field, I addressed the insufficiency of the struggles for bringing back the essence and inherent values of the game in facilitating the entrance of gender-non-conforming bodies to the field. The call for the natural (or rather, naturalized) and a politics-free (or rather, depoliticized) form of football, saying that it is just a game, might correspond to the category of resistance *against* football since its stance is against the current situation in which state-politics and market rules are highly involved in the regulation of the football field. In this regard, I claimed that the emergence of the queer-identified teams is not a harmless demand for participation but a political attempt at transforming the rules, values, and limits of the game; therefore, its explanation requires another vocabulary.

An instrumental approach to football, I argue, does not challenge the status quo, which subordinates the gender-non-conforming bodies on and off the field. It neither brings a radical change to the existing order nor does it motivate these bodies to exceed their limits since improving athletic skills becomes of secondary importance and it considers the game a social project. The increase in projects fostering equality *through* football might easily benefit from the regulatory aspect of the game and thus might reproduce the gender roles and inequalities in the society. In order to avoid that, and thus to make the field a safer space for gender-non-conforming bodies, laboring over the basics of the game is an urgent need.

In this study, I emphasized that resistance *for* football is relatively specific to women and queers since many other groups do not encounter such fundamental obstacles when they try to enter the field. And what takes this category beyond the discourse of inclusion is its refusal of the host-guest dynamic and its efforts of

collective space-making and re-figuration of the game in harmony with the sexual and spatial orientations of the individuals. Instead of feeling gratitude for what Ahmed calls “straight hospitality” (2010) these newly emerging queer-identified football teams struggle for self-determination of their place, interactions, and bodies.

What is the significance of football which makes it the sports field that gender-non-conforming bodies have chosen as a site of resistance? The most common answers from my interviewees to this question have been its popularity and accessibility. The intriguing paradox that it contains was another reason suggested in the interviews: as one of the spaces where performances and discourses of hegemonic masculinity, sexism, bi/homo/transphobia are circulated the most, it also provides a relatively comfortable environment for the masculine performance of gender-non-conforming bodies. It should also be noted that, as a part of this paradox, these bodies might occasionally find themselves negotiating with and even adopting the discriminating speech and practices in order to survive in the field. Adding the temporal dimension to the question leads us to several other answers. The interactions between football fans, feminists, and LGBTI+ people in Gezi Uprising have had undeniable impact on the football culture of dissident groups. The effect of the overall increase in the visibility and impact of the LGBTI+ movement in Turkey should also be emphasized; thus, queer communities became one of the key participants of emerging alternative football spaces. Finally, the search for non-conventional methods and tools for doing politics in an environment of increasing oppression, not being peculiar to the queer community, has been offered as another explanation for the recent tendency towards football fields.

Unfolding the historicity of interaction of body and space in the last chapter revealed the efforts of naturalization of the football field as a heteronormative

masculine domain. I argued that denaturalizing the current structure of the field and the game could create new paths on the field and in the journeys of footballing bodies. At this point, recent experimentations on redefining the value system of the game have been displayed, accompanied by a critical look at the probable contradictions between the idea of standardization and the fluidity of queer communities.

There were moments in the process of writing this thesis that I encountered the insidious tendency to think within the binary system both in myself and in some of the works that belong to the queer literature. Comparisons of how women and men use the space, though they certainly refer to a real division that stems from the different types and levels of socializations based on two constructed gender categories, and although they provided me with valuable apprehension, made me realize that I was also tempted to talk about lesbianism as a fixed identity from time to time since I have seen that many texts are similar in conveying the experiences and the arguments they offer. I wonder if the accumulation of similar arguments might be a result of our limited and conventional methodological tools. Howell asserts that “the identification of spaces as either gay or straight is fundamentally mistaken” because any space can carry some quality of heteronormative spatiality but also of queer which let us conclude that all spaces are incoherent and unsettled (2007, p. 310). What I suggest is not to stop talking about socially constructed categories with real effects but to try to find other ways of doing this since otherwise it is very easy to contribute to the reproduction and accumulation of this dualistic knowledge in the social systems.

Two other aspects that I found challenging in my research were the non-linearity of football stories of gender-non-conforming bodies and the in-betweenness

of artificial turfs in terms of the public-private dichotomy. Many of my interviewees mentioned ruptures, conflicts, long pauses, and returns in their football stories. The path of this story is neither linear and smooth, nor is the return means a coming back over the same line; it necessitates a spatial reconfiguration for enabling the gender-non-conforming body to (re-)enter the field. As for the artificial turfs, the relatively isolated structure of these spaces enables both a homosocial bonding between heteromale bodies (Engil, 2019) and a safer zone for queer-identified teams who can at the same time claim visibility. The in-between structure of artificial turfs and their importance for the queer-identified teams deserve to be further studied, in my opinion.

Queering methods and methodology is not always a predesigned act since it is mostly the result of the need for a solution when the typical ways to reach information does not function in a research about the marginalized groups or issues. Browne and Nash (2010, p. 1) rightfully ask “...how can we gather 'data' from those tenuous and fleeting subjects using the standard methods of data collection such as interviews or questionnaires? What meanings can we draw from, and what use can we make of, such data when it is only momentarily fixed and certain?” and this question surely deserves to be given much more thought by all researchers dealing with queer subjects and subjectivities. In my study, a non-binary spatial analysis of gender-non-conforming footballing bodies, the non-linear football paths that these bodies follow, and the artificial turfs as relatively isolated (neither public nor private) spaces have been three main issues on which conventional reasoning had not much to offer.

Repeatedly made claim of women being physically less capable than men entrenches the dominant perceptions, norms, and regulations in football and this in

turn paves the way for performances that affirm this claim. Sex-segregation in sports, instead of maintaining a fair play environment as alleged by many, functions to normalize the gender binary as well as to “testify” and maintain the strength difference between the categories of women and men. Koca (2016) challenges the rhetoric of the “natural sporting body” with the argument that the measurement and classification of body differences are already constructed with respect to the binary of genders, so one can no longer speak of essential characteristics in the sports field; she also narrates that there are discussions on the possibility of competing based on bodies instead of genders (see Johnson’s and Fouche’s works, as cited in Koca, 2016). All these interventions in the conventional understanding of sport as a fair competition area for natural bodies enable us not only to problematize the concept of fair but also to scrutinize the bodily possibilities: what can a body do, where can a body expand, how can bodies exceed certain [spatial, sexual, financial...] borders, and so forth. As Ahmed states, “we do not know, as yet, what shape such a world might take, or what mixtures might be possible, when we no longer reproduce the lines we follow” (2006, p. 156) and this requires further research with more intricate conceptualizations of geography and mobility. At this point, I claim that the need is evident for queering attempts at methodology, in other words, finding creative, non-normative and ethical ways to engage with one’s field, to collect data, to relate with the relevant theoretical settings, and to produce knowledge; and doing all these with no fear of slippery slopes since they would carry us to unvisited terrains.

Concluding remarks

I hope that this thesis can trigger further alternative understandings of the football field with its analysis on the relationship between sexualities and spatial orientations.

I conceive of this study as an attempt at disrupting the assumptions of football as a straightening tool, of the football field as a sphere of hegemonic masculinity and compulsory heterosexuality, of masculinity as indissociable from manhood, of love for football as a way of normalizing the militarist, patriotic, discriminating discourses. Since it problematizes the taken-for-granted labeling of the display of ambition on the field as being manly, I hope it can contribute to a way of thinking beyond the dualistic and stable categories of woman and man as well as feminine and masculine so that the possibilities of bodily actions can multiply. The consideration of the football field as a site of resistance and of footballing bodies as resisting bodies can hopefully evoke unconventional ways for bodies to orient themselves on the field through which this space can become a site of queer happenings. Another contribution worth mentioning is, in my opinion, the shift it suggests about the antagonistic relation on the football field. Antagonism is considered as an indispensable element of sports, which is mostly created through positioning two teams as opposite to each other, and it is one of the main reasons that are asserted to justify the sex-segregation of sports spaces. This study instead suggests a collaboration between the teams on the field against structures of the field which render certain bodies as non-conforming. The queer-identified teams aim not only to change football but also to manifest a certain way of resistance which sometimes criticizes and thus carries transformative potential for other dissident groups acting on the field. Giving some space to encounters between these groups, I hope this thesis can function as a channel for the broader community to be informed about these contacts. As a new spatial orientation for dissident sexualities, the football fields can contain, enable, reproduce, and interact with queer ways of life. Mavi said:

When I post something on our team page, I write something like “LGBTI+ teams of Turkey” to be practical. I think that it is a political sphere that we

want to be visible but deep down I don't feel like that. I would like that all of us share together, with no identity, maybe queer. I dream of a society in which we don't care what we are, a woman or a man, who has sex with whom, if someone is Kurdish or Turkish or Alawi; a society in which talking about these is unimportant, nobody has to talk about these... I can't make it a whole sentence, but we, the ones who do LGBTI+ politics, can be the pioneers. We act to acquire visibility but together with the other identities; therefore, I think that we can be the pioneers in the sports field. (See Appendix B, 51)

I think that this statement by Mavi is a good example of the proposition that “queer” is not limited to certain types of sexuality; I believe that this way of thinking can bring us to a vital discussion about queer commons and inclusion. Due to space and time limitations, I had to introduce very briefly the tension between queer imaginings and border-making practices. While there is the self-assured claim of being open to all genders and all bodies, unfortunately there are limits to this theoretical wish within the material fields that we are forming. Today none of the teams make a deliberate effort to make the field accessible to people with disabilities, for instance. I consider it as crucial to further reflect upon the processes of bonding, belonging, and border-making in queer communities, on who we are welcoming and who we leave aside. Justifying the entrenchment of the borders by the need for feeling safe might readily transform this space into one among the others that excludes the “inappropriate” and “dangerous.” I find it quite urgent to ruminate on this paradox in order to be able to cultivate ethical ways of sharing the commons and of living together.

APPENDIX A

SEMI-STRUCTURED IN-DEPTH INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

Part 1: Football Today

1. How and when did you start (or restart) playing football in present day?
2. How did you find this team?
3. Why do you play football?
4. How often, where, which time of the day do you play football?
5. How do you arrive at the field? By walking, public transportation, private car, etc.?
6. Do you go there with your football jerseys and shoes on? What do you experience during the time of journey?
7. Are you also a football spectator?
8. Do you like other kinds of sports as well?
9. In which position do you play on the football field? How do you evaluate your performance?
10. What kind of image comes to your mind when you think about yourself on the field?
11. Which emotions do you feel most while you are playing football?
12. How do you describe these feelings and concepts with respect to the football field?

Joy

Anger

Competition

Harsh game

13. Do you remember any moment that affected you in positive or negative ways?
14. How do you think a footballer body should be?
15. What comes to your mind when you think about a woman playing football?
16. What is the third word for you when you hear football and masculinity?
17. Do you think that men are better at football?
18. Do you have cisgender men in your team? Do their presence have any impact on the game?
19. Would you like to play in a mixed team or a women- and trans-only team?
20. What do you think of playing in a mixed league?
21. Can you give information about your team? When did you start? What have you done so far?
22. Why do you play in such a team and why do you think they are important?
23. Have you experienced any homo/bi/transphobic or sexist reaction on the field?
24. Do you have a coach and a team captain?
25. How do you agree on the rules? How do you control them?
26. How do you make decisions in the team? Do you have fixed positions?
27. Do you think that there is a discriminating attitude in the team towards a certain group?

Part 2: Childhood

1. Can you talk a little about the family environment in your childhood?
2. Did you play football when you were a child?
3. In what kind of space were you playing football? Can you describe there a bit?
4. Is there someone specific who made you like football?
5. How were the reactions from your family or surroundings?

6. Do you remember the reactions from other children; how well were you accepted?
7. Did you have to stop at some point? How/Why?

Part 3: Identity Today

1. Can you introduce yourself?
2. Is there a period in your life that you define as a coming out process? When and how, could you talk a bit?
3. How do you identify yourself? Was there a period in your life that you identified yourself in a different way?
4. Are you part of a political group? Or have you ever been?
5. What is your opinion about the recent increase in the interest of dissident groups in football?

Do you have any feedback about our interview?

Thank you!

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUOTATIONS IN THE ORIGINAL LANGUAGE

1. Zaten o korkuyu, beden eğitimi derslerinin o mutsuzluğunu o kadar hissediyorsun ki beden eğitimi dersi hiç heyecanlandığım bir ders değildi mesela. Soyunuyorduk... Mesela bir yıl beden eğitimi dersi sabah ilk dersti. Çok sevinmiştim. Çünkü en azından giyinip gidebilirdim, evet bir kere kullanıyordum. Böyle saçmasapan şeyler yapıyorduk ya. Militer militer şeyler, bir ders en azından. Sonraki ders de serbest spor, ya da bazen antrenman. Sağdan say falan, saçmasapan şeyler.
2. Üniversiteye ilk geldiğimde maçlara gitmeye çalışıyordum. Galatasaray taraftarıydım. Sonra Türk futbolunun geldiği durum zaten, Türk futbolu izlememeye başladım. Zaten izleyebilmen için Lig TV alman falan, ya da gerçekten çok saçmasapan yerlere gitmen gerekiyor izleyebilmen için. Küfürdü bilmem ne, çok erk yerlerde maç izlemektense izlememeye karar verdim. Gerçekten niye televizyona küfür edersin, bunu da algılayamıyorum. Bir ara ben de yapıyordum, sanki orada daha çok kabul olacakmışım gibi ‘aaaa’ yaptığımda. Tamam kadın ama bak bizden gibi bir şeydeydim. Lise son ve üniversitenin başı. Sonra Türk futbolu zaten şey oldu. Ondan sonra takım tutmayı bıraktım, şike olaylarından sonra ve Galatasaray’ın tutumundan sonra. Dedim ki düzgün bir şey yok, her şey çok saçma. Politik bir açıdan bıraktım aslında. Dedim ki desteklemeyeceğim. İzlemem sizi bir şey kazandırmayacak bana.
3. Çünkü birkaç gün önce minibüs kazası ve orada bir tane kadın öldü Dicle. Bizim takımdaki insanlarla konuşurken pankart ne açacağız diye, bunda öfkeleniyorsun mesela, çünkü şeyi biliyorsun, büyük kent takımı değil bunlar, kadın takımı. Erkek takımı olsaydı muhtemelen özel uçakla, uçakla, büyük otobüslerle gidiyor

olacaklardı. Ve resmen aslında o kadınları öldüren şeyin temeli seksizm. Çünkü kadın ve erkeğin eş görülmemesi.

4. Artık bana kalırsa bir pankartın arkasına 50 kişi toplanıp basın açıklaması yapmak, klasik anlamda bildiğimiz eylemlilik en azından şu an Türkiye için sıkıntı yani. Ankara'da 8 Mart'ta müdahale oldu mesela. Bizim Özgür Lig açılışlarını her zaman polis takip eder, sivil polisler. Çünkü biz şey yapıyoruz, Ahmed Arif Parkı var Dikmen'de, sahaya 15-20 dakika mesafe, o parkta toplanıyoruz, her takım kendi pankartlarını yazıyor, sonra yürüyüşe geçiyoruz. Sloganlar atıyoruz, spora dair ya da daha politik sloganlar falan. Her açılışta 3-5 tane sivil polis oluyor, hatta bu açılışta fotoğraf çekiyorlardı. Bir yerden çok ciddiye almıyorlar, bir yerden de bir şey var. Doğrudan müdahale edemiyorlar, ne yapıyorsun halı sahada maç yapıyorsun, çok ciddiye alsak mı kafaları karışıyor bence. 3-5 yıldır, aslında Gezi'den sonraki süreç bize bulunduğumuz her alanı politikleştirmeyi öğretti. Karşı Lig de Gezi'den sonra kuruldu mesela. Çünkü bize orayı vermiyor, Taksim Meydanı'nı vermiyor, ya da Kızılay Meydanı'nı vermiyor, tamam biz o zaman mahallelerde, bu bir futbol sahası olur bu bir park olur, herhangi bir kamusal alan hiç fark etmez, illa bir meydan olmasına gerek yok, her alanda politikleşmeyi bize devletimiz sağ olsun öğretti.
5. Farkındalığın da aktivizmin de yaşı küçüldü. Arkadaşımızın kızı 12 yaşında ve homofobik arkadaşlarım var falan diyor. Bilginin yaygınlaşmasıyla da ilgili. Şimdiki nesle benim 27 yaşında lezbiyen olduğumu fark etmem çok komik gelebilir. Çok iyi bir şey tabii ki, çok mutlu oluyorum 16-17-18-19 yaşında gençleri pride'da görmek, ne olduklarına dair bir claimlerinin olması. Ben hiç öyle bir gençlik yaşamadım. Bir yandan da kadın futbolu da yükseliyor. Ki şu an benim yeğenim ortaokulda, isterse futbol oynayabilir, futbol takımı var okulunda, biraz daha açıldı o alan, kız çocuklarının erişimine.

6. Uzun vadede çok güzel olabilir ama bu lig öyle değilmiş. Dirsek teması kurmak için çok güzel bence. Ama hatırladığım şey saçmalıklardı. Biz mantıklı bir şekilde yaklaşmaya çalışıyordum ama bir süre sonra sıkılmıştım. Dilimizin çok farklı olduğunu ve anlaşılamayacağımızı hissetmiştim. O ligin overrated, kötü bir yer olduğundan emin olmuşum.
7. Ligde oynamak güzel, kalabalık olmak güzel. Her kesimden, farklı görüşlerden insanın olması çok güzel. Çünkü insanların birbirine karşı tahammül seviyesini yükseltiyor aynı takımda, aynı ligde oynuyor olmak. Ama Karşı Lig’de de daha oturmamış şeyler var. Yine erkek futbol zihniyeti çok da silinmiş değil. Hatta bizim 4 kadın çıktığımız oyunda karşı takımda 4 erkek vardı ve biz 4 kadınla önde olunca bu sefer erkekleri kadınlarına pas vermeden oynamaya başladılar, galibiyet almak adına. Keyif almadığımız bir maç oldu o yüzden.
8. Özgür Lig de ayrıca mücadele alanı gibi ama en azından bir şekilde muhatap bulabildiğin, derdini anlatabildiğin. Biz buraya bir gül bahçesi yaptık gibi değil. Zaten çok güzel bir manzara beklemiyordum. Zaten alanın kendisi futbol deyince tamam. Ama o yüzden böyle bir takım var, o yüzden biz o ligdeyiz. Tamamen kötülemiş olmayayım, kaldırıp ligi çöpe atmak gibi değil. Bence oradaki karşılaşma baya güzel şeyler de yaptı. Mesela Homofobi Karşıtı Buluşma’ya taraftar grupları geldi, şimdi bir etkinlik olacağı zaman kontakt halinde oluyoruz. O anlamda belki ben o gruplarla hiçbir zaman karşılaşmayacaktım. Ama futbol bunu da sağladı, onlarla tartışmamı da sağladı. Bir tarafta LGBTI’ler bir tarafta taraftar grupları, nerede buluşacaklardı bunlar?
9. Motivasyonum tam olarak futbol oynayabilmek, hayatımın böyle bir noktasında oynamaya başlamış biri olarak, oynamak isteyen bir kadın olarak. Orada oyun oynamak istiyorum sadece. Ve dolayısıyla bu benzer hislerde ve benzer

motivasyonlarda olan arkadaşlarla bir araya gelmek benim istediğim şey. Ligdeki ortamı dönüştürmek gibi bir enerjim de yok, enerjimi ona vermek... Futbol oynamak, daha iyi oynamak istiyorum, gelişmesini istiyorum ama bu şekilde.

10. Bazen iyi bile oluyor, konforlu. Bazen çeşitliliği, rengi azaltabiliyor. Şovlara dönebiliyor. Yazılı bir kural yok da orada hissettiğim bir kural var. Ve o kurala uyum sağlıyorsun. Nasıl öğrendiğimi bilmiyorum. Hetero erkeklere çok açık olmakla birlikte, belli bir sayıdan sonrasını kaldırmayacağını da biliyorum takımın. 4 rakamı bile. Bundan sonra dzzzt dzzzt diye takımın uyarı verdiğini hissediyorum. Hatta maç esnasında bile ufak kulisler yaptığımı hatırlıyorum.
11. Aslında beni de besliyor, benimle beraber oynayan hetero adamı da besliyor çünkü lezbiyen bir kadınla aynı takımı paylaşma deneyimini yaşıyor ve belki de senin ona saatlerce anlatamayacağın şeyi seninle sahaya çıkarak onu deneyimliyor. Bizim oynayan arkadaşlar takıma geldikleri hali daha farklıydı, şu an ama çok daha başka bir yerde, ben onu da seviyorum, o süreci görmeyi. Çünkü o da hep erkeklerle oynaya oynaya erkekliğini sağlamlaştırmış. Ama kadınlarla oynamaya başladıktan sonra başka bir oyun çıkmış.
12. Burada beni çok geriyor, konuşuyoruz zaten. Bazı şeylerin ekstra pohpohlanması bana o yetersizliğin normunu çağrıştırdığı için beni geriyor, sahte geliyor. Hele bu pohpoh hali genelde de oğlanlardan geliyor, o da tesadüf değil. Okey, gey oğlanlar da geliyorlar, hepsi çok tatlı, dikkatli. Henüz tatsız bir an yaşamadım. Ama ne zaman o topu böyle bedeninin bir uzvu kadar rahat kullanan cis bir herif gelse sahaya, benim tüylerim diken diken oluyor. O performans farkı, ne kadar sözde gözetmeler de, gözetilen olmak bana iyi hissettirmiyor. Bütün sahayı geçip kale önünde bir kadın aramak, pas verip gol attırmak için garanti pozisyonunda... O acıklı bir sahne, sinirimi bozan bir sahne ve üstü kapalı bir cinsiyetçilik o.

13. Mesela bizim kendi aramızdaki maçlarda 2-3 erkek arkadaşımız dahil oluyor. Orada mesela beni geçemiyor olmasına kafayı takıp hem sözel hem de o şeyi de görüyorsun. Pas atmak yerine çalım atmaya çalışıyor. Yenilmiş, maçın ardından birtakım laflar dönüyor, kadın olduğun için ben sana bilerek yenildim hesabı, halbuki alakası yok.
14. Muhakkak fark yaratıyordur. Kas gücü bilmem ne muhabbetine girmek istemiyorum çünkü demin onu anlatıyordum, Birkaç ay önce, ilk devrede bir takımla oynadık ve hepsi orta yaşlı insanlardı bu takımı kuranlar. Niyeyse bizimle oynarken 20-25 yaş arası genç erkekleri önümüze sürdüler ve hepsi erkek, hiç kadın oynatmadılar. İlk önce bizi ciddiye almadılar ve biz onları yenmeye başlayınca hırslandılar ve bir arkadaşın kaburgaları ezildi, benim kulağıma top geliyor falan. O maçı berabere bitirdik, aslında yenmiş kadar olduk.
15. Çünkü mahallede bir futbol okulu vardı ve erkekler için. Ben o dönem başlardım ama karşıdaydı. Zaten o tutkunu bile zar zor anlatıyorsun. Hele de bir futbol takımı, ne alakası var, zaten bir şey getirmeyecek ki!
16. Bir kere sonlara doğru erkek katılımı çok azalmıştı, 2-3 maç üst üste sahada kendini biyolojik erkek olarak tanımlayan tek kişi bendim sanırım. Ama orada yine o voleybol takımında yaşadığım huzursuzluk duygusunu bana hatırlattı o haftalar. Tek erkek olma ve o erkekliğin aşırı yoğun kaldığı an nasıl birbiriyle örtüşür, bilmiyorum. Çok da yoğunlaşmadım o duyguma oradan soğumamak için ama şu an sorduğunda da hemen aklıma geldi mesela o. Kız arkadaşlarımla olduğum alanda da huzursuzdum ya, orası benim dışlandığım için orada olduğum bir yerdi. Ben niye o futbol sahasında kendimi tek erkek olarak huzursuz hissetmiş olabilirim deyince iki ihtimal düşünüyorum. Bir, oradaki bütünlüğü bozduğum. İki, oradaki tek erkek olmam, kadınlarla voleybol oynadığım beden eğitimi derslerini hatırlatmış olabilir.

17. Bakış hissettiğim oldu ama o kadar. Bir de ben kendimi çok iyi hissediyorum, öyle bir tarafı var. Hoşuma gidiyor kramponla yürümek ve insanların görmesi. Ben öyle bir gurur yaşıyorum. Bakın, futbol oynamayı biliyoruz biz. Kendimin de bir kadın olarak futbol oynamaya gidiyor olmam benim için, onun da çok etkisi olduğunu düşünüyorum. O heyecan hiç gitmiyor, gitmedi.
18. Ankara’da merkezi bir caddede oturuyorum 7 yıldır ve dikkat çekiyor, hoşuma gidiyor. Bizim caddenin başında bir tane amca var, tartısı var ve peçete falan satıyor. Adamla her zaman kolay gelsin abi diye diyalogumuz var. Bir gün formayla geçtiğimi görünce “ya ben senin spora gittiğini anlıyordum da futbol olduğunu düşünmemiştim,” öyle bir diyalogum olmuştu. Onu seviyorum, o çarpsın istiyorum biraz da. Çünkü sahada evet bir şey yapıyoruz ama o sahada ya, belki etrafından geçen biri görür ama bir caddede... Çünkü erkeklerde şey normaldir, oradan şortlarıyla formalarıyla çıkarlar, o muhtemelen kimsenin dikkatini çekmiyor ama bir kadın öyle yürüdüğü zaman enteresan geliyor olabilir.
19. Kafa karışıklığı. Yandaki sahayı kimse durup izlemiyor, bizi izliyorlar. Çünkü çoğumuz, hele spor kıyafetleriyle, belli değiliz. Kız mı erkek mi bocalaması yaşatabiliriz, nasıl oynuyoruz, uzun uzun performansımıza da başka bir gözle bakıyorlar muhtemelen, illa feminist bir şey olmak zorunda değil o görünürlük ama neticede ‘kızlar da oynuyor lan’... Başka karma takımlardan farkı, ibnelik akıyor ya... Mini şortlarıyla zırlı oğlanlar; kısa saçlı, maskülen kızlar...
20. Bizim maçları taksiciler deli gibi izliyor, orada bir taksi durağı var, toplanıp izliyorlar. Bazen de gençler, çocuk takımları geliyor, onlar izliyor. Seyircili oluyor maçlarımız. Ama hiç muhabbet olmadı. Bu arada biz pankart açıp koyuyoruz o şeylere ama şu ana kadar bir şey yaşamadık. Bir kez yaşlı bir kadın vardı, o izliyor,

“ya kadınla erkeğin gücü bir mi, ne biçim şey” gibi bir şeyler söylemeye başladı. Biz de bak işte oynanıyor, gel sen de oyna dedik. Bağırды bağırды gitti sonra.

21. Caddebostan’da bir sahada oynadık bir gün. Soyunma odasına girmek için anahtar istediğim görevli bir bey bana alaycı bir şekilde bakıp ‘sen nerden futbola bulaştın, hayırdır’ demişti, Orada çalışan birinin böyle bir yorum yapması bana daha enteresan gelmişti. Bu adamın sanırım daha önce hiç karşısına çıkmamış, alışık olduğu bir durum değil gibiydi.
22. Sahaya her gittiğimizde en az 3 takımla karşılaşıyoruz. Bir kere kadınlara laf atıldı galiba. İşletmeye haber verildi, onlar özür diledi, takımı uyardı, tekrar eden bir şey olmadı. Zaten öyle olsa saha değişirdi. Aksine orada cesaretlendirildiğimizi de hissettim. Sanki mekânı aramışlar da “bu takıma çok iyi davranacaksınız” demişler gibi. Belki bizim samimiyetimizi sevmişlerdir, belki tatlı olan bizizdir.
23. O sahanın işletmecileri baya muhafazakâr, biz de rahat davrandık hep, olduğumuz gibi. Hiçbir zaman onlardan ters bir şey gelmedi, biraz müşteri şeyinde yaklaştıkları için. Hatta tuvalette çöp kovası yoktu, çöp kovası koydurduk, kadınlar için ayrı şeyler yaptılar, öyle taleplerimize de karşılık verdi saha. Ama bence zaten o sahaya bizim dışımızda düzenli gelen çok kişi de yok, müşteriyi kaybetmek istemiyorlar.
24. Toprak bir saha vardı. Erkek çocuklar gidip oynardı ama biz kız çocukları olarak oraya ben 1 kere gitmiştim, gittiğimde de annem takip etmiş, ne yapıyor bu kız, nereye gidiyor, futbol mu oynuyor yine falan gibi. Benim için oraya gitmek düşüncesi yoktu mesela, hiçbir zaman olmamıştı. Ama okulun bahçesi, apartmanın bahçesi, belirli bir alan. Düşünüyorum, açık bir alanda saat 9-10 arası maç yapmakla halı sahada 9-10 arası maç yapmak farklı...
25. İlk kez sportif lezbon’la oynamaya başladım. Çocukluğumda bir kez mahallede maç yapmışımdır ama onun dışında yok. Orta okuldaydık. Sürekli kızlı erkekli

oynuyorduk ama sonra yavaş yavaş kızlar çekilmeye başladı alandan. Çiftçilik yapmayan tek aile, babam öğretmen, bizden yaşı küçük kızlar devam ediyor mahallede oynamaya, biz daha çekilmedik o alandan. Sonra çocuklar birbiriyle güreşir ya, orada benim tırnak içinde kız çocuğu olduğum diğer erkekler tarafından bana söylendi. Sen yapamazsın çünkü sen busun. O mesela ‘hım’ deyip geri çekilmeme neden oldu.

26. Dışarı çıkıp koşabildiğim zamanlar, 4-5 yaşları ilk okuldan önce, öyle başlayan, sonra ilk okul 4’e kadar sorunsuz devam eden ama sonra hafif göğüslerin çıkmasıyla, adetlerin olmasıyla birlikte “hayır oynamayacaksın” a dönen bir hikayeydi.
27. Futbolda da ilk oynadığımda ilkokulda öyle erkekliğin yoğun hissedildiği bir dönem olmuyor. Ama ortaokulda öyle değildi. Ortaokulda ben artık kesinlikle futbol oynayamayacağım bir noktadaydım. Bırak futbol oynamayı, beden eğitimi dersinde benim resmen erkekler odasında soyunmamam gerektiği hissettiriliyordu bana. Ne yapmamı bekliyorlardı, bilmiyorum. Trans kimliğim yok beyan ettiğim, kendimi böyle de tanımlamıyorum, eşcinsel erkek olarak tanımlıyorum şu anda. Ne kadar feminenim bilmiyorum ama sanki oraya girmemi bile yadırgıyorlardı.
28. Sokakta ana cadde değil de ara sokakta bir evimiz vardı, araba park etmemiş bir yer bulup iki araba arası kale oluyordu. Şimdi düşününce aklıma geliyor; oyunun adı da 9 aylıktı. Bak ya! Araba geldiği zaman dururduk, geçtikten sonra devam ederdik. Topu görmeyinceye kadar oynardık.
29. Sokağa çıktığım ilk yıllar bile, 6 yaşlarımda, kaleye sokup üstüme abanıyorlardı. Yıllarca oynadım ama. Oğlanlar otoparkta kale yapmışlar, futbol oynuyorlar. Kızlar da ip atlıyor. Benim gözüm hep futbolda, çağırırsınlar diye. Biri çıkınca kaleye sokuyorlardı, oyuna sokmuyorlardı. Asıl yeni eve taşındık, orada takım kaptanı gibiydim. Bizim blok D16 idi, D15 ile maçlar yapardık. Ben koltuğumun altında top,

hatırlıyorum, “oğlum, kızmış o.” Parkta amıma dokunduklarını hatırlıyorum, taciz tabii bu arada. Mahallenin daha büyük çocukları. Çok iyi oynuyordum, inanamıyorlardı. Ben her yaz saçımı kestiriyorum, dört gözle bekliyorum, bayılıyorum. Oğlum diyorlar karıştırıp, al oğlum falan, bakkal, o yüzden, bir de çok iyi futbol oynuyorum diye... Sonra bıraktım, 11 yaşları falan...

30. Bu aslında seçimini de yaptığım bir şey değildi. Neden futbol oynadım? Çünkü oydu normal olan. Bir erkek çocuk için nasılsa benim için de öyleydi. Dur ben şurda bir futbol oynayayım da politik bir eylem yapayım değil. Çok içimden gelerek, hatta farkına bile varmayarak. Futbol oynayamıyor muyuz ki? Ama insanlar şaşırma başladıktan ben yaptığım şeyin acayip bir şey olduğunu... Bazen annem gerçekten izin vermiyor, mahalle maçı var, önemli maç. Kaç kere kapımıza geliyorlardı, ya abla maç var, kızları gönder... Orada bir şeyi kanıtlamıştık, evet biz bu oyunu biliyoruz. Bize lütfetmiyorlardı yani, biz iyiydik, fena değildik. Çoğu erkekten iyi oynuyorduk.
31. Şu an Lezbon’da 3 tane erkek oynuyor, onun dışında erkek oyuncumuz yok, onun dışındaki kadınları da şöyle bulduk, ya da onlar bizi buldu aslında, sosyal medyayı birazcık aktif kullanmaya başlayınca şey oldu. Hatta en önemli gördüğüm şeylerden biri, daha önce hiç LGBT dernekleriyle ya da örgütleriyle temas etmemiş eşcinsel biseksüel kadınlar futbol üzerinden bu politikaya dahil oldular.
32. Çıkış noktasını asla bilmiyorum, kim çıkarmış. O kadar güzel bir şey yapmış ki. Sonuç olarak orada bir sürü görünmez olan kimlik varken insanlar açılmanın rahatlığını yaşıyorlar. Bu çok değerli bir şey. Peşinden de, orada kimliğiyle var olurken zarar görmüyorsun, tersine destekleniyor olmayı görmek, diğer insanlara rahatlıkla önerebiliyorsun, tavsiye ediyorsun, orada bulunmalarını sağlıyorsun, çoğaldıkça daha keyifli oluyor. Keşke her ilde olsa.

33. Bunu takım içerisinde de biz çok konuşuyoruz. Biz futbol takımı mıyız, LGBTI politikası yapan bir topluluk muyuz? Bence biz ikisiyiz de. Hem futbol oynuyoruz, hem de çok güzel oynuyoruz. Ama onun dışında politika da yapıyoruz. Takımın içerisinde muhtemelen çok iyi futbol oynayan kadınların olduğunu göstermek o toplumsal cinsiyet algısını yıkan bir şey. Diğer taraftan gündemli sürekli o sahaya çıkıyoruz. Bir derdimiz var. Dostluk maçları mesela, atıyorum fahişelerle dostluk maçı yapıyorsun. Bunların hepsi bir yandan da politika.
34. O dönemki aklımla lise tercihlerimi yaparken bazı tehlikeli tipler belirlemiştim, benimle inanılmaz dalga geçen ve beni çok mutsuz eden sınıf arkadaşlarım ve okuldaki insanlar, onların gittiği liselere gitmemiştim. Ve iyi okullardı. Mesela o okulu niye yazmak istemiyorsun, saçmasapan bahaneler buldum sürekli. O kadar kötüydü ki benim için, onlarla aynı okulda bile olmak istemedim.
35. Cinsiyetlere yüklenen şeyler de öyle ya, aslında bir oyun var futbol ama üstüne bir sürü şey inşa edildi, bize yüklenen şeylerde de olduğu gibi. Bizim de futbolda yaptığımız şey bir bozum.
36. Çünkü radar başlı başına toplumsal norm üzerine kurulu ya, radar ne zaman ötüyor, normdan sapınca, sahada topla koşan bir kadın saptırıyor hızla normdan. Radar öttürüyor. Dışarıda çok feminen, asla radar öttürmeyecek bir kadın da olabilir o.
37. Kadınların sokakta bunu çok deneyimleyememiş olması, baskılardan dolayı top oynayamamış olması, klasik farklardan dolayı yetenek farkı oluyor. Bazı çalımları daha rahat atabilme, topun ayağa daha alışık olma hali kesinlikle var. Ama tamamen sokakta oynayabilme ve oynayamama şeyi üzerinden küçükken.
38. Topa hamle yapmak hep eril şeyler. Top ayağına çarpana kadar topu acknowledge etmemek, çocuklar ediyor, koşar, keser, yakınına geliyorsa geri pas atar. Kıza çarparsa falan... Topun kafamızla buluşması da yeni bir şey.

39. Kız çocuksun, artık büyüdün, göğüslerin çıkıyo, adet oldun, erkeklerle oynayamazsın. Hatta o dönemlerde biz bi sitede oturuyorduk. Çocuklara tenis kursu açmışlardı. Babam da şey demişti, artık futbolu bırak, daha kadınsı şeyler oynaman gerekiyor, tenis kursuna yazıl. Annem de “sen tenis oyna, ben de sana güzel etekler alayım.” Oradan şeye giriyorsun tamamen. Etekle oynamak zorunda değilim, o zaten en büyük problemlerimizdendi.
40. Ortaokuldayken ben Fethullarcıların okuluna gitmiştim arkadaşlarım orada diye. 6. sınıf, basketbol oynuyoruz. Daha sonra benim ailemi okula çağırmışlar, benim haberim yok, sizin kızınız erkeklerle çok haşırneşir, ileride farklı şeyler olabilir... Sonra benim annemler o dönem sonunda beni o okuldan aldılar. Muhtemelen orospu olacak muhabbetine girdiler. Ama lezbiyen de olabilir, trans olacak şeyine de girmiş olabilirler.
41. Aslında Kadıköy’de 2010 yılında sanıyorum başladı, bir fb grubu vardı, başından beri içindeydim, futbol oynamak istiyordum ama maçlara gitmedim. Biraz garip bir şey var aslında kişisel olarak. 3 sene kadar gitmedim. Bilmiyorum, bir anlamlar mı yükledim, bana da çok tuhaf geliyor. Zaten gitmeye karar verdiğimde büyük bir karar vermişim gibi hissettiğimi hatırlıyorum. Benim bu kadar ertelememle ilgili bir hazırlanma, bir şey olduğunu düşünüyorum. Bu da çok psikanalitik bir şey gibi oluyor ama bence var ihtimal. O zamana kadar lezbiyen arkadaşlarım da yoktu çevremde, belki bunun bir anlamda beni zorlayan bir yere de gittiğini düşünüyorum, çok bilinç düzeyinde olmayan tabii. Sonrasında kendime dair keşifler yaptığım için orada, çok oturuyor bu.
42. Mutluluk değil de mutluluğa eşlik eden bir şey, bir zafer duygusu gibi galiba. Ve daha iyi hissettirme sebebi, bunu sadece kendimde değil başkalarında gördüğümde daha yoğun yaşıyor olmam. Bulduğumuz pozisyonun içinde yer alabilmenin ne

kadar zor olduğunu bildiğim için belki çocukluk travmalarından gelen şeyi bile erozyona uğrattıyor olabilir. Dışarıdan bakan insanlar için çok şey ifade etmiyor olabilir ama o alanı deneyimlemiş insanlar için başka bir şey ifade ediyor. Ciddi şekilde özgürleştiriyor. Okulda ya da dışarıda takımdan bir arkadaşımı gördüğümde nasıl mutlu hissettim, nasıl güçlü hissetme hali.

43. Tabii ki LGBTI arkadaşlarım vardı ama azdı. O dönemler çok çalıştığım için iş dışında sosyalleşmiyordum. En iyi arkadaşım ile çalıştığım yerde tanıştık, sonra onun sevgilisi, onun aracılığıyla da takımdan biriyle tanıştım... O dönem izin günümü maç gününe almıştım. Maç günleri çantamı ve özenle seçilmiş kıyafetleri çantama koyuyordum ve erkenden karşıya geçiyordum trafikte kalmayayım diye. Sonra para biriktirip krampon almaya karar vermek...

44. Kendi açımdan bana çok büyük bir alan açtığını söyleyebilirim kadınlarla futbol oynamanın. Hem sportif bir alan, hem sosyalleşme alanı. Eskiden daha kapalı bir insandım. Biz mesela ilk futbol oynamaya başladığımız sene ilk zamanlar ben kendimi baya zorladım gelmek için. Çünkü çok kapalıydım ve aslında biraz açılmak istiyordum. Uzun bir süre gelip maçlardan sonraki sosyalleşmelere katılıp aslında hiç konuşmayıp masanın bir köşesinde sessizce oturup ama kendimi zorlayıp geldikten bir süre sonra maç sonrası oturumlarında bir sürü ortak derdimizi konuşmaya başladık. Doğrudan link kurmasam da futbolun bana sağladığı sosyalleşme ve kendini ve başkalarını tanıma imkanının getirdiği bir kolaylık olduğunu düşünüyorum. O dönem çok kapalı bir insandım, çok küçük bir dünyada yaşıyordum ve sadece 7/24 birlikte olduğum bir kadın vardı. Oradan çıkmayı istediğim ve arzuladığım bir dönemde futbol seçeneği ortaya çıktı.

45. Şeyi fark ettim, koşarken yine biraz şey ama, futbolda hakikaten o kadar yoğun ki kafalar, herkesin gündemler yoğun, ülke gündemi yoğun, iş yoğun, falan, stres

gerçekten attığımı biliyorum futbolda. Ve o 1 saat boyunca topu kime vericem napıcam dışında hakikaten hiçbir şey düşünmediğim tek 1 saat o oluyor koca hafta. Yatağa yattığımda bile şunu şöyle mi yapsam, öyle mi yapacaktım, yarın nereden başlasam falan, sürekli bir şey, olumsuzluk... O 1 saat boyunca sahada hakikaten ne ülke aklıma geliyor ne yarın ne yapacağım aklımda oluyor, ne o akşam ne yapacağım. Bir saat sadece spor yapmak ve bir şeyin parçası olmak, herhalde o yüzden çok hoşuma gidiyor.

46. Futbol oynarken rahatım, kasılmıyorum. Ben otobüste daha gergin ve daha sinirliyim. Benim bir alanım olmalı ve dokunmamalıyız birbirimize. Ama futbolda hiç tanımadığım bir insanla bile aynı şeye sevinip kucaklaşmak ya da omuz omuza mücadele vermek, tokalaşmak, el sıkışmak, selam vermek birbirine, gülümsemek... Olduğumdan daha sosyal olduğum bir yer. Ve bunu sevdiğim bir yer, zorla sosyal olmuyorum, bunu seviyorum.
47. Self-terapötik bir yönü bile olabilir. Bir şeyi performe de ediyorsun gerçekten, öğrendiğin şeyin aksini. Topa sert vurmamak zorunda olmak çok rahatlatıcı. O rekabetin olmaması, birilerini dışlamaması. Bizde de bir rekabet var aslında ama bu, birini dışarıda bırakmıyor. Ölüm kalım savaşı değil. Yeterince iyi olmazsan takım dışı kalacaksın gibi bir şey yok. Evet, o hissi yaşamıyorum mesela.
48. Başarısız olmak hayatta çok düşündüğüm bir şey oldu son zamanlarda, onu çok sallamamak, onla barışık olmak üzerinden çok kendimle uğraşmaya çalışıyorum bir süredir. Çünkü o hata yapmamaya çalışma hali beni çok uzun zamandır, hata yapınca çok kötü hissettiğim... Başarısız olmayı kucaklayabilmek istiyorum. Futbolla da çok bağdaşiyor. Orada da çok öğrendiğim şey var, bunun mücadelesinin çok net olduğu bir yer... Sanki biz orada bu şekilde bir futbol alanı yaratıyoruz ya, hepimiz, sanki onu yaparsak her şeyi de yapabiliriz gibi bir şey geliyor bana. Beni aslında güçlü de

hissettiriyor, kurduğumuz şey o kadar kolay değil galiba çünkü, belki bilmiyorum, orada çok özenli bir şey var. Herkesin bir araya getirdiği çok güçlü bir şey.

49. Skor işin prosedürü, öylesine yapılan bir şey. Biz takım olarak bununla hiçbir şekilde ilgilenmiyoruz. Skoru bazen hiçbirimiz bilmiyoruz bile. Bizim için orada önemli olan şey iyi oyun, futbolla hiç alakası olmayan bir kadının kendini gelip orada özgürleştirilmesi, alan yaratması, keyif almak...

50. Benim en sinir olduğum şeylerden biri, birinin hırslı oynamayı, oynarken ben de mesela, hırsın şeyleri var, iyi oynamak istiyorum, iyi orta yapmak istiyorum, sağ açıkta oynuyorum ya, bunun için bazen iyi orta açamadığım için çimlere ayağımla vuruyorum. Ama bunu yaptığım zaman erkek gibi mi oynamış oluyorum, ya da o hırs sadece erkeklere mi bahşedilmiş? Bahsettiğim hırs bu arada nasıl yenemedik gibi bir yerden değil, kendinle alakalı bir şey, ben o topa daha güzel vururdum niye vuramadım, gibi bir hırs. Ve hırslandığım noktada erkek gibi oynamayı kabul etmiyorum. Çünkü bir kadın sporcu da hırslanabilir.

51. Lezbon sayfasında bizimle ilgili bir şey paylaşıırken türkiyenin en LGBTI takımları gibi kestirmeden bir ifade kullanıyorum çünkü orası politik bir zemin, görünürlük sağlamak istediğimiz bir zemin ama içimde öyle hissetmiyorum. Hepimizin beraber paylaşmasını istediğim, kimliksiz, belki kuire çıkabilir. Aslında ne olduğumuza bakmadığımız, kadın mı erkek mi, kimle sevişiyor kimlere ilgi duyuyor, hatta bunları genişletip kürt mü türk mü alevi mi bunları hiç bakmadan birlikte, benim hep hayalini kurduğum da bir toplum. Bunları söylemenin önemsizleştiği, söylemek zorunda kalmadığın, o yüzden doğrudan bir cümle haline getiremiyorum ama LGBTI siyaseti yürütenler bunun öncüsü olacak bence. Kendi görünürlüğümüzü sağlamak adına ama diğer her ne varsa diğer kimlikleri de şey yaparak, o yüzden spor alanında öncü olabileceğimizi düşünüyorum.

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