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„Sport as a Medium to Contest Gender Relations: An  
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Gender Negotiation“

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Josefine Hübler, BA

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## **Abstract (english)**

During a one year period of fieldwork, it was investigated to what extent rugby can serve as communication and socialisation trigger for young refugees in Vienna and how it may influence gender relations. Scholars like Jennifer Hargreaves (1986, 1996, 2014), Susan Cahn (2015), Ann Hall (1996) and Francine Deutsch (2007) theorized the female sporting bodies in the context of a patriarchal organized sporting regime. Their new approaches tried to reconsider and develop a new understanding of women and girls as a heterogeneous group in sports. While dealing with location, project structure and spatial organization of the Rugby Union Donau Club, it was discovered that it promotes sport values like fairness, tolerance, and respect for others, thus creating the gender-friendly, culture-friendly and religion-friendly environment, through the hard work of trainers and volunteers. Nevertheless, it was observed in several cases, that space comprises elements that represent the masculine defined character of rugby like photographs, rituals and media material.

## **Abstract (deutsch)**

Im Zuge einer einjährigen Feldforschung wurde sich theoretisch sowie empirisch der Frage angenähert, inwiefern Rugby als Ausgangspunkt zur Hinterfragung und Neuverortung bestehender Gender Relationen für Jugendliche mit Fluchtkontext dient. Die Arbeiten von Jennifer Hargreaves (1986, 1996, 2014), Susan Cahn (2015), Ann Hall (1996) und Francine Deutsch (2007) legten das theoretische Fundament für eine progressive Auseinandersetzung mit dem weiblichen Körper im Sport, welcher von patriarchalen Organisationsstrukturen geprägt wurde und immer noch wird. "Undoing Gender" (Deutsch, 2007) und andere Theorien trugen dazu bei, Sportlerinnen als eine heterogene Gruppe zu betrachten. Während der Feldforschung wurde die räumliche und soziale Organisation des Projekts "Rugby Opens Borders" analysiert und in einen theoretischen Rahmen gebettet. Teilnehmende Beobachtung, informelle Gespräche und semi-strukturierte Interviews ergaben, dass "Rugby Opens Borders" einen partizipativen, Gender-freundlichen und diskursiven Raum schafft. Dennoch trat in mehreren Fällen wie Fotografien, Medienmaterial und Trainingsritualen der maskuline Charakter von Rugby auf.

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## Introduction

Sports and Feminist Theories became a vital requisite in recent discourses on gender relations. Institutionalized sport can be considered as a system that reinforces ideological implications and interprets gender differences still as something ‚natural‘. For Bryson (1994), it is “the grounds of ideology because of its apparent autonomy from ‚biased‘ interpretation“ (ibid:51). Further, this means sport is basically a social practice in which men and children, in particular boys represent the dominating participating group, other than women and girls. In this dualistic frame, granted women and girls have to play the game within a “patriarchistic regime“ (ibid:50). Scholars like Jennifer Hargreaves (1986, 1996, 2014), Susan Cahn (2015), Ann Hall (1996) or Francine Deutsch (2007) investigated the female sporting bodies in the context of a patriarchal organized sporting regime. Their new approach tries to reconsider and develop a new understanding to theorise women and girls as a heterogeneous group in sports.

This thesis investigates the volunteer project Rugby Opens Borders which was established in 2015 and the organisations activities / aim . The main aim of the field work was the examination of gender relations in sport environments with a focus on refugee youth as they represent the targeted group of Rugby Opens Borders. Scholars see the chance of such spaces arising in moments of interruptions to be emancipating and empowering. Through semi-structured interviews and participant observation I identified benefits and conflicts to elaborate on how such local organizations help to discuss gender relations in new terms and create a new notions of normative concepts of femininity and masculinity. The research question asks how sport enables gender equality. It can be mutually reinforcing – through the creation of role models, the promotion of values and powerful outreach. It further motivates people to strive for change, unleashing tremendous benefits for individuals and society, empowering them in various ways. During a one year period of fieldwork, I tried to discover, to what extent rugby can serve as communication and socialisation trigger for young refugees in Vienna and how it may influence gender relations.

This is leading to the following research question:

*Can or can not Rugby Opens Borders enable young people to reconsider gender relations?*

I want to investigate how sport can be a medium for challenging or rethinking gender relations among refugee youth in Vienna. This implies a critical discussion of normative body conceptions

and the dismantling of stereotyped gender expectations. the sport initiative ROB, under the Donau Rugby Club, is promoting intercultural social interaction and collaboration among refugee youth through sport. The group consists of approximately 30 refugees of various ages (with different origins, most are from Iraq, Afghanistan, Syria and Somalia). A closer look will, however, give insight into a more complex structure. In order to provide a comprehensive analysis concerning those issues the thesis includes an empirical part that elaborates the different aspects like the organizational structure, spatial organization, coordination of the project, observation of the social interaction and training. Only through an understanding of the space and its social structures it can further establish a comprehension of the projects impact on the project team and its participants.

Following this introduction the theoretical considerations for this research project will be discussed. The thesis starts in the first section of chapter 1 with a discussion of sport and its ideological implications (Bryson, 1994) and hidden curriculum (Azzarito, 2012). It draws upon the work of Azzarito (2012), Theberge and Birrell (1994), Bryson (1994), Sterk & Knoppers (2009), Delamont (2012) and others. From presenting the contemporary notions of sport as a system that maintains a “patriarchal privilege, unrestricted capital accumulation, white skin privilege, compulsory heterosexuality and the reproduction of privilege“ (Theberge and Birrell, 1994:362). To better understand the contemporary conception, as outlined in section 1.2., the historical process and development of sport is necessary to deconstruct and exemplify compounds that aim to explain the current situation concerning gender relations. Hence, it enables to contextualize traces of women’s continuous subordination and determination, therefore it stresses the notion of girls and women as a heterogeneous group as elucidated by scholars like Cahn (2015), Gardiner (2005), Hargreaves (1996, 2014), Sterk & Knoppers (2009). Addressing the intersectional elements women and girls embodiment cause additional matters that will be reviewed in chapter 2. The female body is characterized by a vital interplay of contradictions. In section 2.1, Willis (2014), Haugaa Engh (2010), Meier (2015), Wright & Clarke (1999), (Paechter, 2003), (Gerami, 2005), (Grosz, 1994) and other scholars’ arguments are discussed to highlight the complicated and contradicting circumstances women and girls face in sports. Further on in section 2.2, the construction of normative conceptions of femininity and masculinity depicted in media with a focus on sporting women is analysed and linked to ideological implications. As the majority of the Rugby Opens Borders (ROB) participants are Muslim girls, in section 2.3, I aimed to discuss religious embodiment and exclusionary practices in sport, with a focus on the Western sporting world, to disentangle stereotyped considerations

about Muslim women and girls in sport and enable a progressive discussion. Scholars like Jawad, Al-Sinani, & Benn (2011), Dahl (2017), Charrad (2011), Ahmed & Donnan (1994), Dagkas & Benn (2012) emphasize the relational character concerning Muslim women and girls in sport. Chapter 3 analyses the empowering and liberating impacts of sport on women and girls. Physical activity like rugby increases the potential for women and girls to control their own bodies and decide for themselves in their best interest. Attempts were made to present the evolving resistance against constraining structures. One example is the presented case of Rugby Opens Borders - the findings revealed that ROB emphasizes new perspectives on gender identities and empowers young people in particular Muslim girls. Feminist scholars highlight the increasing request for physical liberation and empowerment in and through sport. Chapter 4 provides a short overview of ritual elements in sport, particularly rugby, that will be considered in the empirical research. Rugby implies in many ways certain ritual elements that help to maintain a „social order“ (Birrell, 1994). Chapter 5 provides the theoretical foundation of my empirical research. Until feminist theories occurred in sport sociology there was a lack of „understanding that sporting practices are historically produced, socially constructed, and culturally defined to serve the interests and needs of powerful groups in society“ (Hall, 1996:6). Discussing the concepts of hegemony (Gramsci, 1999) and Undoing Gender (Deutsch, 2007; Butler 2004) pursues to establish a structural understanding of my empirical findings and helps to contextualize them. In chapter 6 the Rugby Union as the global association of rugby teams, is reviewed concerning women and girls and its gender relations to lead those considerations to my empirical part. The second part of my thesis from chapter 8 to 9 illustrates my methodology and research findings. In my final conclusion the research question will be discussed relating to my findings and theoretical contextualization.

## **PART I – THE CONTEXTUALIZATION**

### **1. Gendered Practice in Sport**

In this chapter I want to examine the present conditions and circumstances of sport concerning gender relations. Although many attempts have been made since the turn of the millennium there are still biased practices and methods in sport that need to be considered. In the second section the position of women and girls will be traced back and placed in perspective.

#### **1.1 The Hidden Curriculum of Sport**

In many cases sport reveals certain insights about how an ideological system works and legitimates idioms of culture. Sport serves as a central ideological institution within a state formation. As Willis (2014) pointed out: „*Sport helps the rulers rule*“ (ibid:118). For many people within a society sport represents a form of social practice, enjoyment and recreation. By analysing the dynamics of organised sport it exposes a „hidden curriculum“ (Azzarito, 2012). Although a clear definition of sport is problematic as it implies a complex construction of meanings, values and norms and also correlates with other social systems. There is a need to include varied forms of organised physical activity in the educational context. The complex characteristics of sport compromises several terminologies „[...] *such as physical training, physical education and movement, as well as those in contemporary use such as physical recreation and outdoor pursuits*“ (Hargreaves, 2014:23). Further Hargreaves (2014) describes sport as a „united physical and mental process“ as it creates spheres for social interactions that correlates with the physical self of humans (ibid:17).

Considering that, sport as a social practice pursues to implement and maintain, according to Theberge and Birrell (1994), a „patriarchal privilege, unrestricted capital accumulation, white skin privilege, compulsory heterosexuality and the reproduction of privilege“ (ibid:362). Mostly, these aspects are overlooked or underestimated. Thus, women face constraints in sport that contribute to segregate them involuntarily into specific types of sport, events and competitions that construct an idea of – women belong to those types of sport in contrast to men (UN, 2007:3). Not only participating but also decision-making deals with discriminating practices that are seen not only on the local but also on the international level. This often results in inadequate wages and prizes and misleads women’s position in sport to a lower status and loss of appreciation.

Deutsch (2007) argues that in sport clubs and physical education women and girls are either directly or indirectly forced to adopt stereotypical gender approaches and create gender normatives that have been displayed on their developments and bodies (ibid:111). This can be observed in many individual and club sports. Bryson (1994) identifies, that gender differences are still seen as being ‚natural’ and fails to recognise the ideological implications (ibid:51). For him, it is „the grounds of ideology because of its apparent autonomy from ‚biased’ interpretation“ (ibid:51). Further, this means sport is basically a social practice in which men and boys represent the dominating group over girls, participate. By taking this dualistic approach for granted women and girls have to play the game within a „patriarchistic regime“ (ibid:50). Berger (1972) continues to argue that women turn into a ‚sight’ and thus are an ‚incorporated object’ (ibid:47). Rose (2001) criticizes these linear ideas about masculinity and femininity and additionally underlines the notion of heterosexuality which is another dimension of the hidden curriculum within sport itself (ibid: 12). In western societies, dualistic worldviews are manifested in early ages. There is often no in between. In Kindergarten children start to learn the distinction between ‚bad and good’ and situate them in a biased categorical mindset (Sterk & Knoppers, 2009:31). Good and bad is followed by nature and culture, feminine and masculine terminologies (ibid:31). Sport as a mainly ‚male preserve’ constructs a conflicting situation for women. For Messner (1988), characteristics of being feminine or express femininity involves the acceptance of restrictions in behaviour and physics and therefore makes it difficult to then be viewed as equal to men by themselves as well as others (ibid:203). Thinking of how to behave in order to fulfil certain social expectations becomes a complex system of constant ponderings about the connotations of sexuality and power that play a vital role in gender based societies (Sterk & Knoppers, 2009:31). Primarily, it causes a massive ‚gender conflict’ because female athletes live within a male dominated sporting world and are forced to act feminine in order to accomplish their duty as an idealised commercialised object (Fallon, 2010:9). Messner (1988) calls the experience in organised sports as becoming ‚masculinity-validating’ (ibid:200). Meanings during and after participating sports are embedded in culture, social relationships, personal history and institutional and cultural traditions that contextualize certain physical interactions (see Sterk & Knoppers, 2009:32). Situations such as the moment of birth arrange the world already in gendered ways mediated through parental practices but also medical institutions and constitute a dualistic mind (ibid:35). This continues in kindergarten, primary school and physical education. Dress codes, behaviour and movement appear to materialize those hidden regimes. For Hargreaves (1996) sportswear for example becomes increasingly important for self-representation and is enhanced among western societies statements about femininity as well as

sexuality (ibid:159) The body is turned into an object – a sight – or a desire which can be revealed and concealed through sportswear and creates a „relationship between being dressed and undressed“ (ibid:159). Another way of expressing gendered curriculums is sex segregation in physical education. There are lavatories, cloak rooms, changing rooms and in some cases playgrounds being separated according to sexes (Delamont, 2012:27). Administrative tasks in schools can be gendered as well, there are several occasions where pupils expected to built sex segregated groups and lines (ibid:27). In many schools teachers try to overcome those events by building mixed groups, but surveys have shown that there is a ‚deterministic dynamic‘ that puts boys in a superior position and tend to dominate the setting, pace and direction of the game (Hargreaves, 1996:151). Sterk & Knoppers (2009) argue that these dynamics between boys and girls reflect their incorporated behaviours from parental settings such as the home or institutional or cultural context like school or kindergarten (ibid:37). Results of these social developments are the expectation and acceptance of many primary-aged children to practice sport in separate programmes of games. Growing up means not only physical development but also the cognitive development through learned experience that shapes the way people think and interact. Social and cultural life is intertwined with ideological regimes and so is sport as it represents a fundamental part in socialising young people to become an active members of the society. The hidden curriculum represents the underlying notions of sport to serve certain goals but also helps to create a conscious self. The following chapter analysis the historical development of women in sport and their demand for autonomy.

## **1.2 Tracing Back – A Historical View on Women in Sport**

The history of women in sport is shaped by a consequent fight for liberation, control of their own body and overcoming gender oppression. Even in current daily life phrases like „You throw like a girl“ appear to represent the common sense when it comes to sporting practices (Hall & Oglesby, 2016:271). If we want to examine how sport enables the ways to contest gender relations, it is important to look at the history of sport and especially for women in sport to better understand the relationship between men and women but also their entire experience in and through sport. Phrases that implicitly express gender relations, like the one mentioned above, are still present today and can only be questioned if we investigate the historical development – to realize why those phrases have arisen.

As Cahn (2015) distinctively points it out:

*„For historians, then, tracing women’s involvement in sport opened up a view into how gender and sexual norms have been historically created, institutionalized, challenged, or stabilized.“*  
(ibid:310)

Tracing back to the ancient societies Greek philosopher Aristotle reveals interesting insights on the perception of human beings during that period of time. Already Aristotle differentiated between men and women. According to Gardiner (2005) women were seen as „naturally men’s inferiors in terms of reason“ (ibid:36). The Greek philosopher manifested this idea over his long educational and philosophical practice and rendered masculinity as being the superior given human feature. It caused a dualism of men symbolising human rationality and women symbolising sexuality, emotion and the body itself (ibid:36). This resulted in an ongoing process of division and the problematic framework of Western philosophy that still includes the descriptions of so called ‚oppositions’ such as body/mind, nature/culture, emotion/reason and private/public – all of them are establishing power relations (Hall, 1996:66). Sterk and Knoppers (2009) and other sport sociologists criticise the notion of dualism, that was encouraged by Aristotle and framed the dynamics of a society and its gender construction. Sterk and Knopper (2009) note: *„The mind was constructed as being housed in the body and superior to it. Men were associated with the mind and women with nature or the body.“* (ibid:71) The development of women in sport is a part of a general development that involves a reciprocal interaction between groups and classes and caused tensions but also in ‚dialectical terms’ (Hargreaves, 2014:51-52). However, a process is never linear nor going into one direction – it rather imposes one-way determination of groups or classes onto another. In a hegemonic context it also opens new options of opposition and configurations of power relations. Male domination as well as dominant ideas about sexual difference belong to a long existing tradition in the history of sports and even in modern sports (ibid:7). Its persuasive and subtle approach covers the intentions of domination as being naturally given and many girls and boys during school or in kindergarten do not even realize it and start to live these constructed differences. When we look back 150 years ago women’s duties and ideals were to bear and educate the children but also to satisfy the husband and take care of the household. This ‚Victorian ideal’ assumed reproduction and attraction mainly for the husband as integral elements and the characteristics women had to fulfil (Sterk & Knoppers, 2009:69). As sport was a societal feature that transferred people out of their home and into a refreshing, exciting and idealized world it attracted not only men but women as well. Although, it conflicted with the modes of being a women in the Victorian age as it exposed their flesh and expressed emotions for the public eye. *„Modesty, propriety and circumspectness“* as the social expectations for women back then, ideological ideas disagreed with the physicality

of sport (ibid:69). Thus, as sport endangers the body of women and it diminishes the twin functions of the ultimate Victorian goal – „attracting a man and bearing a child“ (ibid:69). Since education was initiated and then accessible for women, it changed the behaviour towards sport and women’s participation. When educational institutions were established women experienced physical practices within those elitist sub-systems. This, as Hargreaves (1996) argues, served as the „prerequisite for the development of sports“ for women (ibid:61). Colleges and Universities offered for the first time possibilities for women to enter clubs and enjoy the physical activities. Still, it has to be remarked that it hadn’t involved all classes as it was mainly happening in the educational context. This was a perseverance of the upper class (ibid:61). Overall, it enabled new perspectives on women’s ‚naturally’ given tasks. It was proposed that „women who were healthy and well educated would be better mothers than those who lacked in either or both areas“ (Sterk & Knoppers, 2009:70). Yet, women were perceived as the subordinated group within society. The UN published a paper on *Women, Gender Equality and Sport* in 2007 that still calls attention to forms of discrimination and trivialization on women in sport: „*Women were often perceived as being too weak for sport, particularly endurance sports, such as marathons, weightlifting and cycling, and it was often argued in the past that sport was harmful to women’s health, particularly their reproductive health.*“ (ibid:2)

This quote illustrates the ideals of the nineteenth century that were successfully maintained until the twentieth-first century. Medical science in the nineteenth century believed that women generally were the physiologically inferior sex – as Aristotle proclaimed – and had only one major goal to accomplish during their life-cycle which was reproduction. This then weakened ideas about a strong, sophisticated women (Cahn, 2015:13). Men as the opposing group attributed with culture and rational thought were linked to the public life such as work and other spheres outside of home. Within the private sphere, which means for the majority - home, represented ‘symbols of womanhood’ directly aligned to nature itself (Hargreaves, 1996:43). ‚Good’ wives stayed at home and were responsible for the inner circle of life and their recreation (ibid:43). The material connection to nature and the body manifested further on the social construction of gender and the justification of inequalities between men and women in sport. Western societies are intervened with biological ideas about gender in the realms of either men’s or women’s basic features. During my research those assumptions were part of a common sense that was expressed in advertising material, spatial organisation and social club life, see section 9.1, 9.5, 9.6.

Cahn (2015) identifies, that sports like marathon running, rugby, boxing, wrestling and so forth

proclaim the requirement of certain physicality and mentality that are linked to athletic qualities such as competitiveness, strength, speed, power, aggression and teamwork and in consequence were associated with masculinity (ibid:3). Coaches and participants were aware of the gendered rugby environment and tried to reconsider this not only through ROB but through spatial and organisational changes, see section 9.2.

The main goal of many sports was to provide a space for young men to „cultivate masculinity and achieve manhood“ (ibid:3). The sporting arena was just being reserved for males and their growing social and mental abilities whereas women’s construction of weak personalities suited to guarantee an exclusive male athletic sphere. For Sterk & Knoppers (2009) prevailing meanings of women’s inability to perform athletic equivalent to men’s lasted into the 1970s and prevented them from participating in certain sports that were purely male associated (ibid:70).

Recreation as a physical practice was a way to participate in sports but of a relatively powerless and inferior meaning. Women therefore were squeezed into playing netball and other types of sport related to femininity that did not compete to question the idealized male sporting body – „strong, aggressive and muscular“ - as the ideological symbol of masculinity (Hargreaves, 1996:145). The intersection with other forms of social life like religion became present in strengthen the dogma of masculinity.

*„Initially, discourses about modern sport did not even imagine women as participants, and certainly not in competitive situations. Instead, only men were named as qualified participants; competitiveness was framed as “masculine;” and sport in general was associated primarily with the kinds of masculinities ascribed to ‘the Christian gentleman’ and Muscular Christianity.“ (Sterk & Knoppers, 2009:111)*

With the gradual blending of gender and sexuality during the nineteenth and twentieth century homophobia and heterosexism increasingly became noticeable in women’s sport as it stood in contrast to male-dominated foundation of sport and its systemic implications (ibid:77). Female athletes were seen as a ‚sight of appearance’ instead of a ‚sight of act’ and then became a symbol of desire and sexuality. As Willis (2014) argues, even if the female athlete excels in sport it keeps connected to its body features and is an „object of pleasure for man“ (ibid:122). Further on sport sociology failed to differentiate the terminology of sex and gender and used male rendered definitions and values for explanations. This caused a framework of masculinity for sport and the need to squeeze in as a women in order to succeed (Hargreaves, 1996:8). National sport plays a

vital role in this discourse of institutionalized masculinity. In many countries, a national sport symbolises a male-dominated sport although women are playing them as well (Sterk & Knoppers, 2009:73). For Sterk & Knoppers (2009) this also true in the case of Australian rugby as the national sport (ibid:73).

The process of women in sport is a vital interplay of gender and other social and cultural formulations. Sport was institutionalized in addition to educational programmes in universities and colleges during the nineteenth and twentieth century and therefore reserved for women and girls from the higher economic and social classes. This influenced strongly who can participate and who cannot. Social classes created not only certain forms of femininity but of masculinity too. This context continued to shape several masculinities within sport. According to Sterk & Knoppers (2009) sweat was a connotation of work and thus working class people (ibid:73). For middle and upper class women in the nineteenth century participating in sport included sweating due to physical activity were not class appropriate. Working class women in contrast were used to sweat because they had to work in order to maintain their life. Scrubbing the floor and clothes, working on the fields, carrying heavy bucket and operating heavy machinery were physically demanding and associated with strenuous physical activity (ibid:73). In contemporary sport connotations of class relations are still present. Soccer, tennis, golf, snowboarding are associated with the upper class and have a higher female participation rate as they have a tendency of being more welcoming to them (ibid:74).

Women were just slowly entering certain types of sport that are historically related to lower-middle class such as boxing, skateboarding and wrestling due to the comprising institutional and ideological constraints (ibid:74). The ideal feminine body in Western society is portrayed as a ‚universal standard‘ and creates heteronormative gendered norms and whiteness worldwide. This conflicting development excludes women who do not suit these manifested rules and determines them as ‚other‘ (Azzarito, 2017:256). In several interviews and informal conversations either the coaches or the ROB participants expressed exclusionary experiences with people who are not familiar with rugby, as outlined in section 9.7.2. It is important to mention that gender always intersects with social relationship and causes a multi-layered way of either domination or/and subordination. Sport functions as an important apparatus to highlight but also question those power relations. The current and historical situation of women in sport was and is surrounded by male authorities that, according to Hargreaves (1996), „hold traditional attitudes and who are involved in traditional activities“ (ibid:41). As there are changing images of female sporting

physicality we can assume that history is embedded in a process and is changeable as well as questionable. This enables to transform gender norms and rejects or modify traditional dualistic ideas about femininity and masculinity (Hills & Croston, 2012:594). The history of women in sport reflects the constant struggle for autonomy and liberation. The ongoing tension between female athleticism and male-defined sport are essential to understand the modern dynamics of organized sport and gender discourses. Sport as a social and cultural practice implements ideological dimensions and intersects with other aspects of a society. Sporting women therefore face a complex interplay of power relations that have been historically created and maintained. Thus, it is relevant to examine the historical conditions and process as it unveils the apparently ‚unproblematic reality’ and strengthen the awareness of a conflicted ‚lived reality’ of women and girls in organized sport.

## **2. Embodied Intersectionality**

### **2.1 The Female Body as a Contested Terrain**

The female body is a medium that deals with many contradictions. Within sport the female athlete serves as a discourse of topics like forced heterosexuality, sexuality, social expectations and so forth. All of them do not necessarily need to be congruent and can negatively influence each other. Female athletes exist in a conflicted continuum. To fulfill all expectations as an athlete it can mean to fail as a woman because athleticism is associated with masculinity and therefore women turn emblematically into a man. In other words, if a woman succeeds in sport she is becoming a man as she is rejecting all feminine features of her body in order to excel in sport (Willis, 2014:123). Female athletes always need to find compromises to satisfy the public audience. Unlike male athletes fulfill heterosexual demands they have no difficulties in combining private life with the athletic as its both connotated with masculinity and therefore do not cause any social confusion (Meier, 2015:970). Sportsmen and sportswomen are framed by a system of forces that can either be enhancing or restrictive. By dividing into sportsmen and sportswomen gender diversity is being disregarded and determines both groups as being homogenous (Hargreaves J. , 1986:115-118). In reality it is the opposite. Women’s and men’s lived experience differ according to social and cultural backgrounds. Thus, gender identities are not homogenous and imply myriad expressions of either masculinity or femininity. Masculinity is not a simple

category that include all man. The same for women and girls. In a broader context it means that there is „no natural body appearance“ because they are all a product of exercise and routine (ibid:113). Maintaining a certain body type includes ideals that are socially constructed through media and consumerism. ‚Ideal’ female or male bodies create needs and desires. Sport in this context serves as a tool of consumerism and helps to establish specific embodied needs (ibid:113). Beauty, fitness and romance are central in constructing idealized body types. These types are ubiquitous through media and other technologies and thus establish body norms (ibid:113). Women and man face those normative ideas of sporting bodies in sport as well. For women it is even harder as they are forced to express this ideal otherwise they are being trivialized or alienated. Haugaa Engh (2010) expresses this dilemma as followed: „ [...] *the physical body of sporting women, despite the recent acceptance of female athleticism and muscularity, continues to be ‘a work in progress’; a body that must be shaped, regulated and controlled in order to be acceptable and ‘readable’.*“ (ibid:64)

By implementing these idealized appearances into the localized context of social configurations, it creates a common goal of localised “idealized feminine and masculine identities” (Paechter, 2003:71). Through a shared practice of common sense – ‚you can be accepted as long you maintain our notion of masculinity and femininity’ – in communities reflects the constructed consumerism. Wright & Clarke (1999) argue that the stigmatization of women can easily occur and harm deviating terms of femininity and sexuality (ibid:229). One way to cope with the fear of women and girls entering the male sporting arena are forms of trivialization. This can be either linguistic or occur through certain behaviours. For example men play football but women just ‚kick’ the ball from one to another and therefore are not able to properly play the game and not taken seriously. These prejudices appeared during my field research too, as outlined in section 9.5, 9.7.3. Assumptions on societal gender roles arise in daily routines such as private and public contexts (Hall & Oglesby, 2016:271). Often women and girls are seen as they are not able to perform skillfully and, as Bryson (1995) exaggerates it, „lot of things that women do are seen as not doing anything” (ibid:48). To conclude, women and girls performances are never highly valued and rather be peculiar than impressive. The only way to receive broader recognition is the term of ‚being fit’ (Rauscher & Cooky, 2016:294). Fitness as a type of physical recreation is a gendered practice that produces constant „body surveillance and disciplinary body practices” (ibid:294). Further this represents a moral citizenship but also consumerism. The underlying notion of ‚being fit’ is to achieve certain aesthetic body characteristics. The hegemonic feminine body ideal is associated with being thin and curvaceous, a „flat stomachs, large breasts, toned – but not too muscular – and literally no fat” (ibid:294). Abstract interpretations of the body were

interesting in revealing its social and ideological functions. According to Turner (1991) the body with its elements of orifices, reproductive capacity, environmental adaptation and regular functions symbolises components of the head of state, corporate culture and body politics and therefore works as a ‚natural’ resource for sociality (ibid:9). Hargreaves (1996) supports the argument of the body as „the fundamental symbol of power relations“ (ibid:44) and focuses on the relationship between men and women in sport. As Grosz (1994) points out: „Typically, femininity is represented (either explicitly or implicitly) in one of the two ways in this cross-pairing of oppositions: either mind is rendered equivalent to the masculine and body equivalent to the feminine (thus ruling out women a priori as possible subjects of knowledge, or philosophers) or each sex is attributed its own form of corporeality.“ (ibid:14)

‚Corporeality’ is thus the embodiment of conflicting social relations. The internalization of social relations is a product of social organization and produces certain kinds of embodiment. The body itself is a representation of mortality, vulnerability and agency as well. Skin and flesh serve as an instrument of those elements and expose them to the gaze of others. Furthermore bodies are exposed to touch and violence and are the site of an ‚doing’ and being done to’ act, both embodied act become equivocal and reciprocal (Butler, Undoing Gender, 2004:21). Embodiment itself is not about the mere residence of social organization but its reproduction through it. Hence, embodiment means the representation of political principles of class and gender relations and is never a ‚neutral component’ (Frank, 1991:42). The manifestations of domination and appropriation are linked to the dynamics of a particular society. Feminist theories on sport strongly engage in the discourse about the body as the embodiment of social relations because the „story both begins and ends with bodies“ (Frank, 1991:42). Consequently, bodies are material elements and expressions of particular social and cultural settings. They are constantly shaping and reshaping peoples life. Through globalisation many parts of the social life are interconnected and create through new technologies, media, internet a virtual reality that functions as a ‚new pedagogical principle’ for sport, fitness and health (Azzarito, 2017:254). Women and especially young girls are permeated with media and its hidden ideological formula. The body turns then into a permanent site of struggle and resistance. Criticism arose, that dualistic interpretations of the body are linear and reject the idea of diversity (Butler 1999, 2004; Hargreaves 1986, 1996, 2014) . Grosz (1994) states, that bodies are „neither – while also being both – the private or the public, self or other, natural or cultural, psychical or social, instinctive or learned, genetically or environmentally determined“ (ibid:23). We need to acknowledge the multilayered complexity of human identities and their embodiment of social organization. ROB as the field of study

implemented several feedback loops that intended to provide a sphere of trust, belonging and proactive involvement - the ROB participants were able to talk freely about fears and hopes, about their gender identities, see in section 9.2, 9.7.

But organized sport continues to celebrate physical differences in all societal levels and most notably between male and female instead of questioning this institutionalized dualism. A new development of the ‚athletic girl‘ was initiated and won increasingly societal recognition (Cahn, 2015: 30). ‚Athletic‘ in this terms refers to ‚being fit‘ instead of strong, virtuous and skillful and epitomizes the spirit of a modern womanhood (ibid:30). There are resentments to this idea as it encourages women and girls to participate in sports but does not jeopardize men’s control in the sporting world (ibid: 30). Its ambivalence causes damages to the concept of the ‚athletic girl‘. Some discourses surrounding the ‚athletic girl‘ are emphasizing that women who participate in sport are able to experience „human“ (rather than „feminine“) attributes like loyalty, teamwork and a democratic ethos while ‚allowing them to forget, for the time being, that they are girls“ (ibid:19). This argument illustrates again the contradiction women and girls face in sport. To say, that sport enables women empowerment and liberation can be questioned concerning the argument mentioned above. Also, Adjepong (2016) pointed out, that in her research female rugby players perceived different responses to their participation in rugby not only in but outside the sporting world (ibid:1498). Thus, it is complicated to talk of empowerment for all women through sport because it fails to acknowledge the complexity of social forces that can restrict one woman but not the other. Sophie, one of the ROB coaches faced resentments and discriminating comments about her playing rugby, see section 9.7.2.

Many feminist scholars worked with Foucault's notion of “panopticon” - women are then perceived as a form of sight and confronted with the „panopticon“ of the ‚other‘. Michel Foucault suggests the concept of the „*Panopticon*“ (Foucault, 1995) as a ‘inherent knowledge’ that shapes, monitors and oppresses the self and can be interpreted as a kind of architectural figure like a tower that represents the public eye. It dissociates the see/being seen dyad and establishes unilateral power. One concern of Foucault’s panopticon is the inability to oppose and challenge existing hegemonic structures. Bodies are interpreted as the passive object of a „monolithic, unidirectional notion of power with its inexorable and repressive grip“ (Hall, 1966:55). Still, gender appropriate actions are permeated by its surrounding societal structure such as language. Babies are educated in a charged relationship of reflective and forceful collective cultural practices. Phrases like „Oh, what a strong little man!“ ascribe ‘gendered meanings’ and relate to

his or her perceived gender. Heterosexuality in sport is another force that is imposed on women. Sterk & Knoppers (2009) identify, when female athletes outstand in sport they provoke and cause societal discomfort as they seem to lose femininity and turn into ‚men‘ (ibid:107). Questions about their sexual orientation arises and were used to sexually discredit female athletes. The dominant fear during the 1990s and even today is that competitive sport would masculinize women. (Sterk & Knoppers, 2009:77) The association of strong female athletes and homosexuality became a kind of hidden expectation. Cahn (2015) illustrates this contradiction: *„Sport had developed as a male preserve, a domain in which men expressed and cultivated masculinity through athletic competition. [...] The female athlete's ambiguity created a dilemma for her advocates. Given women's evident enjoyment of such "masculine" pursuits, could the "athletic girl" (and thus, the modern woman) reap the benefits of sport (and modernity) without becoming less womanly?“* (ibid:8)

Sports media serves as a powerful tool in manifesting hegemonic structures including male superiority. Although media coverage of women’s athletic performance tends to gain more societal recognition it “still tends to alienates, trivialises or demonizes deviant forms of femininity” (Messner M. , 1988:206). In conclusion, there is an urgent need to repair the cultural and social settings for women and girls participating in sports in order to minimize the constraints caused by the intersection of gender, patriarchic privilege, whiteness, heterosexism, homophobia and other social forces (Rauscher & Cooky, 2016:295). Forms of opposition and resistance already exist as a new way to liberate women and girls from those given circumstances.

## **2.2 The Construction of Femininity and Masculinity of Athletes in Media**

Sportswomen are one of the most marginalized category of media coverage. Underrepresentation is not the only problem female athletes face in media. Through a persuasive stigmatization of female athletes gender stereotypes are constantly reflected and reinforced. Those medialized stigmatization occurred during the fieldresearch too and reflected the contradiction between a progressive social idea - Rugby Opens Borders - and a relatively conservative, masculine sport - Rugby Union. Hence, this subchapter provides insights on media coverage, its ideological implications as well as impacts on girls and women’s self-perception.

*„Violence against women, exploitation and harassment in sport are manifestations of the perceptions of men’s dominance, physical strength and power, which are traditionally portrayed*

*in male sport.*“ (UN, 2007:3)

The relationship between men and women follows dualistic approaches and is depicted in other media like the television, film and music industry. They all tell specific gendered stories by using touch and other forms of social interaction to create certain narratives and motivate associated actions during daily life (Sterk & Knoppers, 2009:32). One aspect is the portrait of thin women as it would appear to be ‚natural‘. Chase (2006) calls it „cult of thinness“ which sets a normative ideal of bodies and therefore pressures women to fulfill those types (ibid:234). Much of the media content regarding female athletes emphasizes constant self-surveillance, self-measuring and self-discipline as a moral standard for female bodies that should be practiced on a daily base. Female bodies are surrounded by those forces and function to create it as a docile body. Even in 2017 media content of sporting female continues to be a reproductive element of hegemonic masculinity although there is a notable amount of exceptions and forms of resistance. Sporting features of „strength, assertiveness and virility“ are still encouraged and depicted on television (McDonald, 2017:115). Sport advertisement including their assumptions are coded by social and cultural practices. Advertisements of female athletes are about athleticism but also about sexual appeal. Hall and Oglesby (2016) highlight, that pictures those women are often pictured in provocative poses and exposes body parts that clearly identify as representations of femininity. Sexuality underlines many sporting advertisements of female athletes because „after all sex sells“ (Hall & Oglesby:272). In combination with the display of strong and tough women who are not afraid of anyone serves as a media images that echos and „epitomises the image of sporting men“ (Azzarito, 2012:76). Female athletes are then just the reflections of the male perseverance within sport. Media content fails to establish varied forms of sporting females.

Women, to mention John Berger again, function as a form of ‚site‘ they ‚appear‘ to the satisfaction of men. Sterk and Knopper (2009) formulate that tendency as followed:

*„More often than not, women’s sexual attractiveness, rather than their athletic abilities, gains media attention. Sexually provocative sights, such as nude bungee jumping, scantily dressed female wrestlers, and skimpily clad women in the stands at men’s sporting events often receive more attention than coverage of regular women’s sports. The annual swimsuit issue of Sports Illustrated exemplifies this emphasis.“* (ibid:77)

Sexuality works to maintain the domination of forced heterosexuality within sport and evolved through a long historical process of constant subordination of women especially in competitive

sport (ibid:77). These images of gendered life occur in colour codes, dressing, names and behaviours that are connotated with a particular sex. The sex/gender distinction is essential in understanding the conditions of the biological/ ideological body and its constructed social self as gender. The distinction should provide a framework to contest the ‚biology-is-destiny-formulation’. Sex often appears to be biological intractable in contrast to the fluid concept of gender (Butler, 1999:9) - hence, gender is neither the causal “result of sex nor as seemingly fixed as sex” (ibid:10). In its consequence the division between sex and gender prompts a radical discontinuity of sexed bodies and cultural constructed genders. Thus, male or female bodies will not compulsively relate to their gendered given attributes but associate themselves to the either both or the ‚opposite’ (ibid:9-10). The process of femininity therefore implies an active engagement that is a result of a world full of gendered images and advertisement. Due its continuity gendered settings have become already part of the everyday life and contribute to a „process of homogenization of images of femininity“ (Hargreaves, 1996:163). The conflation of sport and sexuality is predominantly practiced in Western media representations of women’s sporting bodies. It further reflects the economic process of consumerism and profit of Western societies. Through its physical presence the body is the most visible sign of sexuality. Physical performance like sport filters those sexualized display because there is no other social interaction that exposes flesh that commercially than the sport industry. As media is an integral part of sporting regimes the exploitation of images showing sexualized sporting women appears to be ‚normal’ (Butler, 1999:161). The normative ideas about sporting bodies create a certain feeling of the body as „that to a certain extent sexuality establishes us as outside of ourselves; we are motivated by an elsewhere whose full meaning and purpose we cannot definitively establish“ (Butler, 2004:16). By emphasizing an idealized women’s sporting body it establishes a specific type of femininity that homogenizes images of women. In some cases female athletes exploit those sexualized representations in order to get public interest, money and media attention (Hargreaves, 1996:163). While modern consumer culture forces to maintain gendered life, it enables forms of oppositions that fight imperative norms and ideas. To recognise female athletes as nonpassive subjects is thereby important as it acknowledges oppositional tendencies within the sporting world. Modes of femininity as „being fit“ or the athletic beauty-queen are additionally reinforced by outside sport-beauty contests, pageantry and sexual appeals (Cahn, 2015:82). To follow the dualism of sport, female athletes had first be attractive to men and secondly skilful to be commercially accepted and portrayed. Just being an athlete implies the notion of masculinity. Therefore girls and women remained alienated from sports that were rather athletic than appealing (Cahn, 2015:82).

*„How owners and sponsors decide to market the league—the ratio of “babe factor” to women’s pony-tailed wholesomeness to sheer talent—is the other million- or possibly billion-dollar question.“ (Cahn, 2015: 297)*

If we look at the women’s beach volleyball they are representing the ‚babe factor’. In comparison to other women team sport, they receive “more Olympic television coverage than all them combined” (ibid:299). The common sense established the idea of women’s sport being less interesting than men’s. During the fieldresearch I encountered several cases where the ROB group desperately searched for a women’s rugby game - they wanted to watch the world rugby women’s league - and were not able to find it whereas the men’s rugby game was shown on the official rugby union website immediately, see section 9.5, 9.6. But this is caused by its linkage to biological arguments that assume women are not as skilful as men and thus less able to produce interesting sport content. Rugby as a truly masculine sport conflicts with women playing rugby. Hence, if women play rugby it tends to be trivialized and alienated instead of being respected and supported by its surrounding society (Wright & Clarke, 1999:239). Women, sport and media is a conflicted triangle that produces gender norms and expectations. Still, there are forms of resistance that constantly evolve primarily on the local level and help to question the preconceived dualistic and suppressing ideas of gendered athleticism.

### **2.3 Muslim Girls - Religious Embodiment and Exclusionary Practices in Sport**

As the majority (with the exception of one girl from Mexico) of the participants were Muslims it seemed highly important to investigate the relation between religion and sport.

The process of constant globalisation new migration patterns arise and increase to the amount of diaspora communities in the Western world. Diaspora communities are seen as ‚cultures of hybridity’ and involve a fluid management of identity in relation to specific contexts (Dagkas & Benn, 2012:114). This causes a differentiation in the centrality of the physicality of the body and culture. They are expressed through varied levels of significance and meaning (ibid:114). These clusters of cultural and social interrelation, according to Ahmed & Donnan (1994) belong to the realm of Muslim women as they often are located between Islamic fundamentalism and modernity and modernity and postmodernity (ibid:14). Jawad, Al-Sinani, & Benn (2011) speak of the Islam as an holistic approach that implicitly emphasizes the development of human beings with a focus on spirituality (ibid:33). It is a way of life with rules and encourages „intellectual

and physical well-being“ (ibid:33). Thus, men and women are promoted to live healthily in body, mind and spirit. Bodies are therefore an important „vehicle of culture“ but are also inscribed by it (Dagkas & Benn, 2012:115). Aspects of culture appear in numerous ways including social and religious values and are expressed through embodiment. In Western societies Muslim women often face social contradictions because women, Islam, and sport create a contested triangle of intersecting power relations. In particular gender relations and politics constitute tensions „between religious and secular values“ (Benn, Pfister, & Jawad, 2011:1). Weiss (1994) notes, that women in Muslim societies are socially constructed as a ‚communal symbol‘ and territory (ibid:127). Historically, restricted mobility for women served practical but also symbolic needs (ibid:127). By associating Muslim women strongly to symbolic terms, they faced marginalisation and forms of discrimination in accounts of the Muslim world. Stereotypes and fear of radicalism have grown steadily throughout the West when we talk about Muslim people. They are experiencing a form of ‚othering‘ that accelerates Islamophobia even stronger since September the 11th in 2011 (Benn, Pfister, & Jawad, 2011:2). The idea of then an oppressed, victimised and disadvantaged Muslim women fits perfectly into this Islamophobic discourse (ibid:2). In coping with the postmodern age problems not only occur in Muslim societies but as well in other traditional societies following Christianity, Hinduism or Buddhism. They are confronted with globalised social systems and a culture based on „youth, change and consumerism“ (Ahmed & Donnan, 1994:12-13). It promotes noise, movement and speed which contrasts the ideals of traditional religions like quietness, balance and the discouragement of change (ibid:12-13). They contradict the term of culture too. Culture represents a dynamic process within a societal setting and is defined by a constant transformation and transaction between several social systems and it establishes normative ways of social interaction (Treichel, *Verstehen kultureller Systeme*, 2011:24). This concept is based on movement rather than stagnation. Thus, the postmodern age is not only based on youth but on fluid identities that create and recreate themselves through social and cultural adoption to specific circumstances. The sporting world in the Western context often highlights men’s and women’s bodies visibility. This body culture emphasizes a transparent self that is in accordance with the dress code regulations of international sports federations. If there is no flexibility within the regulative framework Muslim women and girls are often excluded because they are not able to participate due to their religious beliefs (Benn, Pfister, & Jawad, 2011:3). How Muslim women practice sport is variable and depends on their own religious regulations. Some attend in sport courses or sport related activities „with head, legs and arms covered“, others choose to wear Western sporting outfits that exposes their flesh and others prefer to practice in sex-segregated settings (Jawad, Al-Sinani, & Benn,

2011:32). There is no normative way of Muslim women to dress or behave when participating in sport. Religious practices vary as well and have to be interpreted within the context it appears. In Islam sport is an important medium for health and as the prophet says: „*The strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than the weak believer.*“ (Dahl, 2017:197) Through embodiment people can represent certain religious values. Faith is therefore „*embodied in the sense that representation of the body, appearance, physicality, social interaction and behaviour are integral to religious identity, to lived reality of the daily embodiment of religious belief. Embodied faith reflects outward manifestations inseparably connected to internalised belief.*“ (Dagkas & Benn, 2012:115)

These outward manifestations include dress codes, rules on social interaction and formulate embodied religion and culture. They are deeply influencing the body and its figurative connotations. Values, beliefs and behaviours are playing an important role in defining those normatives“ (ibid:115). One example of this outward manifestation is the wearing of the hijab and represents one of the most conflicted discourses. The wearing of the hijab implies a religious and cultural conflation of differing religious views and lived realities throughout the world. In some cases, wearing the hijab refers to personal embodiment of a commitment to faith and represents a public and symbolic dimension (ibid:116). In the Western contexts Muslim women who decide to express their religion by wearing a hijab can result in solidarity and approval for some people and in other cases alienation from others that are not familiar with it (ibid:116). Especially diaspora communities face these issues in daily life. The common sense within Western context understands the hijab and other forms of islamic dress as it would still symbolise that Muslim women’s“ place to be in the home“ (Ahmed, 1992:225). But Ahmed (1992) suggests, that the opposite is the case. By adopting dress codes according to their religious beliefs it legitimizes their presence outside the home (ibid:225). „*Islamic dress is the uniform of arrival, signaling entrance into, and determination to move forward in, modernity.*“ (ibid:225)

Walseth and Fasting (2004) support the notion of prejudices against minority women as „cultural caretakers and bearers of the different ethnic groups' cultural identities“ (ibid:120). In the colonial context women of either the colonized or the colonizing groups represented the markers of difference between those groups (Charrad, 2011:422). By framing women as a symbolic meaning they indicate similarities or contradictions through their physical appearance – embodiment. During the time of independence movements all over the Arab world have used female figures as symbols of national pride and honor (Gerami, 2005:450). It cultivates the idea of women as a

distinctive cultural marker.

According to Dahl (2017) there is no such thing as the ultimate islamic body concept because it relates to many other socio-economic circumstances. (ibid:196). The body is considered firstly as a product of the society and secondly as an active producer of the society. In connection with the islamic aspect the conception of the body is a product of the islamic belief system but it also creates a society through sport (ibid:196). In this context the embodiment of religious practices and rituals are expressed through the human body. A main argument is the difference within Islam as a belief system and, as Dahl (2017) states, a „*cultural form, interpreted, conceived and manipulated by nation, states, political movements and different interests groups to legitimate their political agenda, social conduct and (sometimes pre-Islamic) practices*“ (ibid:203).

In sport, Muslim women face restrictions of a gendered curriculum and high visibility of the body. Due to their embodiment of faith they often express in secular societal context markers of cultural difference. But there are possibilities to overcome those constraints by flexible dress codes within sport clubs and organizations. Kleindienst-Cachay (2011) found out, that among Muslim women and girls in Germany karate and taekwondo represent popular types of sport (ibid:97). One reason is the demand of wearing a sport related uniform that covers the body. In this way, it is easy to accomplish religious beliefs with sporting practice. Other forms of sport like boxing and kickboxing tend to be really popular especially in the Turkish diaspora (ibid:97). Often, other members of the community attend the training as well and therefore reassure the supervision of the girls (ibid:97). Girls that participate in sport can motivate other girls from Muslim background and function as a role model for them. Thus, sport can mediate and establish new ways to rethink existing values and conceptions on gender for Muslim women and girls (Bahlke & Kleindienst-Cachay, 2017:146). If sport clubs are flexible it can both empower girls to participate and express their faith by wearing appropriate sports apparel (ibid:140).

Azzarito (2017) stresses, that gender as an important question often needs to be embedded in an intersectional framework (ibid:251). Many Muslim women and girls are confronted with feminist approaches and their own system of religious values. Femininity as well as masculinity exist in this continuum fluidly and variable because they always interact with social class relations. In sport forms of domination and subordination are produced and negotiated through this continuum (ibid:251). While many attempts are undertaken to involve and include Muslim women and girls into organized sport the hidden curriculum hinders them to successfully participate (Walseth & Fasting, 2004:123). Gender and gendered appropriate behaviour within organized sport continues

to be dualistic and presupposes sexuality (ibid:123). The dualistic concept of Aristotle that „saw female bodies as defective, women being ‚as it were an impotent male, for it is through a certain incapacity that the female is female“ was implemented by both European and Arab civilizations (Ahmed, 1992:29). But we have to keep in mind that it is important to deconstruct unifying rubrics like ‚America‘, ‚The West‘ or ‚Islam‘ because they „invent collective identities for large numbers of individuals who are actually quite diverse“ (Said, 2003). It should be seen as analyzing groups within groups to grasp social relations and underlying contradiction. Minorities such as diaspora communities do not represent a homogenous group but rather a system of subsystems (Walseth & Fasting, 2004:114). For Jawad, Al-Sinani and Benn (2011) this means, people who work in sport and education systems should acknowledge diverse „ways in which Muslim women and girls practice their religion and participate in sport and physical activity, for example, choices of activity, dress and gender grouping“ (ibid:36). International sport federations are trying to constitute a more flexible regulation system for dress codes to encourage Muslim women and girls to participate and take into account that propriety, safety and integrity are fundamental values that need to be incorporated (ibid:36). In the local context teacher and trainer needs to collaborate with young people and their families to establish a relationship of trust and understand their own lived values. This avoids separatism and ‚Othering‘ – „means treating difference between people hierarchically – for example, in terms of superiority and inferiority – thereby dismissing the needs of others as invisible or unimportant“ (Dagkas & Benn, 2012:116).

### **3. A Step Forward - Physical Liberation and Empowerment Through Sport**

The previous chapter outlined that sport implies imperative gender regimes which are culturally and socially constructed and the product of a long historical development. Despite its constraining character sport is also a way to express „physical liberation“ and „cultivate cultural power“ (Cahn, 2015:314). Arduous and joyous activity belong to the daily base of female athletes. According to Cahn (2015) sport can encourage women to „bend gender“ and „express their own sensibility“ (ibid:314). Being physically active and engaging in sport such as rugby enables women to control their bodies and decide for themselves in their best interest. The evolving resistance against the state and men as the executive tool of power helps to increase physical liberation and acts as a way of empowerment.

*„It therefore seems ironic that, until recently, the majority of feminist researchers have ignored female sporting bodies, nor have they always seen the relevance of physicality or empowerment*

*through physical activity, to feminist politics*’. “ (Carle & Nauright, 1999:129)

The United Nations Inter-Agency Task Force and the International Labour Organization acknowledge sports as an important instrument for social inclusion and the development of peace (Groenmeyer , 2010:111). Within a heterogeneous society sport provides elementary possibilities to interact with people from different economic and social classes, ages, sex and ethnicity. This creates a transcultural space of communication and sociality. In particular for women and girls with strong family responsibilities sport clubs open up new realities separated from home and other social spheres. Kleindienst-Cachay (2011) argues, that in sport women and girls develop friendship and thus means an „enormous enrichment“ for girls and women (ibid:101). Gender equality in sport is one agenda that comprises not only the equal participation of both men and women but furthermore sport as a tool to promote general gender equality within a broader social context. According to the UN report from 2007, women and girls can achieve cognitive and physical capabilities through sport that challenges gender stereotypes and deconstruct entrenched discriminatory power relations (ibid:8). Chase (2006) concludes in her foucauldian analysis on women’s rugby that *„rugby does empower women and encourage them to rethink their bodies“* (ibid:244). The International Working Group for Sport for Development and Peace supports this argument. They suggest that participation in sport helps to increase self-esteem, self-confidence and improves the ability to have control over one’s body (Haugaa Engh, 2010:63). Feminist theory on sport stresses the importance of sport as an integral instrument of women to control their bodies and make choices in their interests (Cahn, 2015; Hargreaves, 1986,1996; Hall, 2016; Messner,1988, 1990), although they acknowledge the conflicting circumstances women and girls face in sport. The female sporting body is a conflicted political terrain that either reinforces gender normatives or questions those. For Hall (1996), feminists have often overlooked the theoretical and progressive potential of the relationship between sport and gender negotiation (ibid:50). Since women entered the sporting world it has been associated with a „genuine quest for equality, control of their own bodies, self-definition“ and liberation of the existing male dominated organizational framework (Messner M. , 1988:198). Messner further argues, „it remains for a critical feminist theory to recognize the emergent contradictions in this system in order to inform a liberating social practice“ (ibid:208).

As Cahn (2015) critically reflected, the ‚athletic girl’ represents a striking „symbol of modern womanhood“ and fabricates new opportunities of sport participation without competitive elements (ibid:7). Besides that, it involves the notion of ‚being fit’ but not jeopardizing the male

dominance (ibid:7). It has to be noted, that women continue to challenge discourse of gender relations by repositioning their physicality. Through discursive moments and collective reflection in physical activity women and girls claim agency and „space for sharing“ experiences and by doing so they are able to change restrictive regulations in sport that maintain to be a male preserve (Sterk & Knoppers, 2009:80). It is about deconstructing gender-related boundaries and the creation of new meanings that provide all people who participate in sport a nondiscriminating experience. Research has shown that when girls and boys are exposed to risk together, they started to collaborate (Hargreaves, 1996:154). This helped to lever gender boundaries. They started to work in unusually co-operative ways and created an atmosphere of trust that reduced gender ‚appropriate‘ behaviour and encouraged camaraderie (ibid:154). It is evident that female athletes are a striking force in establishing a new order within the sports world. Even this is not broadly displayed, they contest sexist barriers, restrictive perceptions of femininity and physical appearance through their increasing involvement in sport (Chinurum, Ogunjimi, & O'Neill, 2014:2). The ongoing production of ‚traditional‘ gender stereotypes remains a rigid feature of present Western society but the last centuries showed that traditional ideas about femininity and masculinity can be critically scrutinized (ibid:2). Dualism as the main ideological setting of identities turns to be modified slowly.

Still, femininity as a defining concept of womanhood is part of the expected gender roles. They are maintained by both men and women within daily life and extends to physical practice as well. As femininity collides with male attributed sport women are often „dissuaded from weight lifting, sweating, grunting, being aggressive“ and therefore participating and competing in sport in general (Chinurum, Ogunjimi, & O'Neill, 2014:2). Another form of conflict is represented by touch that is governed by gendered meanings. In sport women and men physically interact with each other. Touch as a physical form of interaction is coded in particular rules that were constituted in early years (Sterk & Knoppers, 2009:110). Despite this, gendered meanings give to touch are adaptable and modify themselves according to societal circumstances. The shifting potential of touch and other physical performances create, as Sterk and Knoppers (2009) note, human agency for women and children (ibid:110). Not only agency is provided through physical activity. Sport entails a positive impact on „mental health and well-being“ (Chinurum, Ogunjimi, & O'Neill, 2014:4). It enhances physical health among women and enables to cope with new social and cultural environments that can be transferred into other aspects of life (ibid:4). Sterk and Knoppers (2009) conclude, gendered meanings are the product of „culture, tradition, and personal experience“ and located in a continuum that is constantly reshaped (ibid:33). Through

women's and girls' increasing participation in athleticism they contest existing gender relations and gain equality not just within sport but within the whole societal context. By acquiring control of their bodies female athletes „challenge male domination“ in the sporting world (Carle & Nauright, 1999:129). In particular team sport supports leadership skills as every team member can be a referee, captain or coach to a certain extent. These developed skills can be useful in work life and other social realities (Meier, 2015:974). Furthermore, women and girls have the opportunity to meet new people in team sport and sport clubs and can share experiences. This „meeting ground“ allows them to establish new relationships between „not only strong women physically but also mentally and emotionally“ (Birrell & Richter, 1994:225-230). Enjoyment, physical confidence and fulfilment can be enriching, sensuous experiences that can be achieved through sport. Thus, it is relevant for sports feminists to engage women and girls in the broad spectrum of physical practice. Hargreaves (1996) calls attention to women's and girls' contradicting environment in the sporting world and possible actions that can be implemented.

*„But such philosophy [women's and girls' mobilization to participate in sport] relates to definitions of oppression and freedom which are highly complex; they are to do with the values that people hold, with the contexts in which they are in, and with larger structures of power. The choices facing sports feminists are similar to those facing feminists involved in other aspects of culture:*

1. *Co-option into a male sphere of activity*
2. *A separatist all-female strategy*
3. *A co-operative venture with men for qualitatively new models in which difference between the sexes would be unimportant“ (Hargreaves, 1996:41)*

As Hargreaves (1996) already remarks, social interaction including physical activity and gender relations are situated within a cultural framework and thus can be good or bad. The corporeality of a physical active body plays a significant role in a liberating process and helps women and girls to repossess themselves. Reclaiming physicality represents a symbolic and real level. It intervenes in the patriarchal practices in sport and diminishes those restrictions caused by long held traditions (Theberge & Birrell, 1994:365-366). Ideas of being feminine or masculine can be considerably distinguish not only in sport. The shifting process reveals new forms of femininities and masculinities that are also entering into the sports sphere (Sterk & Knoppers, 2009:83).

In 1972 U.S. President Richard Nixon introduced a new law called Title IX that proclaimed:

*„No person in the United States shall, on the basis of sex, be excluded from participation in, be denied the benefits of, or be subjected to discrimination under any education program or activity receiving Federal financial assistance.“* (U.S. Department of Education, 2018)

After that law was officially implemented a boom in female participation throughout the U.S. occurred. It happened in high school, colleges and recreational sport and enfranchised many women and girls into existing organized sport (Birrell & Richter, 1994:222). According to Messner (1988), since then it intended to successfully include women into sport and push for greater equity (ibid:197). The Austrian state followed in 1979 with a law to protect people from discrimination – general law on equal treatment (Wiener Antidiskriminierungsstelle für gleichgeschlechtliche und transgender Lebensweisen). The educational context is subsumed in the III. part of the equal treatment act called „equal treatment without distinction of sex or ethnicity in other areas“ (Bundesministerium für Digitalisierung und Wirtschaftsstandort, 2019). According to the office of the Equal treatment act, full protection against discrimination (protection against discrimination based on sex, origin, religion, disability, belief and sexual orientation) currently exists only in VET schools. In general education, at least in this law, there is only protection against discrimination based on ethnicity. Often the discrimination occurs in intersecting ways and therefore need to be analysed accordingly (Initiative für ein Diskriminierungsfreies Bildungswesen, 2017:83). Although official initiatives were made they both did not facilitate the wished shifts. For example Title IX fails to address racial disparities occurring in administration and other levels of athletic participation like coaching (Cahn, 2015:288). The increased presence of women through Title IX could not change the system of sport as a male preserve. It still maintains to function under male authorities and „virtually unchanged“ (Birrell & Richter, 1994:222). Despite women’s arduous participation in sport the increasing amount of female athletes sets new parameters within the sporting context and is nevertheless highly important for advocating gender equity.

#### **4. Ritual Elements of Sport**

Social interaction is imprinted by ritual elements. They ensure social stability and continuity although they are continuously historically and socially modified. The sporting world contains a rich supply of ritual elements. Bryson (1994) argues: *„Sporting events have a ritual element*

*which continually strengthens the hegemony and the dimension of male solidarity, not just for the teams, but for the men in general.*“ (ibid:59) Rituals appear to be contextual. The importance of the performed ritual within sport and other social dimensions depends on the frequency and social setting (ibid:60). People need to categorize the objects of thought and emotions according to its social meaning and relevance. Due to the fact that sport represents an important cultural form it not only implies ideological instruments but also rituals as a way to reflect societal developments including dramatic expressions. Hargreaves (2014) emphasizes the need to identify the connection between those aspects to analyse the power relations that are perceived through sport (ibid:51). The athlete which belongs to the realm of the sporting world resembles the existing relationships that evolved due to its embodiment. In a repetitive form those athletes male and female, are reaffirming the values of the social order.

*„Sport has ritual significance when character [is the actor] based on valued social attributes is demonstrated. In such situations, the athlete is an exemplary figure who embodies the moral values of the community and thus serves as a symbol of those values.“* (Birrell, 1981:373)

This sharpened statement can though be experienced in ordinary life like in the ballpark on a Saturday afternoon. Sport and physical activity with their commonplace nature seem to not reflect social order in particular but there are subtle and evident attributes that are displayed in daily settings and embody the ‚character‘ of a specific athletic ideal (ibid:374). In rugby as the main research field rituals are an integral part of the sport. It includes dances, songs, specific phrases and much more. The rugby culture is characterised by a variety of ritual elements. They reinforce existing values and attitudes in order to maintain their localised ‚social order‘ (Gill, 2007:421).

## **5. Feminist Theories on Sport**

As the former chapters exemplified, women’s and girls’ conflicted situation in sport is not something that suddenly arose but is rather a historical development interwoven with power relations. Progressive ideas from many scholars established feminist theories that examine those power relations and try to overcome them. The concepts of femininity and masculinity are “socially and historically constructed” (Hargreaves, 1996:145). These concepts are embodied

practices and reflect existing power relations in behaviour, norms, attitudes, styles and so forth. Hence, Hall (1996) classifies the body as a cultural and social product that represents all conflicts of society (ibid:53). Until feminist theories occurred in sport sociology there was a lack of „understanding that sporting practices are historically produced, socially constructed, and culturally defined to serve the interests and needs of powerful groups in society“ (Hall, 1996:6). Even in 2019 sport practices continues to express subordination and exploitation of minorities and serves the powerful groups. These disparities in particular of gender equity are further defined through reduced opportunities, financial and social support for girls and women worldwide (Capranica, Piacentini, Halson, Myburgh, Ogasawara, & Millard-Stafford, 2013:99). During the 1960s theories about sport had an uncritical perspective and rather positivist orientation. They focussed on the positive outcomes through sport and failed to analyse sport as a social phenomena. According to Hargeaves (1996) in the 1970s and 1980s new approaches entered the sphere of sport theory and integrated political and economic issues like drugs and hooliganism. Since then the theoretical discourse turned out to be more critical about sport and recognised sport as a social phenomenon, including forms of dominance and subordination (ibid:6). Other accounts stressed the importance of the athletic body as an symbolic representation with ideological connotations (Messner M. , 1988:202). Judith Butler’s statement about the performing act of doing gender represents the fluidity of gender which comprises its historical construction:

*„If gender is a kind of a doing, an incessant activity performed, in part, without one’s knowing and without one’s willing, it is not for that reason automatic or mechanical. On the contrary, it is a practice of improvisation within a scene of constraint. Moreover, one does not “do” one’s gender alone. One is always “doing” with or for another, even if the other is only imaginary.“* (Butler, Undoing Gender, 2004:1-2)

Sport in this context is a physical activity that acts as an instrument to reproduce dominance and subordination thus maintain the social order. But if we identify the potential or constant shaping and reproduction it also means that there are ways of opposition, resistance and transformation of those relations (Theberge & Birrell, 1994:361). Throughout the feminist discourse on sport there is no common sense. There are contradictory perspectives that either question whether female athletes should simply adapt themselves into a male defined sport or if sporting women and girls should seek for alternatives and create new models of sport that suits a variety of bodies and gender forms. Other perspectives focused on the „organic relationship between sports and

other cultural formation“ that cause change and continuity through agency and structure (Hargreaves, 1996:7). These social and cultural dynamics are linked to power relations. It is important to not homogenise the group of women as if they would all be the same and critically reflect the notion of ‚general‘ increased access for women to sport (ibid:10). Women are a complex and heterogeneous groups that include several sub-groups and gender. Often sport sociologists analysed gender in a framework of a „sex role paradigm“ (Messner, 1988:199). Within that scope it was examined how physical activity affects one’s individual sex role identity, values and attitudes (ibid:199). This overlooked the social construction and power relations that occur in sport participation and its fundamental influence on gender relations. Reproduction theory in particular, which is related to Althusser's concept of unconscious and automatic reproduction of capitalism, emphasizes the notion of sport as an one-way determining tools for a capitalistic regime (Hargreaves, 1996:21). Sport serves then a an act of conformity and impedes free expression, opposition and variations of social identities. Such formulations ignore the social and cultural complexity of sport. Serious conflicts are endemic to sport and specifically to gender relations in sport. Reproduction theory is pessimistic and static in its theoretical foundation and silent to individual experiences of sexuality, struggles, change and gender relations (Hargreaves, 1996:21). Feminist approaches consider actions as a meaning of social transformation. As Birrell and Richter (1994) formulated: *„It is not so much what women could say or do, it is that they choose to take some action.“* (ibid:242) To find a way in detecting social disparities feminist theories focused on ethnographic research – specifically participant observation and interviews because they enable to understand „women’s needs, desires, opportunities and constraints“ (Hargreaves, 1996:11). Applying this form of research we acknowledge the concept of culture as a lived experience that is constantly constructed and restructured through the interaction of people (ibid:12). Those meanings can be reproduced, resisted and transformed. Women in sport are a complex group including varying meanings why they participate in sport and how they perceive it. Ethnographic research can answer those questions and frame them theoretically. The constant process of agency and constraint can be symbolised in a ‚wheel model‘.

*„At the hub, constantly keeping the wheel in motion, is the historical dynamic of structural constraint (which includes structural, ideological, and characterological oppression) and human agency (which includes critical thought and resistant, transformative action). The spokes of the wheel represent varied forms of oppression: class, race, gender, age, and sexual preference (others certainly can be added). The rim of the wheel represents social theories of liberation, whose role is to link the spokes in such a way that the hub can move the wheel.“* (Messner & Sabo, 1990:10-11)

For my empirical part I chose two approaches to theoretically frame my results. They will be the concept of hegemony first formulated by Antonio Gramsci and applied to gender relations and sport by Jennifer Hargreaves (1986, 1996, 2014). Hegemony should provide a theoretical foundation to introduce then the practical concept of ‚Undoing Gender‘ (Butler, 2004; Deutsch, 2007)

The second concept ‚Undoing Gender‘ emphasized by Judith Butler (2004) and in particular for sport by Francine Deutsch (2007) highlights some strategies to overcome gender restrictions and push forward agency forward for women in sport.

## **5.1 The Theoretical Concept of Hegemony**

In a society hegemony is a tool for predominance or control of an ideological regime like the state or masculinity in sport. It describes power relations that constitute a common sense and serve to maintain social order but provide ways of resistance and opposition (Hargreaves, 1996:22). It therefore serves to „explain continuities and discontinuities in sport“ (ibid:22). Sport is positioned within the framework of a hegemonic masculinity (ibid:22). Determining accounts of behaviour are certainly part of hegemony but it rather acknowledges the complex ways in which common sense and consent in specific forms of domination arise. Thus, hegemony as a theoretical foundation establishes the understanding of social and cultural consent that involves a complex set of meanings surrounded by restricting but also liberating modes (ibid:115). Sport as an ideological instrument maintains hegemonic structures of male dominance that are expressed through social interaction and organisational structures. Hegemonic masculinity in sport means the domination of women and deviant forms of masculinity. Being a women or men are social categories that are created by sociality and cultural codes. In sport all those categories are maintained and reinforced through sex segregation, specific attitudes and behaviour. As Connell (2003) notes:

*„The meanings in the bodily sense of masculinity concern, above all else, the superiority of men to women, and the exaltation of hegemonic masculinity over other groups of men which is essential to the domination of women.“* (ibid:85 )

In sport physical appearance is essential and exposes the body to the public. Not only its appearance but also „the appropriation of muscle, capability and machinery“ are tools for men to

subordinate women's physicality (Cockburn, 1981:44). Muscles are an important feature for a men to have and represent idealized masculinity. In contrast, females are expected to be fit but not be too muscular and therefore are indeed constructed as women.

The theoretical concept of ‚hegemony‘ (Gramsci, 1999) was first formulated by the Italian communist Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) in his *Prison Notebooks* (1999). The term ‚hegemony‘ refers to two modes of representation. Quentin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith provide an informative distinction: *„On the one hand it is contrasted with “domination” (and as such bound up with the opposition State/Civil Society) and on the other hand “hegemonic” is sometimes used as an opposite of “corporate” or “economic-corporate” to designate an historical phase in which a given group moves beyond a position of corporate existence and defence of its economic position and aspires to a position of leadership in the political and social arena.“* (Hoare & Smith, 1999:20)

Therefore, hegemony means both domination and resistance and is nothing absolute and repressive. Hegemonial structures are embedded in every level of society and represent ideological settings that stabilize and consolidate forms of domination and subordination. Those are often expressed by the dominance of “bourgeois ideas and beliefs” that were consolidated in science and philosophical discourses (Heywood, 2004:84). Gramsci stressed the importance of the establishment of a ‚proletarian hegemony‘. It was based upon socialist principles and values. For Gramsci, ‚scientific determinism‘ was something that could be rejected by a constant political and intellectual struggle (ibid:84). This concept enables the opportunities of resistance and contains a progressive potential. Ideological domination like hegemony is a phenomenon which is not finalized or inevitable. Hence, agency and the concept of autonomy become part of hegemony as an social process (Hargreaves, 2014:14).

*„Hegemony is not only the articulate upper level of ‚ideology‘, nor are its forms of control only those ordinarily seen as ‚manipulation‘ or ‚indoctrination‘.“* (Williams, 1977:110) It involves a „whole body of practices and expectations“ concerning the lived reality in its entirety like our perceptions of ourselves and our world (ibid:110). Through its vital system of meanings and values that constitutive and constituting in our perceived experiences they create a certain reality that „appear as reciprocally confirming“ (ibid:110). Hence, as it justifies a sense of reality which is often associated with a imperative sense it determines the experienced reality and blends realities that are located beyond those. For most people it seems therefore to be an absolute sense of reality although it is not. Hegemony is then „in the strongest sense a ‚culture‘, but a culture which has also to be seen as the lived dominance and subordination of particular classes“

(ibid:110). In sport hegemonic structures like the dominance of masculinity and male superiority are these senses of ‚absolute’ realities and seem to be inevitable. According to Adjepong (2016), social expectations of women athletes in sport like being ‚heterosexy-fit’ not only exemplify but confirm a hegemonic image of sporting femininity that aid male heterosexual amusement and pleasure (ibid:1492). The continual display of idealised highly feminine sports women perpetuate „normative ideas about masculinity, injuries and sport“ (Adjepong, 2016:1492). The analysis of sport and its relation to other spheres in society like the media, modes of production, education, family, ethnic groups, cultural practices and gender relation are requirements in understanding the current situation of women in sport. Hegemony provides an analytical framework for this considerations. Empirical data of women and their lived experiences in sport need to be included in order to connect questions of power relations and lived reality (Hargreaves, 2014:15). Lived realities implicitly negotiate hegemonic configuration on a daily basis. Hegemony is a system that is persuasive and understands people rather as participants than passive recipients of social and cultural forces (ibid:22). Thompson (1994) identifies, that sportswomen are also located in hegemonic configurations and negotiate issues related to gender during the process of physical participation. It relates further to social structure and distribution of power and influence (ibid:218). *„Essential to the understanding of the hegemonic process is the acceptance of conflict and possibility of change.“* (ibid:218) Those conflicts and changes are performed through individuals and groups in different social settings. Sport, media, educational and private context are actively creating collective values and meanings that can constrain but also empower women and girls. This dialectical relationship produces forms of determination either made by the collective or the individual. Thus, for Hargreaves (1996), female athletes are both determined and determining (ibid:22). Male hegemony in sport is connected to historical developments and defined as a process of construction and reconstruction. If we are able to understand and critically scrutinise this process it will further one be able to „break this domination“ - hegemonic regime (Bryson, 1994:47).

Cahn (2015) demonstrates several dimensions of male hegemony that occur in sport:

- *„First, sport has functioned as a site for both the policing and liberation of women’s bodies.*
- *Second, sport serves as a primary site for defining biological sex and cultural gender, producing the norms that govern manhood and masculinity, womanhood and femininity.*
- *Yet sport is also an arena for self-expression and self-definition, allowing individuals to perform or alter their “selves” in both mundane and profound ways.*

- *Finally, sport is a political arena wherein the actors constantly negotiate, and literally play out, issues of power and justice.*“ (Cahn, 2015:301-302)

Cahns (2015) explanation illustrates the existing containing but liberation circumstances for women and girls in sport well. Through its compelling character, sport veils ideological transmissions that are practiced everyday in a commonplace environment. Hegemony as a theoretical concept offers oppositional and transformative ideas to weaken present modes of domination and subordination and result in social and cultural change (Hargreaves, 1996:22). Since the appearance of feminist theory on sport male hegemony shifted and modified, thus, has never been a static process and reveals „both reactionary and liberating features of gender relations“ (ibid:22). In the sporting world many realities perceive institutionalised gender conventions differently. Sport clubs in particular serve as a meeting ground for women and create a space for identity formation and self-expression that has been historically an important domain for female athletes to express variable gender identities that imply also „queer sensibilities“ (Cahn, 2015:309).

To analyse gender relations in sport within the theoretical framework of hegemony it provides a better understanding of the complex processes that are involved in and expressed through sport like economic and political forces. Women and girls in sport are surrounded by an intersection of class, capitalism, ethnicity, age and gender relations and need to be recognised in order contextualise the lived experiences of young girls and women in organised sport. The female rugby team I am focusing on are confronted with the presented hegemonial structures and seek to either adapt or challenge male domination through various strategies. The empirical part implements questions that relate to the concept of hegemonic masculinity.

## **5.2 Undoing Gender as a Feminist Strategy**

Hegemony as a theoretical framework should provide the foundation to implement the practical idea of „undoing gender to refer to social interactions that reduce gender differences“ (Deutsch, 2007:122). As noted earlier, gender is a concept that was constructed through historical process and serves as a tool to legitimate domination and subordination. Thus, it is important to link oppositional strategies that emerge within a hegemonial system with feminist theory. Undoing gender refers to gender as a representation of a specific contextualised norm. The approach that gender is a norm demands a further explanation. Norms are, as Butler (2004) argues, linked to

social practices and create implicitly through accumulation a normalisation (ibid:26). A norm can be analytically separable from the embedded practice but it is difficult to de-contextualise its operation. Hence, as Judith Butler elaborates:

*„Norms may or may not be explicit, and when they operate as the normalizing principle in social practice, they usually remain implicit, difficult to read, discernible most clearly and dramatically in the effects that they produce. For gender to be a norm suggests that it is always and only tenuously embodied by any particular social actor.“* (ibid:26-27)

Norms are produced and reproduced through social practice and establish further norms that are connoted in its own way. This practice is applied onto other social contexts and diffused over several societal levels. Gender is therefore practiced and ‚being‘ done by either oneself or others. The term ‚do‘ indicates action like „to perform, to execute, to accomplish, to finish, to complete, to exert, to bring about: effect“ (Deutsch, 2007:122). Norms are continuously involved in creating gender through ‚normalised‘ social practices. Often gender is confused with sex and used to explain the differences between man and women defined in a binary system. But we need to properly differentiate both terms because they describe on the one hand the biological and on the other hand the social features of people. In some feminist theories sex is even another dimension of ‚doing gender‘ as it implies dominant ideas about femininity and not biological aspects. Sex is referred to the biological characteristics of male and female existence and should just be used to explain physiology, anatomy, genetics and hormones. Gender in contrast expresses all social and non-biological attributes that are constructed to differentiate between male and female (Delamont, 2012:7). This comprises clothes, attitudes, interests, behaviours and aptitudes. They all create distinguished categories of either masculine and feminine lifestyle (ibid:7). In daily life routines they are expressed and applied „as if they are the same“ (Hargreaves, 1996:146). Those practiced norms are interwoven with meanings and thus they produce ‚gendered structures‘ of daily life (Claringbould & Knoppers, 2008:82). Categories of gender relations are depicted in certain social interactions and appear in all societal levels. Gender identities are related to performances as they represent through embodiment certain gendered styles. The body is a central element in expressing meanings that are related to gender relations. As the concept of hegemony emphasises no form of domination is consistent and manifested. Power relations can change and turn their direction. Thus, gender as an embodied practice is never total or inevitable. Bodies constantly interact with each other and create realities. As Gill (2007) emphasizes, they are „flexible and open to interpretation“ (ibid:417). When we

apply gender it deemphasizes the ‚binary system’ of masculinity and femininity and is understood in multiple ways (Gardiner, 2005:45). Gender implies variable forms that can be both masculine and feminine at the same time. Undoing gender hereby means to generate a system that opens up to variable notions of gender and detects structures of gendered structures. Only by locating these we are able to overcome gendered norms in sport and other societal levels. Gill (2007) declares, that physicality is no criterion for a certain gender identity but rather its interpretation and expectations of the respective embodiment (ibid:417). Gender identities are associated to performance and enabled a development of „queer theory as a field and for the advancement of an anti homophobic political agenda in alliance with the movement for gay, lesbian, bigender, and transsexual rights“ (Gardiner, 2005:46). Deutsch (2007) stresses, it is important to acknowledge gender as a fluid concept of shaping and reshaping processes of social interactions (ibid:107). Undoing gender is an opportunity, as Butler (2004) articulated, „to undo restrictively normative conceptions of sexual and gendered life“ (ibid:1). West and Zimmerman (1987) published a paper in 1987, which focused on the process of ‚doing gender’. Although this article was highly important for the description of the process of ‚doing gender’ they failed to elaborate forms of resistance and strategies to overcome those gendered norms. They rather evoked conformity, instead of ‚undoing gender’ which stimulates resistance (Sterk & Knoppers, 2009:107). When we discuss ‚doing gender’ it is linked to practices and discourses that strengthen hegemonic constructed differences and thereby not questioning those. Undoing gender call for proactive participation in resistant strategies and discourses that critically reflect on existing power relations and suggest alternatives (ibid:108). Geramis (2005) statement concludes all featured aspects that need to be reflected and changed very well:

*„[...] (a) gender is socially constructed, and thus, gender identities are acquired; (b) power differential is societal and not natural; (c) the intersection of race, class, gender, and other social distinctions makes some categories of women privileged as compared with others; (d) gender privileges of masculinities must be made visible and thus challenged; (e) human biology is defined by the linguistic tools of a culture, and thus, biological hierarchies of race and gender are open to interpretations; and finally, (f) heterosexuality is a given culturally privileged sexuality.“ (ibid:449)*

Within in the context of sport these aspects play a significant role in establishing power relations. My research will focus on suggestions elaborated by Francine Deutsch. Deutsch (2007) emphasises five dimensions that need to be examined in physical activity. First, analyse social

interaction and search for appearances of gendered structures (ibid:106). „(2) *whether gender can be irrelevant in interaction, (3) whether gendered interactions always underwrite inequality, (4) how the institutional and interactional levels work together to produce change, and (5) interaction as the site of change.*“ (ibid:106)

Because culture and biology relates to each other in a constructed matter, it is always variable and changeable. Although it creates a relative autonomy resistant strategy question this autonomy by subverting existing institutional structures just like to ones within organized sport. Definitions of individuals are not fixed but rather established through certain stereotypes (Willis, 2014:133). Gender organises principles of institutions and everyday life. By diminishing gender it is intended to turn women into men or vice versa but rather „degenderize the best – and the worst – qualities of people“ (Lorber, 2000:90). By applying the concept of undoing gender to social interaction in sport it „both emphasize the use or development of practices or discourses that do not devalue, harm, exclude, or categorize“ (Sterk & Knoppers, 2009:108). It further comprises ideas of equal regard, encouragement, inclusion in association with women and men of all types and all types of masculinities and femininities are articulated in sport (ibid:109). Resistant strategies in sport ensure the understanding of a common humanity instead of gender role appropriateness and aid to create mutual care and responsibility for everyone within the society (Sterk & Knoppers, 2009:109). In general, no one individually is the initial cause for ‚doing gender‘ but rather the collective meanings that are expressed through norms concerning ideas about femininity and masculinity, that depict women as less valuable human beings than men (ibid:112). Birrell and Richter (1994) define a feminist located in the sporting world as a person who should deconstruct and reconstruct of existing hegemonial gendered structures (ibid:225). To successfully implement strategies of ‚undoing gender‘ in sport both men and women need to be involved as they all threaten the male hegemony and stress health, co-operation, enjoyment and deemphasise destructive competition (Hargreaves, 1986:117). Male hegemony is constantly inhibiting girls‘ experience in sport. Thus, ‚undoing gender‘ enables to critically reflect on the antithetical relationship between sport and femininity and to establish opposing strategies of physical enriching activities for all people. These strategies provide alternative visions of female physicality, empower girls to push for a greater equality and diminish repressive notions of femininity and masculinity (Hills & Croston, 2012:594). Young people especially young girls need to be incorporated in order develop a training that suits their ideas of physical experience as well as enables marginalised youth to participate (Ginwright & James, 2002:39).

## 6. Object of Research – Rugby Union

### 6.1 Rugby as a Male Preserve

Rugby represents a specific type of sport that comes along with not only its game but other forms of social dynamics such as a club culture. Nauright and Chandler (1999) identify rugby as a melting pot of „class, gendered, racial and national identities“ (ibid:xiii). Gender relations belongs to a conflicting issue in rugby. First, we need to clarify the core idea about the game and its basic features. The structure of the game follows different game settings. A rugby team can play in different numbers – either seven, ten or fifteen people per team. The task is to move „the ball across the field by carrying, passing, kicking or grounding“ (Fallon, 2010:233). Hence, many people belong to one rugby team that is accompanied by other elements like a clubhouse, pitch and constitutes a certain subculture. Gill (2007) claims that rugby teams are often characterised „by close bonds between players“ (ibid:421). Those relationships are founded on „mutual trust and dependency“ (ibid:421). On the pitch, every member of the team depend on their others reliability. Dunning (1994) calls rugby union a „macho“ subculture, that is enacted off the pitch in either social events or outside the club house environment (ibid:169). Often, club houses have bars and other elements for celebration. Connecting the social aspects of rugby and its physical demands this particular kind of sport is, according to Willis (2014), „strongly associated with male identity, with being popular and having friends“ (ibid:123). These archetypal features are represented not only in rugby but other kinds of team sports like football. „Physical achievement and masculine activity“ frame rugby and are understood as being the same (ibid:123). Historically, definitions of intense friendship were combined with the sense of comradeship that constituted the „willingness to put their body on the line for the good of the team“ (Nauright & Chandler, 1999:203). These characteristics helped to create the mindset of a „good soldier“ and prepared them to „sacrifice“ themselves for their nation (ibid:203). So, historically the game educated men to be a good soldier with deep patriotic values. This was preserved for men and constitutes therefore „social enclave where the principal activity is male“ (Dunning, 1994: 171). In rugby male dominance remains still present. Another expression of „macho“ subculture in rugby represents the consumption of beer „to excess, often accompanied by rituals and races which tend to increase consumption and the speed with which inebriation is reached“ and appears, as Dunning (1996) argues, to be a common case after matches (ibid:169). Azzarito (2012) argues, that sport like rugby „are seen as particularly relevant to male identity formation

as they emphasise masculine body performance such as forceful actions, physical contact, muscularity, bigness, power, and strength“ and therefore „fixate boys’ sense of self as masculine in opposition to girls’ feminine behaviour in sport“ (ibid:72). On a metaphorical level masculinity shapes all aspects of rugby and creates a material base of solidarity among men (Thompson, 1994:214). These types of relation actively influence the physical experience for women in rugby. Carle and Nauright accentuate: „*Although liberal feminists may be delighted at the apparent breakdown of the masculine exclusivity that has been imposed on rugby in the past, a through investigation of the format of the game as it applies to women highlights a sporting field that reinforces and echoes historical, masculine-oriented stereotypes.*“ (ibid:128)

Songs play a significant role in rugby. They are performed not only on the pitch but moreover in social events and celebrations after a match. Most of rugby songs contain discriminating phrases and contribute to „embody a hostile, brutal, fearful attitude towards women and the sexual act“, as Dunning (1994) critically reflects (ibid:170). Thompson (1994) supports the argument of rugby as an „constantly offensive“ area for not only women but also homosexual people (ibid:214). In many discourses those dynamics are described as the „rugby tradition“ (Thompson, 1994:215). In particular cases the central theme those ‚traditions’ involve „mocking, objectifying and defiling women and homosexuals (ibid:215). Carle and Nauright (1999) openly addressed denigration of homosexuals and women in rugby through practices that reinforce masculinity like body contact and performance (ibid:130). References of marginalization that reflect the constant struggle of dominance and subordination compound the situation for many women in rugby.

## **6.2 Redefining Concepts of Femininity Through Rugby**

Although there are conflicting circumstances for women and girls in rugby many of them showed more and more interest in participating. Since the 1970s the participation of women increased significantly in the „British Isles, elsewhere in Europe, North America and Australia“ (Carle & Nauright, 1999:128). We have to acknowledge the complex development of women’s sport. Hargreaves regards this process as a „not coherent, unified process“ and calls attention to its contradictions (Hargreaves, 1996:273). Women entered now almost every corner of the sporting world. Team Sports with aggressive characters like football and rugby belong to the „fastest-growing female sports“ (ibid:273). In 1983, when the UK Women’s Rugby Football Union (WRFU) was formed it consisted of 12 founder members (ibid:273) and initiated a timeline of

new organised forms of women rugby all over the world. Shortly after the UK WRFU Italy, Canada Japan and so forth followed. The participation rate highly increased over the time. According to the UK Rugby Football Union in 2013 15,500 female rugby players „were registered to play full contact rugby“ and their vision is to involve 100,000 females in rugby (England Rugby, 2013). In comparison to 2,000 women playing rugby in 1993 this development represent an increased interest in rugby among women (Hargreaves, 1996:273). In Austria the participation differs greatly. According to Rugby Austria just 10% of the active players are female (Rugby Austria). There is a great need to integrate more female players in rugby. Therefore Rugby Austria created the project „Kriegerin“ in cooperation with 100% Sport and the Sportministerium with the aim to inspire women and girls to participate in rugby (ibid). Their image video shows females of all body types and technical levels, thus they emphasize the attendance of everyone that is interested in discovering their own „inner warrior“. The notion of a ‚warrior‘ can be regarded as a conflation of masculinity in rugby and new self-definitions of femininity. Although rugby is considered as a mainly male dominated sport it continuously serves as a new meeting ground for women of different gender and self-definitions, thus as a way of agency. Hargreaves’ (1996) research showed, that „women who play rough physical sports, requiring strength and speed express the sense of satisfaction and exhilaration they get from participating“ (ibid:273). While rugby union has ‚traditionally‘ „all-male enclaves that are beyond women’s capacities“ other development arised that enabled women and girls to compete in international rugby matches. The first international Women’s Rugby World Cup took place in 1991, which was not supported or financed by the International Rugby Board (since 2014 named World Rugby) and set the foundation of international women’s rugby competition (Wright & Clarke, 1999:230). In Carle and Naurights (1999) research on women playing rugby many women expressed their „genuine love for rugby and the social interaction surrounding the game“ (ibid:146). Through physical contact sport like rugby the players were able to „test their bodies“ and discover them in many new ways (ibid:146). Hence, they felt a constant joy while practicing rugby despite „hostile attitudes“ from the outside (ibid:146). These hostile attitudes are not only against women’s decisions but also their embodiment. In rugby matches and trainings bruises and other injuries can occur and, as Chase (2006) formulates „present a Research done by Adjepong (2016) has shown, that women rugby players are not afraid of getting bruises but are ‚wearing‘ them proudly because they interpret it as a way to challenge the social construction of femininity and women’s ‚bodies as docile“(ibid:1491). Despite their redefining concept of women’s sport many of the women faced criticism outside the sporting world. Adjepong (2016) notes:

*„The bruise works through claims to an identity as ‘not like other women’. Instead sportswomen use their bruises to identify them with dominant discourses of physical strength in sport rather than as victims of male violence. But in fetishizing their bruises as marks of honour, these athletes discount how other women might be triggered by seeing women bruised and with black eyes. Consequently, they inadvertently use their privilege to trivialize the oppression of other women and reinforce systems of domination that sustain intimate partner violence and oppress women more generally.“ (ibid:1499)*

It has to be mentioned, that Adjepong uses „privilege“ as a term that refers to different social circumstances among women. In her research „the majority of respondents for this study were white and almost all middle class“ and thus are just one perception of a highly heterogeneous group (ibid:1494). This exemplifies the complexity of women in rugby and other types of contact sport. To conclude, those contradictions in sport are an active part of women’s participation. Through rugby women and girls both „challenge and reinforce dominant discourses of sport and sporting bodies“ (Chase, 2006:229). They are also able to discover and experience their bodies and test their limits when they play rugby (Gill, 2007:421). In encouraging women and girls to participate in rugby they develop a female agency and in turn empower other women and girls further to attend the training. Hargreaves (1996) stresses the idea of collective work through local organisations „with well-thought-out strategies to win support and change opinion“ (ibid:287). While femininity is constructed as a normative notion in western society women rugby players contest them by exposing injuries and expressing multiple forms of femininity (Chase, 2006:229). They do not except gendered ideas of a female bodies. When female athletes tackle during training or a match, Chase (2006) identified this as a „powerful act“ which „makes them feel powerful“ (ibid:239). According to Fallon (2010), rugby has been ranked in several studies „as a masculine sport“ with features of physical fighting and violence (ibid:34). Gender role conflicts are caused by normative ideas of femininity and physical intense types of sport like rugby that ‚can‘ have violent features in the game. In many cases women rugby players are then entangled in social and cultural contradiction. As there is a significant increase in ‚masculine‘ sport like soccer, rugby, boxing, wrestling, weight-lifting and motor racing it demonstrates a shift in male hegemony towards a more variable and diversified approach of both femininity and masculinity (Hargreaves, 1986:117). Thus, it needs to be contextualised as a constant conflict of domination and subordination. Power relations are still highly present and practiced in daily life but as it was analysed hegemony is never total and hence able to be transformed and redefined. For Hargreaves (1986), women rugby players often incorporate specific characteristics of

masculinity like fierce competition and aggression and therefore „actively collude its reproduction“ (ibid:117). It can be argued, that pure resistance will help the situation of women in sport. It is rather a question of context and relation concerning the specific situation. In Chase (2006) research many women who participated in rugby „changed how they felt about their body“ (ibid:243). Further One she follows the notion of hegemonic relations in sport by identifying the female rugby body as a sphere of „contradictory discourses that produce docile, resistant, and transgressive bodies“ (ibid:245). Gill (2007) supports this statement. Sport as a mainly masculine world is structured accordingly. By entering this ‚masculinised‘ world women are „reembodying gender identities [...] but brought into direct conflict with the structures policing gender identities and boundaries“ (ibid:418). Engaging in rugby disrupts existing gender norms and, according to Gill (2007), causes „social instability“ (ibid:416). Women rugby players face those constraints but can also push for greater equality and a reconsideration of gendered sporting practices and attitudes towards femininity and masculinity. Therefore women and girls who participate in rugby are part of a change although it is a long-term process that simply does not reconstruct society over night.

## **7. Conclusion**

In my theoretical considerations I wanted to outline the societal circumstances women and girls face in sport, especially in rugby union. Sport can be defined as a social practice that serves to maintain a, as Theberge and Birrell (1994) have argued, a „patriarchal privilege, unrestricted capital accumulation, white skin privilege, compulsory heterosexuality and the reproduction of privilege“ (ibid:362). That means, it emphasizes a system of linear power relation and encourages domination and subordination of specific classes. Although this is part of sport as a social practice it has to be analysed in dialectic terms. The hidden curriculum (Azzarito, 2012) of sport ignores the option to develop forms of resistance and progressive ideas. As I outlined, the terminology of sport as a physical practice and performance is difficult to grasp and define in a general definition. I used Hargreaves (2014) notion of sport „*a as physical training, physical education and movement, as well as those in contemporary use such as physical recreation and outdoor pursuits*“ (ibid:23) Women and girls face a dilemma in sport and in particular rugby because they are framed by a masculine defined world but constantly seek to find new solution to

transform their position. The struggle for autonomy and physical liberation are a requirement for transformation within a relatively restricted space like sport.

Therefore I see the necessity to differentiate between either domination but also liberation and use the theoretical concept of hegemony (Gramsci, 1999) and adapted to the context of sport (Hargreaves 1986, 1996, 2014; Hall 1996) to explain those forms of continuities and discontinuities within a society. For my empirical part it was important to understand the social and cultural context of women and girls in general. Commonly women and girls are identified as an inferior and homogeneous group. Those approaches were questioned and re-defined to express the varied forms of gender (Hargreaves 1986; Hall 1996; Butler 2004). Femininity and masculinity are furthermore categories that are not belong to either men or women but represent a fluid process and of adoption and rejection.

In media representations of female and male athletes clear distinctions are made to provide a biased society which maintains to manifest male-dominated hegemonic structures in sport. Although media coverage of women's athletic performance tends to gain more societal recognition it still tends to alienates, trivialises or demonizes deviant forms of femininity (Messner M. , 1988:206). This involves embodied intersectionality. In my subject of analyse Rugby Opens Borders (ROB) almost exclusively young girls with Muslim faith attended the training and were re-defining conceptions about faith and physical practice. Hence, it was inevitable to include approaches about sport and religion as it was an active part of the girls' identity.

What is really needed for considerations concerning the empirical part is not only a theoretical concept but an applied strategy to unveil forms of discrimination and subordination but also of resistance. Undoing Gender originally formulated by Judith Butler (2004) but further one linked to sport by Francine Deutsch (2007) are the practical tool within hegemonic structures. Hegemony then is the theoretical foundation of Undoing Gender. I argue that Undoing Gender is an act of movement that implies a theoretical discourse of power, resistance and liberation.

In the second part of this thesis I will present the case I have chosen as the subject of my analysis. Rugby Opens Borders is a typical emerging site of struggle having the potential to produce new forms of agency and enable to rethink exciting gender relations not only in sport but within the society as a whole. The analysis showed that although there are many constraints concerning gender relations surrounding both girls and boys they seek to find ways to question and re-think

those existing prejudices. Rugby Opens Borders is a project that should provide another opportunity originally for young refugees to escape tragic memories or simply enjoy reciprocal physical activity.

Regardless, its projects humanistic and progressive ideas, the training is still influenced by historical developed assumptions about perceptions of femininity and masculinity. Thus, we have to contextualize and acknowledge the potential of change over time.

## **PART II – EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS**

The second part of this thesis provides an insight of the object of research and will examine gender relations in terms of training, social activities and spatial as well as social organisation of the project. Therefore, a comprehensive overview of the project including its genesis, aims and status quo will be presented. This part will start with the methodological framework of the research to provide a guideline on how the data was coded and related to the specific research question.

### **8. Methodology**

During the research, a qualitative method was chosen to provide the participants an opportunity to present a complex, non-limiting and interactionist method to successfully describe their experiences while participating in rugby and outside the training. Therefore the empirical data is following an interpretative and qualitative research design that allows to acquire all necessary data and explore the site of research in detail. The research included a mixture of several methods involving semi-structured interviews, participant observation and focus group discussion. Utilizing those methods enables to understand everyday life experiences of girls and women in all its peculiarities that would not be possible to grasp with quantitative methods. Hence, the collected data was used not only as a repertoire of information but rather a narrative that constructs a set of meanings and symbolic clusters to facilitate a correlation of object of research and data. While researching every interview was recorded and approved to be content of this master thesis. Field Notes were made of every attendance and observation in order to provide a systematic overview of experiences and impressions. In addition to semi-structured interviews

with participants, coaches and organisers. The people who were interviewed held different positions in the object of research in example persons who were in the inner core of the Rugby Opens Borders organization and involved in the decision-making processes that took over public relations and communication as well as negotiation with public authorities, as well as volunteers who have been playing rugby for many years and are active members of the club who just want to help and develop this project and the participants of the actual Rugby Opens Borders training. To get a comprehensive understanding of the organisation and structure of the Donau Rugby Union space, I have talked to Udo und Benni who are the leading representatives of the project.

The main insights were gained through participant observations and semi-structured interviews. 7 interviews have been carried out and include varied perspectives concerning the object of research. All interviews have been recorded with and face-to-face conversation. The interviews were conducted in English and German as not everyone was able to speak in German fluently. All interviews were transcribed and anonymized to allow a conversation on conflictual and sensitive issues. It is impossible to interview all desired interlocutors because some people rejected an interview for personal reasons. Nonetheless, it was relatively uncomplicated to reach my interview partners. Rugby Open Borders has several media channel and communication tools to get in contact and inform each other. There is a Whatsapp group providing all information and updates concerning the times and structure of the training. Being part of this group chat enabled me to contact many participants, coaches and organisers. Apart from digital devices I joined the training and club life regularly and created a relationship of trust. I approached prospective interviewees via e-mail, telephone or personally in the area of Rugby Union. Attending the training and actively engage in the training facilitated new interview opportunities and established a relationship between the participants and myself. *„Here opportunities for an interview often arise spontaneously and surprisingly from regular field contacts.“* (Flick, 2009:169) While we trained together spaces of communication developed and opened up a way of entering the lived ‚realities‘ of both girls and boys. I specifically used semi-structured interviews *„to reconstruct the interviewee's subjective theory about the issue under study“* and provide space for further assumptions and thoughts which enable a re-examination of issues discussed (Flick, 2009:153). The content and length of the conducted interviews varied. Talking to Udo, Benni, Minnie and others who represent the organisation team already had formulated ideas and perceptions of specific issues as they are confronted with those situations quite often. Concerning the girls and boys who participate in the training of ROB expressed occasionally uncertainty and therefore replied in short sentences. The ethnographic interview as another tool I

implemented is a rather unstructured ‚friendly conversation‘ with a particular aim on certain issues. *„It is best to think of ethnographic interviews as a series of friendly conversations into which the researcher slowly introduces new elements to assist informants to respond as informants.“* (Spradley, 1979:58) Despite those friendly conversations I tried to establish my position as an anthropological researcher repeatedly to not create a misunderstanding relationship. Particularly in cases like communal meals and other social activities it was a suitable method. While in the beginning some irritation has arisen not only from my side but from the ones of the participants, through active participation and continuous presence irritation could be vanished. Especially with the boys like Isi and Ali it took me a while to gain their trust and attention. This ‚trust‘ emerged after I was not able to attend the training and observed it instead. Ali, one of the boys who is part of ROB could not train either. We sat next to each other and talked about his journey coming from Afghanistan to Austria, gender and other topics during the training. Since then, he would salute me and agreed to have an interview with me.

Mies (1983) associates feminist research with rather qualitative than quantitative research because it enables an open method that acknowledges women’s voices and needs as a lived daily experience.

Complementary to interviews, I engaged in the training, observed the area and participants, joined the meal after the training, helped to cook for the participants together with other volunteers and watched several rugby matches to develop an understanding of the game and its rules. Participant observation was required to approach the outlined research questions and be able to answer them comprehensible. Because contradicting aspects arises when analysing interviews and Field Notes it generated interesting insights. Interview settings can cause some biased outcomes in particular concerning gender relations. I will further examine these issues in the following chapters.

During the fieldwork I encountered some problems associated to the ethical nature of the research. The majority of the participants represent age groups who are under eighteen and therefore minors. A considerable amount of my fieldwork has been carried out among young people between twelve and twenty years old. Thus, ethical questions concerning minors required a sensibility regarding personal contact and the interview settings. It includes further a precaution and special care for the researcher. This means I tried to not harm, irritate or unsettle the young people during the interviews. The manner and behavior of interviewers are, therefore, of big importance, as special steps are needed to establish good rapport with children, interviewers

should be cautious dealing with specific topics, which could disturb or worry the minors, such as their relationships with others in their peer group, and those, which risk creating tensions between them. Another task is to integrate parents or anyone acting as the guardian of any minor. They need to take part in a research project as they are the legal responsible person and must be confident in a minor's safety and in safeguarding of his or her rights and interests. In order to get information and be able to conduct an interview with minors, I obtained consent from their guardians (parents). Regarding the focus-group interviews I have received permission before conducting an interview from a relevant adult overseeing the location (a trainer), who has overall responsibility for the protection of a minor and can monitor the situation. In order to conduct photo and video recording a special permission was obtained from the Rugby Opens Borders managing team.

The tables below will outline and present all fieldnotes and interviews I generated over a one year period. During this time I was able to compare, reflect and analyse the empirical data in a retro perspective matter. The structure and social organisation of the training and project changed during my research. To not get lost in my empirical data, I used Spradleys (1980) suggestions for field notes and documentation.

I structured my field notes accordingly to maintain a corporate system for evaluation and analysing. They contain, as Spradley (1980) suggests "experiences, ideas, fears, mistakes, confusions, breakthroughs, and problems that arise during fieldwork" (ibid:71). After every fieldwork I immediately tried to write and document my insights, experiences and conclusions. In the chart below the selection of field notes are presented, that I used for this thesis.

Interviews			
Name	Role at Rugby Opens Borders	Date of Interview	Interview Setting
Minnie	Former teacher of the ROB girls team, former member of Donau Rugby women's team	08.04.2018	Face-to-face at the Donau Rugby Clubhouse, semi-structured interview, recorded
Udo	Founder of the project	22.04.2018	Face-to-face on the side the rugby field, semi-structured interview, recorded

Focus Group Interview (4 girls and 2 boys)	Team members of ROB (not attending anymore)	29.04.2018	Face-to-face on the side of the field after the match, semi-structured interview with a Focus Group, recorded
Bennie	Trainer for the ROB boys team and program representative (no trainer anymore, Mato is now head coach), member of the Donau Rugby men's team	13.05.2018	Face-to-face, semi-structured interview, recorded
Sali	Team member of ROB (now in the regular girls rugby team)	24.06.2018	Face-to-face in the clubhouse, semi-structured interview, recorded
Isi and Ali	Team member of ROB	10.03.2019	Face-to-face in the clubhouse, semi-structured interview, recorded
Mato	Head coach of ROB since January 2019, member of Donau Rugby men's team	29.04.2019	Face-to-face next to the field, semi-structured interview, recorded
Judi	Team member of ROB, recently joined the team	12.04.2019	Face-to-face in a coffeehouse, semi-structured interview, recorded
Sophie	Former ROB Team coach of the girls	16.04.2019	Face-to-face after the training in the changing room, semi-structured interview, recorded

Selection of Fieldnotes 2018-2019		
Type of Observation	Date	Keywords
Participation in Training	15.04.2018	Tryout, new girl, active participation

Observation of the Training	13.05.2018	Tryout, new girls, new abilities
Observation of the Training	27.05.2018	Tryout, no new girls, small group, Ramadan
Participation in Training	17.06.2018	Not many girls, complain
Observation of the Training	25.11.2018	Tryout, new girls, winterbreak
Participation in Training	24.02.2019	Beginning of the Season, one new girl, mixed team now
Observation of the Training	10.03.2019	No new girl, girls from the regular rugby team, informal conversation with Ali
Participation in Training	22.03.2019	New girl, small group, injured myself
Observation of a rugby match, Donau Rugby men's team against Slovenian Rugby men's team	23.03.2019	Cheering together
Participation in Training	29.03.2019	No girl at all
Participation in Training and Dinner together	07.04.2019	Judis enjoyment
Observation of the Space (Clubhouse)	12.04.2019	Focus on men's rugby team
Participation in Training of the Donau Rugby girls team	16.04.2019	Different technical level

## 9. Rugby Opens Borders (ROB)



Fig. 1 Rugby Opens Borders (ROB) official Logo. Retrieved April 12, 2019, from <http://www.rugbyopensborders.com>

## 9.1 Spatial Organization

In this section I will examine concepts of space and connect those to gender. Historically, gendered space was initiated to express power relations and serve certain social needs. Urban space involves gendered regimes that extend to the degree of sex segregation in many parts of the urban social life like toilettes, locker rooms, lavatories and more. On the basis of the example of the club *Rugby Union Donau* (Meierestraße 20, Vienna) I want to analyse their gendered spatial organization and draw on notion that gender and space are socially constructed.

The studies of space and gender represent a theoretical consideration that can be traced back to Durkheim's idea of socially differentiated space, and before that to Lewis Henry Morgan's work on kinship and territory. Many scholars argue that spatial relations are deeply linked to issues of gender and reproduce social relations that establish forms of power relations and subordination. Moore (1986) identifies space as a set of "symbolic code[s] and/or as a reflection of social categories and classifications" that can be analysed through a structuralist framework (ibid:2). Lefebvre (1991) states:

*„Space is conceived of as being transformed into 'lived experience' by a social 'subject', and is governed by determinants which may be practical (work, play) or biosocial (young people, children, women, active people) in character.“* (ibid:190)

Those determinations are expressed through materialized constructions of meaning and further emphasize the idea of a classificatory system of life that enables people to "separate themselves

from nature and in doing so create a cultural order which is not that of nature” (Moore, 1986:2). Moore (1986) further concludes that “space is seen as representing social relationships through ideological structures” and are therefore embedded in a broader social and historical context (ibid:74). Linking Moores (1986) and Lefebvre's (1991) argument to the sphere of sport it provides an idea of how gender relations are expressed through space (including objects, transformation and reproduction of social order).

*„Anne Williams research (1989) shows how primary-aged girls and boys have sex-linked attitudes abilities in sports and physical education, linked to their experience outside school. Separate programmes of games are what many children expect and accept.“* (Hargreaves, 1996:152)

The statement of Hargreaves (1996) illustrates institutionalised ways of gender relations that impact the lived experiences of young people and furthermore foster the reproduction of those established gendered expectations in daily life. During my research I faced those reactions to several tasks and exercises as well. I will further explain that in the following chapters. Massey (2001) additionally connects place to space and gender and identifies this triangle as an reciprocal process.

*“That is, in their very specific construction as culturally specific ideas – in terms both of the conceptual nature of that construction and of its substantive content – and in the overlapping the sets and connotations with which each is associated. Particular ways of thinking about space and place are tied up with, both directly and indirectly, particular social constructions of gender relations.”* (ibid:2).

Often the term of womanhood has been associated with the space of ‘home’ or ‘local’ and thus was further linked to symbolic codes of ‘nature’. Again, this implied a dualism that contrasted men to women in terms of space, place and social responsibilities. Massey (2001) advocates a critical engagement in dualistic conceptions of “the either/or variety, around concepts of place-identity which call upon exclusivity and boundedness, and the sentimentalized association of place with home” to develop a reconsideration including varied connotations of space and place referring to its social and cultural context (Massey, 2001:13).

During my research I tried to look closer at the space - location facilities of Rugby Union Donau - with the focus on gender relations. This implied analyses of the clubhouse, rugby field and other parts of the area. While the lounge in the clubhouse was being renovated during my research the other rooms remained the same.

Rugby Opens Borders is located at the area of *Rugby Union Donau* at Meiereistraße 20 in Vienna. This area belongs to the 2nd District of Vienna and is surrounded by the Ernst-Happel Stadium and the *Prater Park*. The Ernst-Happel Stadium represents one of the most important sporting locations in Vienna. When there is a soccer game or concert, many people passing the Rugby Union Donau area followed by noises and sounds from the stadium. As the site of research is partly surrounded by the Prater Park, a lot people passing the area. To provide a clear idea of the space and its neighborhood I used a Google Maps section and prepared a detailed draft of the specific Rugby Union Donau area.

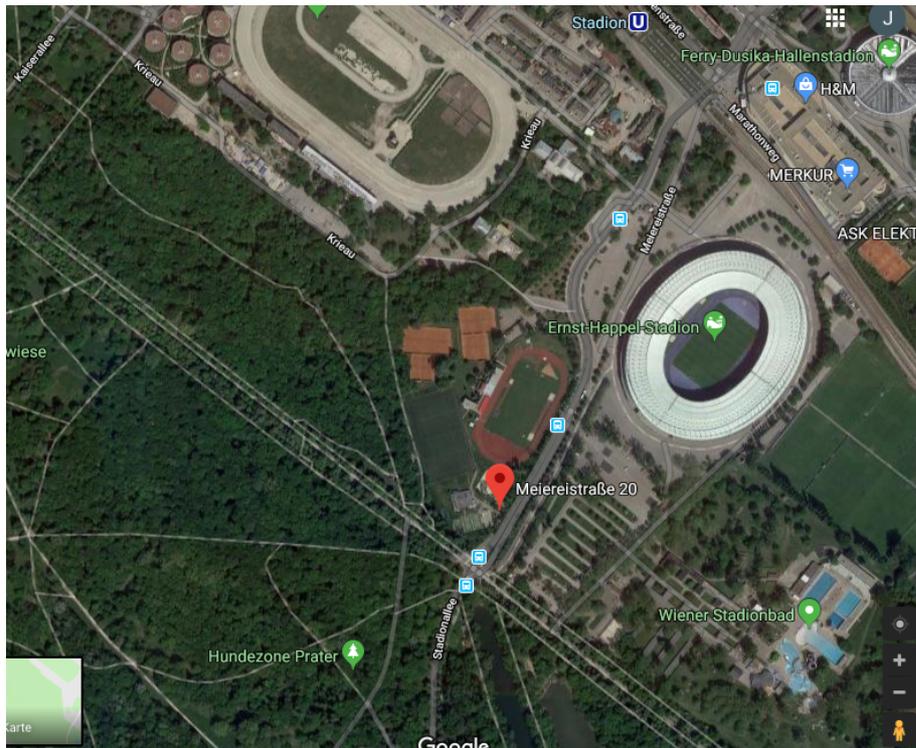


Fig. 2 Google Maps. (n.d.). *Rugby Union Donau*. Map data ©2019 Google. Retrieved April 09, 2019, from <https://www.google.com/maps/place/Meiereistraße+20,+1020+Wien/@48.2067319,16.4117731,1112m/data=!3m1!1e3!4m5!3m4!1s0x476d0739ab83ad35:0xb12899040ea4cbf5!8m2!3d48.2051089!4d16.416998>. Screenshot by author.

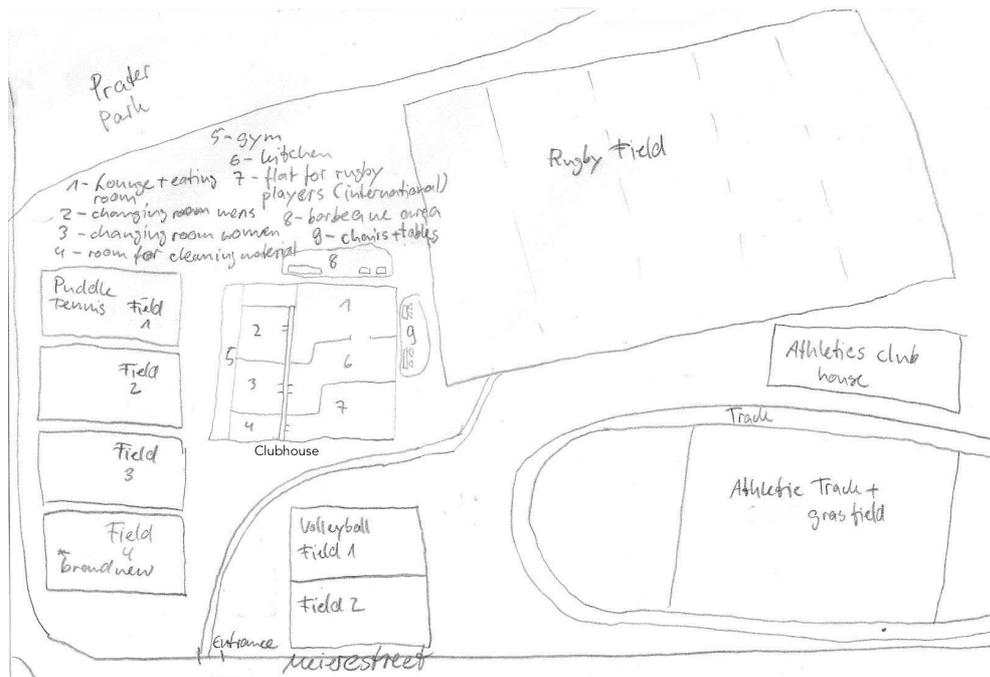


Fig. 3 Detailed Draft of the Rugby Union Donau Area

The area is therefore located in a part of Vienna which is defined as a space for exercise, recreational activities and entertainment like sporting and musical events. Occasionally the *Liliput Bahn* can be heard during the training sessions as it passes through the *Prater* and drives parallel to the Rugby Union Donau area. Within the Prater Park several attractions are permanently installed and serve tourists and citizens of Vienna as an amusement park. The northern side of the field borders with a *Leicht Athletik Zentrum Wien* as well. The closest metro station *Stadion* (stadium) already displays the nature of not only the site of object but its surrounding neighborhood. On the territory of Rugby Union Donau there is a rugby field, four puddle tennis grounds, a sandy surface with three beach volleyball nets, a barbecue place with a row of tables and the clubhouse, changing rooms, a kitchen, a veranda, a gym and a common club room are located. During the week and at the weekends people who are not related to rugby are using the space for practicing, puddle tennis or beach volleyball. On sunny and warm days they would bring friends or family and have a picnic or other activities on the ground. The Rugby Union Donau area is thus used in many different ways that are linked to different social forms of interaction. The clubhouse itself provides a locker and changing rooms for all people who access the area and represents one of the central elements of the site. The rugby field and clubhouse constitute the most important spatial parts of the area concerning the Rugby Union Donau Club itself. If matches are held or the tournament season starts the clubhouse turns into a social venue. Besides social activities the clubhouse facilitates a housing option by providing a small flat for international rugby players. Mato is currently residing in the clubhouse. He is from Brazil and

plays for the men's team of Rugby Union Donau and is the head coach of the Rugby Opens Borders team.

Although the space is demarcated by a fence the main door is always open. There is no prohibition for any kind of person. It is an open space that can be entered on a daily basis.

On the rugby field nets are applied for prevention. This net separates the athletic centre from the rugby field and symbolically from the rest of the area. During my research the girls' and boys' ROB team would train on the left side of the rugby field depending on the weather. Sometimes the separation of the teams was visually expressed by colourful marks, placed on the ground. The left part of the rugby field contains benches. The girls would rest during the breaks and have some water on the benches or just lie on the ground. The boys' team would prefer to sit in front of the fence (about two meters high) that separates the Prater Park from the Rugby Union Donau area. During sunny days the fence provides shade. Since 2019 the team has changed their structure and trains now where the boys team used to train – right next to the fence.

The barbeque section (marked on the Fig. 2) is located behind the clubhouse. This is the place where the participants have their after-training meals and socialize. There is a grill at the corner and a row of tables. When the training is over usually one long table is utilized to provide space for every participant and volunteer that cooked and assisted. I could observe that frequently boys and girls chose their space at the table corresponding to their respective gender. If they would not attend with a friend the situation changes and they just sit down next to anyone. In general, participants who came on a regular basis developed a sense of trust to the others and not care if a boys or a girl sits on the next chair. After the meal the trainers ask several people to volunteer with washing dishes and helping to clean the table.

Analysing the spatial organization helped to develop a certain understanding of the social relations that are created through the material environment. During my analysis I referred to Francine Deutschs (2007) notion of „Undoing Gender“. I tried to incorporate those given tools presented by Deutsch (2007) to unveil gendered structures in spatial organization and search for efforts that question and diminish those gendered structures in particular at ROB.

The clubhouse itself contains the changing rooms, kitchen, lounge area and gym. The gym can be accessed through the respective changing room and encompasses miscellaneous sports devices, equipment, weights and mats. It is covered on one side with mirrors and the other with several

windows. The range of weights allows everyone irrespective of age, condition and weight to exercise. On the wall there are many championship prizes of the womens and mens team. During my research I joined either Minnie (one of the former coaches of the girls team), Sali (former ROB member), Mato (current head coach) or just observed them training. Minnie and the others often told me, that they need the gym to stay in shape. Although it would be almost 30 degrees outside they enter the gym and exercise. Judi (recent ROB member) frequently expressed uncertainty when doing an exercise. She mentioned several times *“Ich kann das nicht, ich kann das nicht”* although she never tried it before. Ali (ROB member) would sometimes make jokes about Judi. He would tell, that she is not able to perform those exercises (Fieldnotes 7th April 2019). Weight lifting in particular in rugby is needed to develop muscle groups that help to perform better during the match. The girls adjust the weight for themselves and train on a weekly basis. Within the training the gym served as an alternative when it was too cold or too rainy to train outside due to its small space. The gym itself contains many heavy weights and a small section of light weights (2-4 kilos).

The Wintergarten provides, next to the common space, an additional space for relaxing. There are several chairs and couches. Many photographs are arranged there. Looking closer I found just one photograph of the women's rugby team surrounded by over 15 photographs of the men's rugby team. In the common space/eating room the club members repainted the ‚wall of fame‘. The ‚wall of fame‘ serves as a prestigious tool for people from either the club or visitors. The wall consists of the a drawn logo of the club and photographs of rugby matches and is painted in the significant green color. When I first saw this wall no photograph of the women's team was presented. After I mentioned this to Ike (manager of ROB) he said, this would be changed immediately. But after two months nothing happened and it is still the same arrangement (Fieldnotes 23 March 2019).

Next to the entrance of the club lounge room there is an advertisement board with different types of booklets including invitations to the charity games, information about rugby, Encyclopedias of sport, timetables and invitations for women to try out Lacrosse Sport in the Vienna Cherokee team, whose training is held on the same rugby field.

The advertisement board also showed some flyers of the club. I recognized that the main message of the flyers mainly refers to men. Although they are displayed in different settings they are still just men. The slogan is *“Rugby Union Donau – reißt mit”*. Almost all advertising material refers

to men. Women are not displayed as a vital part of the rugby world.

In the common room there is a bar, tables with chairs, a projector for watching rugby matches and other games and sofa. The veranda and barbeque area is accessible through the lounge and eating room. On the bar there is a charity box of the ROB project. On the wall in the common room there is a table with different aims and goals and values of the Rugby Union Donau club. There is also a chart with values and norms of the rugby club including ethical and social values as well as rules concerning the behaviour on the space and in the clubhouse. The main values are according to the chart respect, fairness, team spirit, tolerance and the focus on all age groups and genders. Among the goals of the club is the professional growth of male and female trainers and successful games in national and international tournaments among youth, female and male teams. Applying Moores (1986) notion of space as the “representation of social relationship through ideological structure” (ibid:74) and Lefebvres (1991) idea of space “as being transformed into ‘lived experience’ by a social ‘subject’, and is governed by determinants” it can be argued that the spatial organization of the Rugby Union Donau is primary dominated by masculinity (ibid:190). It then reinforces a dualistic approach of gender relations although they try to include different age groups and genders, as they proclaim.

## **9.2 From the Conception to the Creation – How it all Started**

*„I see that sporting aspect is a kind of icebreaker, because, especially in contact sport, you get to know each other physically, and then the barrier drops, you are more... it is easier to get in a real contact, you really see how someone is doing and then you can figure out, do you need help or everything is alright.“ (Bennie, 2018:3)*

Rugby Opens Borders (ROB) is a side project of the Rugby Union Donau Club and was initiated in 2015. Udos rich description of the history and progress of the programme helped to understand how it all started including its main objectives and goals. ROB is a relatively young volunteer project with the aim to help young people from different social and cultural backgrounds to socialize, create a sense of belonging, be physical active and improve their physicality in general. ROB is a project that is actively supported by other rugby clubs like Stade Rugby Vienna, Rugby Club Innsbruck and Rugby Austria.

The project's initial focus were young refugees which represent a vulnerable social minority in the Austrian society and face intercultural differences like an unstable social and economic

environment and a lack of contact with the local population. Since 2018 and new policies on migration and refugees the amount of people entering Austria has drastically decreased. Therefore the project aims to invite not only young refugees but girls and boys in general who are interested in rugby and are not able to finance the training and just want to get started. During my field research there were girls from Syria, Afghanistan, Mexico, Czech Republic, Slovenia and other countries who joined the training. The ROB training is based on voluntary help by either club members or friends and family. The majority of the girls were Muslims.

The core aims of the project are:

- Foundation of a rugby team without borders
- Offering a regular training
- Participation in several tournaments like United World Games (UWGs)
- Intercultural events with concerts in cooperation with other rugby clubs
- To promote an intercultural dialog and create a sense of belonging
- Social activities and workshops to support a mutual learning (Lichtblau-Zakrzanska, 2016)

The founding member of the project was Udo and is currently represented by his brother Ike. Both are responsible for the projects organization and structure. Udo was one of the Rugby Union Donau trainers. After he injured himself in 2015 he had to stop playing and training and therefore spends his time for social activities concerning the club. As Udo was not able to perform in the rugby matches his head coach asked him to launch a volunteer project due to some spare money the club had. This led to the idea of ROB.

*“I was playing rugby myself for almost 10 years and at some point I had a slight injury and didn’t play for a while and during that time our head coach approached me and he said that since for the [...] So, he just approached me and asked “Hey, now we finally have a place that we could run a social project, do you have an idea what we could do there?”. I don’t know why he asked me. He said that he thought that maybe I have contact to some migrant community and maybe I have some plan what project we could do there. I found it super interesting, because since I wasn’t playing I had more time anyway. I said that I was certainly happy to look into that to see if I could come up with a good idea. And so, I talked to a couple of friends and brainstormed and wrote down some very preliminary ideas.” (Udo, 2018:1)*

Basically, the project emerged through a direct intention of the club and sought to provide social projects for the local population. When Rugby Opens Borders (ROB) initially started the influx of refugees was not then something foreseeable, as Udo explained.

*„Yeah, actually it's been quite a while now. We started in 2015 which was also the year when suddenly this big influx of refugees happened. But we started it two or three months before that, before we really know it was coming... That was pure like [...] Nobody was thinking about that issue at that time. What we just thought that there was already the need since we already had refugees there even before more came from Syria etcetera. Yeah, that was really good because we had the project in place and like two or three months later when the situation escalates we were kind of ready to help and, yeah, get things running. I think our first training was in May 2015. That was our first official ROB training.“ (Udo, 2018:1-2)*

Udos knowledge about the conflicts young refugees are confronted with was little and increased during the implementation of the project.

*“I ended up talking to a friend who worked in a refugee house, a shelter for girls, so I learned a lot about the fact that specially in Austria we have so many especially unaccompanied minor refugees, who more often are in the situation that they end up in the shelters. And when they come and don't have an asylum, until they have an asylum which can take some months, a year, even longer, they are often not really doing something except sitting in the shelters with all the other traumatized kids.” (Udo, 2018:1-2)*

The project follows an inclusionary concept. “Inclusion” according to Mayer & Vanderheiden (2014) encourages a systematic approach that acknowledges the emotional and social layers of a heterogeneous society that comprises minorities and majorities (ibid:37). Inclusion can be understood as an extended concept of integration, that aims to improve critical aspects of integration (ibid:37). ROB enables young boys and girls to actively engage not only in the training but in the organization as well. Further the coaches encourage the participants to attend the trainings of the other Rugby Union Donau teams.

*„They're some players that are already been here since three years, but of course we have a lot of fluctuations. We always try to have a group size of around 30 kids that we work with. Actually, we try to make them to play even in the clubs. We offer them that they can train with the clubs for free which is great because they can play more rugby, and this is where the real integration*

*happens when they play in a team that is composed entirely of people that are local here. That's where they can also bond and make friendships, so you don't only have refugees playing with refugees. We want them to reach out for other Austrians. We also get the Austrians from the local teams here and they run the training with us.*“ (Udo, 2018:7)

By identifying the rugby club as a space that implements a set of “symbolic code[s] and/or as a reflection of social categories and classifications” (Massey, 2001:2) young refugees who join the ROB project are confronted with those social categories and classifications. Rugby as a space that involves a “macho” subculture is enacted off the pitch in either social events or outside the club house environment (Dunning, 1994:169). Often, club houses have bars and other elements for celebration. Connecting the social aspects of rugby and its physical demands this particular kind of sport is, according to Willis (2014), „strongly associated with male identity, with being popular and having friends“ (ibid:123). In rugby male dominance remains still present. Another expression of „macho“ subculture in rugby represents the consumption of beer „to excess, often accompanied by rituals and races which tend to increase consumption and the speed with which inebriation is reached“ and appears, as Dunning (1996) argues, to be a common case after matches (ibid:169). Azzarito (2012) argues, that sports like rugby „are seen as particularly relevant to male identity formation as they emphasise masculine body performance such as forceful actions, physical contact, muscularity, bigness, power, and strength“ and therefore „fixate boys' sense of self as masculine in opposition to girls' feminine behaviour in sport“ (ibid:72). On a metaphorical level masculinity shapes all aspects of rugby and creates a material base of solidarity among men (Thompson, 1994:214). These types of relation actively influence the physical experience for women in rugby. Carle and Nauright accentuate: „*Although liberal feminists may be delighted at the apparent breakdown of the masculine exclusivity that has been imposed on rugby in the past, an investigation of the format of the game as it applies to women highlights a sporting field that reinforces and echoes historical, masculine-oriented stereotypes.*“ (ibid:128) Those determinations are expressed through materialized constructions of meaning and further emphasize the idea of a classificatory system of life that enables people to “separate themselves from nature and in doing so create a cultural order which is not that of nature” (Moore, 1986:2). Udo as well mentioned the exclusionary and intolerant nature of rugby but further highlighted its important values “this kind of like moral ideals that you also want to give back to the society” (Udo, 2018:1)

*“Rugby union became a game played, controlled, promoted and watched by men. Rugby as a historical cultural practice has long reinforced the general notion of men in sport as an overclass that has resulted in men’s greater access to opportunities, rewards and power”.* (A.Carle & J. Nauright, 1999: 57).

Those historical developments were issues the ROB team wanted to actively discuss. Although contesting gender relations was not the priority on their list, the project still provided a range of tasks that question gendered practice in rugby. For Sophie, coach of the ROB girls, rugby serves as an integral tool for equality concerning the body.

*„Ah, rugby is extremely inclusive. So, no matter what size you have you tall, small, a little bit heavier or not you have a place in the team. For me it is the ultimate team sport cause you do really everything for your teammates like your entire body it hurts after a game. You really give everything. So, and the entire rugby community is like a family.”* (Sophie, 2019:1)

Another fact is the value of belonging to a “family”. For many of the coaches and participants ROB helped to make young girls and boys feel like they are part of the “global rugby family”. The feeling of belonging and a community is the striking argument that coaches and participants explained to express the main idea of the project. Rugby serves as a point of entrance. Bennie, former coach of the ROB boys, supports Sophie argument:

*“It doesn't matter where you do in a world, you join the rugby club and you basically get friends in a week or so, team work obviously, integrity, fun and friendship – these are the core values, I think, that you can, as you already said, transfer in your everyday life, which will help you come around.”* (Bennie, 2018:5)

Udo outlined the main motivation of the project: *„For us it's not the main aim that they all became great rugby players. It's more important that they can come here, and we can help them grow.”* (Udo, 2018:6)

Ali, one of the participants, explained his impression of the project:

*“Yes, in the beginning there were many people from different cultures and countries. It doesn't matter where you are from, if from Somalia or Afghanistan, heavy or skinny ... everybody can play. It is about having fun in the game and that you don't insult anyone .... like, hey, you are*

*from there and there and therefore I don't like to play with you. It is rather about a good game and that you just have fun together and learn good things.” (Ali, 2019:1)*

The regular training was held until January 2019 every Sunday at 3 p.m. and lasted for about two hours. After the training some volunteers cooked a meal for everyone. Since 2019 the training is held every Friday at 4 p.m. and every second Sunday per month at 3 p.m.. In the beginning of the project Udo tried to find volunteers that would overtake tasks and support him in general terms. Together with participants Udo created a logo and started together with Benni, Sophie and Minnie promoting ROB by presenting the rugby sport in refugee shelters all over the city. Within a short time a big base of volunteers was created. There was no hierarchical barrier to enter and to be part of the project.

*„In the beginning it was...we did not have to look for volunteers, because a lot of people thought it was a great idea, great initiative, especially when so called Refugee crisis, whatever you want to put it, started, there were a lot of people wanting to help, and offered to help, by cooking, if they did not know anything about rugby, so pretty soon we had a big base of volunteers, and a lot of them still stick to the project. We also included a lot of friends, and friends of friends who came and join us, or people who just heard about it in the news, so we do not struggle with volunteers and we do not call volunteers, if somebody is interested just give us a call, or text us and we will figure something out.“ (Bennie, 2018:2)*

Generally, the project relied on the social network of friends and family. This further means a low hierarchy in organization. In 2019 Mato, the current head coach of ROB mentioned some issues that arose. During my observation of the space on the 12th of April 2019 Mato expressed some problems:

1. People who organize the project are rather about organizational and structural stuff than about the kids
2. They need to invest more money from the funding into the kids
3. There is no transparent communication (sometimes no one would come to prepare food because of a lacking communication)
4. There is a great need to recruit new kids by going to schools and present the project

The projects initial targeted group were refugee boys but embarked on encouraging young refugee girls to participate in the training too. During the presentation in the shelters Minnie showed a video of the Iranian female rugby team and actively invited the girls to join the training.

But according to several interviews I did with the coaches in the beginning, it was difficult to find girls who would join the training.

*“The first six months we were really unsuccessful, because it’s really hard to collect girls in general” (Minnie, 2018:1)*

Sophie saw some difficulties in recruiting girls too.

*„Ähm, that took quite some times so we went from house, to house, to house, to house, to house and there were signing up and say they would come but they never actually did. So it took us about a year to get girls and it was quite exhausting [...].“ (Sophie, 2019:4)*

In the beginning of the project only Udo and Benni were recruiting and went to schools. After some time, they realized that girls need to be part of the project to inspire young girls and provide a space for them.

*„So that’s where we also got the girls team from Rugby Donau involved a lot and they have been really building this up. It showed how much ..., how well it worked once you got the girls from our team involved as well and we made sure we had this diverse project team so that you have some girls and not only guys. So, you can reach out better also to the girls we want to have as players and so on.“ (Udo, 2018:2)*

During my research the amount of girls varied. In 2018 more girls came on a regular basis and I was able to observe the progress of the girls better than in 2019. Due to the problems Mato pointed out, only Judi participated in training in 2019 apart from some other girls that temporarily joined. In 2018 usually between 4 to 6 girls came to the Sunday trainings and later socialized in the group. Some days no girls at all would attend. Since 2019 the former separated teams have now merged and will be separated as soon as they are enough people for each group. The reasons for the girls not to attend was difficult to answer as they differentiated. I will not discuss their reasons because I did not visit their homes or met their families. When I asked some of the coaches or the ROB girls, they mentioned either family issues or the fear of failing in school as main reasons to not participate (Minnie 2018; Sophie, 2019; Judi, 2019). Once, Minnie told me, that Camilla (ROB member) suddenly stopped coming. Camilla started playing rugby during my research and showed progress. Since she felt too much pressure in the training and thought she is not as good as the others, she decided to stop the training. The absence indicates that organized sport implements a hidden curriculum and can hinder the young girls to participate (Walseth &

Fasting, 2004:123). Gender and gendered appropriate behaviour within organized sport continues to be dualistic and presupposes sexuality (ibid:123).

#### **9.4 The Question of Financing and Formation of a Structure**

Rugby Opens Borders is a project that involved a great amount of people who are willing to work voluntarily. Udo founded and manages the project. In 2019 he moved to Madrid and selected his brother Ike to be his representative during his absence. Further, Udo was responsible for organizational and financial issues concerning ROB. Besides that, he organizes fundraising events, establishing contacts with other rugby clubs either national or international, recruits volunteers and is the main representative of the project in the media. Udo first instituted a structure and order to successfully implement the project. Although they are not officially financed by the ministry, they manage to collect enough money for project every year. The beginning, as Udo told me, was not easy.

*„We just figured our own way and learned how to make fundraising events and get some money because it's often not easy to get government funding because we are kind of in a niche. So, the sports ministry says, nah that's not its thing, integration is more for another ministry. Well with sport it's not exactly... It's tough you know. So, we worked out our own ways how to make sure that we can finance the whole thing and luckily we can save a lot of cost since we got the pitch for free [...] The only sights we've been getting is from the sports union. It really hasn't been a lot, but it helped to have a little security in terms of planning our activities.“ (Udo, 2018:2-3)*

To raise money Udo arranged several concerts. The entrance for the concert served later on as a funding for the project.

*„We have a concert, for example, we invite all our friends and then they just come and pay the entry ticket and that's their donation [...] Other than that, for example the president from our rugby club is been helping us. Once we made a fundraiser that was involving three Austrian rugby clubs and the rugby federation and they all kind of donated money for us. But its never like*

*we have a fixed budget. The only regular thing comes from the sports union. They give us some small founding every year for some sub-projects we do.*“ (Udo, 2018:3)

The legal framework of Rugby Opens Borders is not considered as an independent association and therefore not able to claim funding from the governmental authorities. Udo encountered several problems with the municipality.

*„It has to do with legal issues as well because of the form in which we are running the project. In Austria there is a lot like, if you want to have access to certain kind of founding you need a special legal form that you are your own registered club, that is only focusing on welfare or thinks like that.*“ (Udo, 2018:3)

ROB can be rather seen as a non-profit organization. In the sporting world and other social spheres, such types of organizations are dominant and play a critical role in many Western societies. Non-profit organizations provide projects and programmes that are financially not covered by the state or the market (Coates, Wicker, Feiler, & Breuer, 2014:230). According to Coates, Wicker, Feiler and Breuer (2014) governments support sport clubs through the provision of public subsidies. Partly because they appreciate the positive externalities such as inclusion and integration of youths and immigrants that are produced by clubs (ibid: 231). As non-profit organizations are confronted with an unstable financial environment they rely on several either internal or external stakeholders like sponsors and donors. The ROB project is no exception. The project is supported by the Rugby Union Donau Club and sports union in form of a funding and a free pitch for the training (Udo, 2018:1). The Austrian Rugby Federation endows the club with free tickets for major sporting spectacles (Udo, 2018:3). The largest share of the funding constitute private sponsors and donors primarily from the rugby community. Udo characterizes ROB as a „self-made project“ (Udo, 2018:3).

During the formation of the project Udo was joined by Bennie, Minnie, Sophie, Charlotte and many other who voluntarily supported the whole project by either coaching, cooking or preparing social events. Establishing a structure was a process that involved several people. Bennie mentioned the need of a structure and organization in order to make the project work. Within the project the volunteers have different focus points to be responsible for - funding, social activities, training, kitchen, PR, etc:

*„Yes, we also have representatives. And within that structure, we have different focus points, for example, I do the sporting aspect, the social media aspect [...] we have sector for the fundings,*

*sector for social activities, sector for the kitchen...so that is the structure...we have ...we always try to have a head of every section, to have a coordinator, no matter what we do, we always need somebody to take care of it, or otherwise we will lose the overview and maybe get lost somewhere.*“ (Bennie, 2018:2)

During the research the coaches of the teams changed. Bennie used to be the main coach for the male ROB team. He has been part of the project since the beginning and I saw him almost every Sunday in 2018 on the rugby pitch. Besides Udo he is the project representative and responsible for the coaching and recruiting of new Rugby Opens Borders team members. Every three or four months the coaches discuss together *„how the year went [...] where should we focus in next three months, and other stuff, like what do to when the player is injured, how to get him a good doctor, or if the players having trouble in finding the apartment, we also discuss this in a small groups and then we meet with the other groups, every half a year and then we present them what the sector did in the last month or year, so we have a structure*“ (Bennie, 2018:2).

Udo and Bennie involved other Austrian rugby clubs in the project and were able to expand the team of coaches and volunteers.

*„In Innsbruck they tried to build a team as well and they ended up having one or two guys joining them in their club. In Vienna the stade team, Rugby Club Start, they joined our project. They kind of running it with us now. They provide coaches and volunteers and we're joining forces here which is a beautiful thing because it also brings the rugby community together, sort of. That's also our aim that we're trying over the long run to get the entire community involved.*“ (Udo, 2018:3)

Since the beginning of the project the structure was implemented and maintained by Udo and Bennie. Both realized soon, that they need to include girls from the Rugby Union Donau Club. There was a disparity in the project team that had an impact on the participation rate of boys and girls (Udo, 2018:5). Udo recognized:

*„But what I was noticing is that, if you looked at the involvement from people at the club it was mostly the boys, the guys from the team involved in the project team. I wasn't happy with that situation somehow because it wasn't really balanced.*“ (Udo, 2018:5-6)

In order to provide a space for the participating girls they incorporated Minnie, Sophie and Charlotte in the project. Just recently Mato joined the project and is currently the head coach of

the ROB team. He changed the schedule of the training. Now, every Friday and every second Sunday per month the training is held including a meal afterwards (Mato, 2019:2). Mato is originally from Brazil and play for the Rugby Union Donau male team. He resides in the clubhouse on the Rugby Union Donau area. The club provides players from other countries a shared flat to live. As Matos mother tongue is Portuguese and still is not able to speak German well enough, he uses English as the main language during the training. Hence, I was always translating during the training because Judi and other participants are not fluent in English.

Udo mentioned during the interview, that „girls can profit a lot from participating in the project because this is really breaking up cultural barriers“ (Udo, 2018:6). Their current project team „is almost 50/50 boys and girls“ (Udo, 2018:6) and that is also Udo's future aim.

Maretha, known as Minnie in the rugby environment, is one of the ROB coaches as well. She is originally from Spain and the head coach of the ROB girls team. As her native language is Spanish, sometimes we could hear that she was communicating with the players on the field in English, German and in Spanish (in particular with Camilla – a girl from Mexico). Minnie is responsible for the recruitment of new members and visits refugee houses to promote the project.

For two years the girls team have existed. Although, to recruit the girls entailed several problems, the project team constantly invested time in motivating girls to join the training (Udo, 2018:2). Minnie enumerated several hurdles she encountered with dealing with the girls team:

1. Girls do not regularly appear to the training
2. Difficulties of including the girls into the competition
3. Lack commitment
4. Problems to get a permission from the parents: a 19 years old girl was not allowed to play
5. Initial problem of training with boys (Minnie, 2018:1-3)

Despite those problems, Minnie was the driving force in creating the girls team. Bennie identified difficulties when girls and boys had to play together.

*“From the beginning idea was to also include girls, but it was really difficult to figure out, how to recruit them, how to approach them, because when I go to a facility and stand there, present myself and the project, I think that there is not much contact or connecting points with girls, because OK, there is a man, telling me about contact sport, this is nothing for me... then there have been a couple of girls showing up, and there we tried to train them together and then we*

*recognized that they do not feel too comfortable with so many boys around, and that is why we decided that we have to make our own girl section, because this is the only way where we can really get to know them, otherwise, we will never really meet, and thankfully Minnie does and did a great job, in taking that part.” (Bennie, 2018:6)*

Besides Minnie there was Sophie who trained the girls. Both play in the Rugby Union Donau girls team and share a common „love for rugby“. The motivation from almost everyone was the social aspect. Bennies main approach to this project was the idea of providing a space of equality.

*“I always have had a social aspect and I care a lot about people around me, especially about people who are not having privileges, or come from a different culture or still struggle in life, no matter what reasons, so I decided that this is a good idea and that I will join the ROB from the beginning” (Benni, 2018:1).*

For Minnie it was not only about the love for rugby but about the future of new rugby player generations. She specifically wanted to question existing stereotypes about rugby as being a ‚masculine‘, ‚rough‘ type of sport and establish some values and norms that represent the game.

*„Hm, I love Rugby very much and äh... I am getting old and I have this kind of feeling of share the love of Rugby that I kind of keep forever because I will sooner or later retire, also... I don't know, I mean I work on human rights as well so it's my profession, so maybe it's my passion. Also, in the long run I mean they are 12, 13, 14 years old in the long run if they learn and if they could Rugby playing they are going to be the future of Rugby Austria and it's a circle” (Minnie, 2018:3).*

According to Mato, ‚fun‘ is something essential in the project. It is not primarily about the rugby sport but rather about ‚being together‘ and create a joyful experience.

*„That's my philosophy – have fun first and then we start talk about rugby afterwards. And also the values of rugby are respect, teamwork, its communication, integration. That is simply the most things I expect from them and they are from me.“ (Mato, 2019:2)*

Sophie became part of Rugby Opens Borders because of the opportunity to help young girls to establish a confidence in themselves.

*„Ahm, the team spirit. Support each other that you strong together but not individual strength brings you to your goals but rather the support and also, that you need to be confident and confident in yourself.“* (Sophie, 2019:2)

Empirical data of women and their lived experiences in sport need to be included in order to connect questions of power relations and lived realities (Hargreaves, 2014:15). Lived realities implicitly negotiate hegemonic configuration on a daily basis. This can be applied to the project and the girls team. The structure of the project had already indicated a dialectic approach. In the first place it was just Udo and other boys from the club. This represented a constraint for many girls in the refugee houses because they had no point of reference. By adapting the structure to eliminate this problems Minnie and Sophie joined the project team.

Thompson (1994) identifies, that sportswomen are also located in hegemonic configurations and negotiate issues related to gender during the process of physical participation. It relates further to social structure and distribution of power and influence (ibid:218). *„Essential to the understanding of the hegemonic process is the acceptance of conflict and possibility of change.“* (ibid:218) Those conflicts and changes are performed through individuals and groups in different social settings. The project team as well as the girls and boys who participate in the training both reproduce and perceive social forces. The project implements non-hierarchical aspects and is not funded by governmental authorities, ROB is transformative and is nothing that is completed. During the observations and interviews there was always an attempt to adapt the project according to the needs of the young girls and boys. In particular, the girls team changed their schedule when there was the period of Ramadan or would actively include them in the social life and other rugby related events (Fieldnotes May 27, 2018).

In the future, according to Udo, ROB as a project should provide a framework for international purposes. He seeks to implement the project in other cities and countries, share his knowledge and help to organize such projects in other societies.

*„What we really would like to achieve in the long term is that these project is becoming kind of an open source project where every rugby team in Europe or in the whole world can catch up on our idea. They can implement it, use our logo and try to run a similar project. We could help them establishing the theme, tell them what they need to do and how to raise funds, because we went to all this process and learned a lot.“* (Udo, 2018:4)

The project impacted the girls and boys who participated in a positive way. Although many girls

stopped coming, others developed a great sense of belonging and joy. This was also due to the fact that the project team continuously seeks to adapt the program to the needs of the girls and boys. By hosting social events, providing food after the training, inscribe for competition the girls and boys discover new perspectives that enables a personal growth and critical self-reflection. But in my research I did not want to focus on the integrational aspect as it would exceed the content of this work. This would be a suitable topic for a further investigation. Nevertheless, Benni concluded a core idea of rugby as a global physical activity that goes beyond nationalities and the project wants to promote those values.

*„It doesn't matter where you come from or how you look, but in rugby everybody gets a chance, just show some effort.“ (Bennie, 2018:5)*

## **9.5 The Training and its Ritual Elements**

In the following chapter I want to examine the ritual aspects of the training. They can be interpreted as an initiation how to enter the rugby community within Vienna. Furthermore I will present the content and structure of the training to grasp a better idea of how the program proceeds their training. Through active participation I was able to find detailed information which was not able to find out by just a participant observation. Not only the system of communication but the personal interaction between the girls and boys appeared during the active participation. Besides that, it worked as a suitable point of entrance and icebreaker to get into further contact with the girls that reinforced mutual trust. In the last part of this chapter I will compare the training of the female and male ROB teams. This leads us to the analyses of the „Touch“ game at the end were boys and girls of the two teams build mixed groups and play with each other. The whole chapter discusses the knowledge of the body but also their physical interaction with others. It can be said that during the training a new physical feeling appeared throughout the girls. Gender relations in the matter of representing different physical dimensions within the rugby game were present and expressed through movement, language and physical interaction.

I attended the rugby training in 2018 five times and I actively participated two times and was able to train together with the girls. In 2019 I tried to come on a more regular base in order to gain more insights on the social dynamics emerging in the training. Since 2019 Mato the new head coach of ROB changed the structure of the training. The sex segregated groups were merged as

there were not enough girls and boys in 2019. After some conflicts concerning the recruitment of new ROB members in the first month of 2019 just a very few girls and boys attended the training. Since April 2019 they have actively started to recruit young people again in order to be able to create a team and attend some tournaments. Mato inscribed the ROB team (including girls and boys) for the the UWGs.

*„Yes, that’s right. For UWGs for United World Games. I am really excited. Next week we start the recruitment again then you see if they show up. Then normally more boys and girls are coming to the training. Normally there are more boys.“* (Mato, 2019:2)

There is no special need of sport equipment. The training just requires some running shoes. Besides that, everything was provided and not necessary to bring. The changing rooms contain lockers to put in personal belongings but not one of the girls did that so I just followed their behaviour and left my things in the changing room. In order to play rugby properly it is needed to wear studded shoes. The active participation was helpful to understand the structure of the games including its rules. By attending the training I was able to realize how physically intensive rugby can be. Injuries are part of playing rugby. Minnie and the others often had bruises either on the face of on the legs and hips. I injured myself several times. In April I broke my finger during training but it healed quickly and I joined the training two weeks after the accident.

Sophie mentioned: *„Yes, it is like. If you have a bruise it is not like ‚Oh, no I have a bruise‘ (changes voice) it is like ‚Haha, look at that, it looks funny it looks like a heart or oh no mine looks like a circle‘ and you kind of like look what the bruises looks like and you are kind of proud about it because it shows that you put effort into it. It is kind of normal and you want to have the funniest bruises. (laughs)“* (Sophie, 2019:2)

The main pitch where the training was held is made of artificial turf. In summer the pitch can get really hot and cause bad grazes mainly along the legs or arms. Once you get the ball and slide on the pitch your skin can get hurt easily. Rugby is an intense sport and contains physical interaction. But if the technique is coached well the injuries can be reduced. While I was training with the girls I obtained some interesting findings on the interpersonal level. It helped to talk freely to the girls and experience the same as they do during the training. This united the group and put me in a rather close ethnographic position. Getting a better knowledge of my own body and physical interaction with the tackling obstacles, other girls and even boys helped myself to understand how rugby evaluates gender roles and it gave us the opportunity to gather valuable

information. Throughout the participant observation and active participation I identified the ritual dimension of the training. The program contains some essential initiations to find a way of getting the girls interested in the rugby sport. Sport can be understood, according to Birrell (1981), as *„a significant aspect of society because of the ritualistic overtones it possesses“* (ibid:354). Birrell (1981) takes it even further and suggests that sport can be seen as the legacy of ritual and is reaffirming the values of the social order (ibid:354-356). To put this idea into the context of Viennese rugby it means that collective values (culture) of the Rugby Union Donau Club are transmitted through the training and help to integrate into a social fabric.

Birrell (1981) points out: *„[...] emphasizing the ritual power of sport draws attention to an explanation of sport which takes into account both the personal gratification obtained by the individual through sport involvement and the social needs of the community [...] [there is] a encompassing power of sport to join together the individual and the community for the mutual benefit of both.“* (ibid:355)

In our case it means through the training the girls and the boys acquire the values of the rugby sport as well as the whole community surrounding it. Hence, it appears to create a space without regulations regarding social and economic situation and cultural background. In order to establish those collective settings there are several rituals within in and outside the training. Symbols are important for the process of rituals within sport. Especially rugby comprises many symbols to build a relationship within the group.

Therefore a system of symbols in rugby is needed to represent other abstractions and *„are vehicles encoded with meanings, which serve as the basic units of meaning in rituals“* (Birrell,1981:357). To extend Birrell's (1981) statement, symbols enable to encounter the individual stories with the globally practiced sport of rugby and therefore connect it with the transnational community. In this sense it is not mainly about the content but rather about the process of doing. Regarding ROB, it serves to process people and especially the girls to acquire certain values in order to be part of the Rugby Union Donau community. As Bennie mentioned:

*„You do not have to be the best player in the world, just show some effort and we will welcome you and that is one of the ideas and this is why rugby can work with projects like this.“* (Bennie, 2018:5)

Birrell's (1981) suggestions of ritual elements in sport are helpful to understand how values are transmitted. To adapt Birrell's (1981) ideas, I would suggest that interpreting sport, in particular rugby, as a set of rituals provides the potential of a rather fluid process. Nevertheless, rugby and

its ritual elements can be inclusive but also can exclude individuals of a community. The ROB training in our case study implies some of the above presented aspects. The training structure of the project serves more as an initiation. There are several universal values within rugby and are transmitted from one generation to the other or in our case from one girl to the other. Minnie and Benni highlighted the most important values in rugby. *„Like, respect is everything on the pitch. Respect to your teammates, respect to your referee.“* (Minnie,2018:6) or as Bennie told us: *„Fair play, because without fair play the game would not be possible, the integrity, the [...], lot of time friendship – it doesn't matter where you do in a world, you join the rugby club and you basically get friends in a week or so, team work obviously, integrity, fun and friendship – these are the core values, I think, that you can, as you already said, transfer in your everyday life, which will help you come around.“* (Bennie, 2018:5)

Linking these aspects to hegemonic structures in the sporting world (Hargreaves, 1986,1996, 2014) and gendered practice in sport (Azzarito, 2012; Deutsch, 2007; Hargreaves, 1996; Hall, 1996) rituals transfer either certain forms of subordination and domination or opposition. Analysing the training means to analyse the ritual elements of rugby that leads to the opportunity to unveil gendered practice in rugby. It further encompasses adaption and progressive ideas that question gender that are also part of ROB.

Regularly the training is held every Sunday at 3 p.m. and lasts for two hours. Since 2019 Mato has changed the training structure. Now the training is officially held every Friday at 4 p.m. and every second Sunday per month. Not only Mato wished to change the date.

*„Actually it was my idea. Like I have for me Sunday is for resting. That time they have to stay home, rest and stay home with the family. And Sunday in my opinion is not a good day because my idea was we make two trainings per week because I would like them to have rugby as a part of their life. You know. They have to feel, oh today I have rugby training I will not do nothing because its my compromise. Because I noticed that the came on Sunday just if they want, if the weather is good or if they have some food otherwise they don't care so much. That's why I propose we have training also on weeks.“* (Mato, 2019:2)

There is no contract or force to come. Most of the trainings during my research Minnie was coaching the girls. Apart from her Charly und Sophie trained the girls. As there is no fixed team almost every Sunday, on Friday new girls came to tryout. The amount of girls varied. Sometimes there were none and in other occasions there were over 20 girls. This affected the progress of the

girls team. Minnie mentioned during the interview:

*„[...] before because we already have an unstructured team let's say and they been training for almost a year so I decided to include them in competition and this year we started playing and I don't know whether that was a good decision. Honestly, because since we started the competition they I mean they signed up for the match but then they say I am coming, oh no, I am not coming or I am coming or I am not coming and they first of all D R I V E me crazy and drive the rest of the team crazy, [...] this really destabilize the team.“ (Minnie, 2018:2)*

Afterwards Minnie told us, that they want to change something about it as she sometimes comes to the pitch and not a girl attends. Mato and Sophie told me too, that they experienced trainings where nobody attended. During my fieldwork it happened quite a few times. There is a variation of age groups within the team. They can stretch from 11 to 16 years old. All the girls originally come from different parts of the world. Some are from Syria, Afghanistan, Kurdistan or Mexico. There is no initial need to be a refugee. There are also friends from girls attending the training who are Czech or Austrian. One girl of the Donau Youth Girls team comes regularly to the ROB training on Sunday. Her name is Angie and she plays an important role within the group. I experienced during the training that many of the girls wanted to team up with Angie due to her technical skills. Minnie mentioned this as well:

*„Well, they respect her in a different you know ... see that she is better and sportively tough and stuff. She is also very nice and very kind human (laughs) so she really patient she is playing with them everything and ....“ (Minnie, 2018:8)*

The program is flexible and adapts the schedule according to the girls' needs. Sophie explained the history of the structure. In the first year the trainings were held all together. As Sophie explained: *„They did not want to train with the boys. They asked for separated training so we did it and sometimes we put them together because I think this is important to learn that it is no same to train together and even though they would say ,Oh, no, do we really have to play with the boys'.“ (Sophie, 2019:6)*

During my research the time of the training changed due to the religious practice of Ramadan from 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. and personal issues. As almost all of the girls are Muslims it was physically necessary to change it in order to keep the girls going and do not harm them. Two girls started the playing rugby during my fieldwork and I was able to slowly observe their physical and mental transition. Their names are Camilla and Judi. Camilla is 10 years old and originally from

Mexico. After the first attendance she already changed her outfit into a rather sporty one. Playing together with her I experienced her as being shy and insecure. But within a few trainings, she transformed and got more secure with herself. In 2019 she did not attend anymore. Minnie told me, that Camilla felt insecure and therefore stopped joining the training. When there are some social events like a barbeque, Camilla still comes together with her brother, who shortly after her started playing rugby, and is now an active part of the men's team. Another girl I observed from the very beginning is Judi. She started playing rugby in April 2019 and came every Friday and every second Sunday. I watched her physical and social transition. I will further discuss the benefits in the following chapter.

The training itself can be divided into four parts:

1. Playful start
2. Tackling session
3. Touch game
4. Group hug

1. *Playful start* - When the training starts everyone has to run for about two or three rounds on the pitch including different exercises. While running they either shake their arms, run backwards or zig-zag, jumping etcetera. On the 13<sup>th</sup> of May 2018 there was a very big group of 22 girls. Minnie tried to build a circle and do some “get to know” games. In the beginning of the training the structure is normally more playful and about running games to increase the heart rate. This part of the training includes the process of introduction. If a girl comes for the first, time they are able to slowly integrate by playing rather common games and physical less intensive exercises. After Minnie implements running games it then can get physically exhausting. With focusing on team games like tennis rugby or trust games like blindfolded chasing, the girls get in contact with each other and create mutual trust. During these games the girls experience not only their own body in uncommon movements but also the ones of the others. While practicing those exercises some can get uncomfortable and shy but steadily get more secure. Sometimes the coaches already include boys in the exercises. On the 15<sup>th</sup> of April 2018, Sophie introduced a passing game and asked one of the male coaches to be a “barrier obstacle” and the girls had to pass him in order to complete the task. Although there was no direct physical contact, the awareness of the boys was there. The first part of the training summarized a general introduction to sport through a playful examination. On the 27<sup>th</sup> of May 2018, Camilla progressed in the way she was expressing her

emotions like excitement, anger. She was also able to do some kicking exercise. Also Judi showed a transition. The first time she appeared in the training she was wearing her casual outfit and even her cross-bag. After a couple of trainings she began to wear proper sporting clothes and even sweat bands. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of April 2019 Judi expressed great interest and engagement in the training. She was laughing and tried to encourage even Isi (ROB member) to train more intense. Although she often explained that she is not able to do certain exercises “Ich kann das nicht”, she would still do it and afterwards be proud of herself and smile. Judi told me, that rugby helped her to develop new skills and experience her body in new ways.

*„Yes, well, when I run. I am rather a bad runner. But it gets better now. I move a lot. Normally, I don't do this but in rugby I do. Now everything works better.“ (Judi, 2019:3)*

One of the main rules within rugby is the communication system. At every moment each person on the team has to be present through voice and sounds. Although this seems clear and easy, we could observe that Camilla, Judi and other younger girls struggle to establish this communication system. Even for myself it was not always easy to raise my voice and indicate where I am. Sometimes you just forget about it. Once this communication system is learned it helps the girls to clearly pronounce and express themselves. Camilla tried to really implement this but it was still hard for her. I could observe that she is improving in these terms and uses now phrases like “here”, “I am free” etc. One girl who attends on a regular basis is named Sali, she said: “[...] my favorite job when I pass and speaking loud “Pass! Left! Right!”. I don't know how to explain, but I love it to say that, yeah.“ (Sali, 2018:5)

2. *Tackling session* - After the first introductory part with cardio elements the training continues into the tackling exercise. Tackling in rugby means to prevent a person from bringing the ball to the other side of the pitch and stop the game flow of the opposing team. There are special techniques and rules for tackles. Mato, Minnie and Sophie mainly used foam obstacles as tackling objects. In some trainings Minnie even included partner exercises but on a rather basic level to practice tackling. The technique of a proper tackle means run after a person and while doing this put the head aside, grab the person with the arms and tackle it with the shoulder instead of the head or other parts of the body. Minnie sometimes tried to connect a steeplechase with tackling. This makes the movement tricky and harder. During the training with a big group, Minnie divided them into smaller groups and gave them the task to tackle each other in a gentle way. By implementing these techniques the girls not only get in physical contact with other bodies but also understand ways of using their own bodies. During one training on the 17<sup>th</sup> of

June, Sali brought a friend from school. Her name is Emilie and her parents are from the Czech Republic. During the training we teamed up and did some exercises together. She did not enjoyed the tackling part and was complaining about herself. She was not feeling comfortable but Angie and Minnie were very emphatic and helpful. During the following Sunday training Emilie changed her attitude and got more secure about herself and body language. Minnie, Sophie and Angie as the assistant of the coaches were very always respectful, helpful and tried to make the girls enjoy their training. Matos philosophy follows this idea. His way of training wants to provide rather pleasure than pure technical training.

*„It's like when they came here, the only thing that I want is that they feel like I want to come back because I have fun and a good time because many of them have really bad background and I want them to come and enjoy. Sport is like the second plan. That's my philosophy – have fun first and then we start talk about rugby afterwards.“ (Mato, 2019:2-3)*

The tackling part is important in order to learn the rules and techniques of the game and be able to play it accordingly. Technique is not depending on physical superiority. Sali supports this statement: *“Yeah girls can do everything what the boys can do.“ (Sali, 2018:3)* Still, as rugby is a contact sport physicality has to be even in order to be fair.

3. *Touch game* – This part of the training is the first experience of a realistic game situation. The only difference it the non-existence of the full contact part. Bennie explains the reason:

*“I think a good idea is to focus on social activities, and also to have some touch games together, what is possible, but on rugby scale, still I think it is a little not fair to put 90 kg boy against the 30 kg girl, so I think social activity is the next step that we have a chance to know each other a bit better.“ (Bennie, 2018:6)*

Instead of tackling people need to ‘touch’ the opponent on their hip. In that case the touched person has to put the ball on the ground and another member continues passing. This physical interaction can cause some conflicts not only for girls but also for boys.

*„There was in the first place some kind of irritation. For example if we would play touch they were reluctant to touch me. Or in the game they accidently touched me in areas we shouldn't but it was in the game so they couldn't do anything about it because it was by accident and they were so embarrassed by it, I never seen that before.“ (Sophie, 2019:4)*

For Ali and Sali playing touch means to play with a „brother or sister“ – they do not see any differences between girls and boys.

Sali said: *„I mean they are like my brothers, my bigger brothers, my younger brothers , it's normal. It is not important, with whom you play rugby, I just play...“* (Sali, 2018:4)

Also Ali explained: *„Hm, for me the same. You just have to be careful that you don't touch the girl wrong. Everything can happen. We are brother, like siblings. It is like when brother and sister or sister and brother are playing.“* (Ali, 2019:3)

Comparing those statements, physical interaction can cause some irritation in the beginning but enables to establish a new relationship towards different bodies and dissolve gendered practice.

After the playful start and the tackling session the coaches mingle the teams and build one big circle. Each by each is counting “1,2,1,2...” and then separates into two big teams. This means that girls and boys play together in one team. We observed girls like Sali said, they really like playing with the boys but due the fact that some girls are not used to physical contact with boys they seemed a little shy and uncomfortable. Especially Camilla did not know how to react to different situation during the game. For myself it was the same in the beginning. The structure of the game and quick responses made it difficult to react appropriate. After one or two touch games the girls got a feeling of the structure and were able to pass the ball. During the game many girls who attend for the first time rather pass to boys instead of other girls. This could indicate that girls do not believe in their ability to properly catch and pass the ball and project this onto the other girls. Camilla did the same. But after a playing more touch games we realized this changed. There were situations that girls passed to other girls. Still, during the touch game boys are identified as to be more physically present and communicate clearer. Hargreaves (1996) pointed out, that *“there are many attempts to overcome physical segregation but in mixed groups surveys observed that ,boys tended to dominate the setting and determine the pace and direction of the game being played’“* (ibid:151). This dynamic was observed during the touch game as well. Sophie tried to avoid this case by explaining: *„I also told the boys that they have to pass the girls and that if they don't I will get upset.“* (Sophie, 2019:6)

I will mention the reason later on in my comparison of the female and male ROB teams. But the touch game allows both girls and boys to interact and get in physical contact as well as build a team spirit. It is all about the technique and esprit de corps. Still, due to sociality there is often a physical gap between girls and boys. But once someone proves its skills, everyone can be a part

and will be involved. Minnie mentioned:

*“Well, now they play touch with them with no problems. And äh it’s touch. So touch means you can touch the person. You have to touch the person with your hands. Ideally (...) in the hips. We are trying to teach them but in reality I happens whatever you can touch the person. Maybe at first they were a little bit reluctant because of the touch thing but .... no they don’t seem to have any problems.” (Minnie, 2018:6)*

Sali answered to the question how she feels about playing with the boys: *„I mean they are like my brothers, my bigger brothers, my younger brothers , it’s normal. It is not important, with whom you play rugby, I just play [...].“ (Sali, 2018:4)*

During a group interview many of the young people liked the idea of the touch game. They really enjoy playing all together as it creates a big group – which means for them more fun. *„Then there are so many people and we play in two teams against each other, this is fun. In the end we are all together and this is nice.“ (Group Interview, 2018:2)*

4. *Group hug* – Shortly after the finish of the touch game, everybody consolidate and build a big circle.

*“Well, at the end of the training we make a big circle. A C I R C L E like everybody is sweating you know you hug with each other and you say thank you for coming and great training and you put your hands together and shout something they will always try first of all to be together and to not touch the boys and so they always will try to ähm .... to be between me and Sophie to have us as the connection between them and the boys. I don’t know if they do that at the moment but they can’t be together with the boys. At the beginning ... I am not sure if they do it now.” (Minnie, 2018:6)*

During my fieldwork I observed that the separation is just the case when the girls are either completely new or due to some other reasons they do not feel comfortable being hugged by a boy. This can be a personal, cultural, social or religious matters and depends on the context. The group hug is essential in the way that it officially ends the training session. While having the circle all hands are put together in the middle and one starts chanting a rugby related phrase – mostly „Team ROB“ is used. Then there is the all together group shout. Many girls like Judi, Sali, Emilie and even Camilla are next to boys in the circle and do not mind. The group hug represents the closest physical contact of the training. One can feel and smell the other and vice versa.

The male and female ROB teams train on the same pitch and can always observe and sense each other. Through sharing the same space they still get in contact but rather on a visual level than on a physical. While watching the training of the girls I also included the boys training in my observation. As the training has been assembled since 2019, I reflected on my observations from 2018. Mato said: *“I think it is because we don’t have enough numbers of girls and boys that’s why we went with mixing but yeah last year we splitted.”* (Mato, 2019:2)

Mato and Minnie told me, that they will separate the teams as soon as there are more girls and boys coming to the training again.

Both teams follow different structures and approaches. Even if both teams have the same starting point they still are not exactly the same. The boys seem to come more regularly than the girls. With some exceptions the boys do have on the average larger groups than the girls during the training.

Sophie explains the situation with the girls: *„Ähm, that took quite some times so we went from house, to house, to house, to house, to house and they were signing up and say they would come but they never actually did. So it took us about a year to get girls and it was quite exhausting because we had to try and try... “* (Sophie, 2019:4)

Another aspect is the age difference between the male and female groups. All of the boys were unaccompanied minors. Minnie clarified: *“Most of the girls are really young and most of the boys are over aged. Some are 16, 17, 18, 20.”* (Minnie, 2018:5) Due to the fact of the size and regularity the predictability of attendance is higher than within the girls team. In combination with the age difference this leads to a rather progressive training structure. As I observed both teams the boys tend to train specific tackle and running situation of a real rugby game. They are also playing rugby matches against other teams. Hence, to win the next match the team needs to practice intensively. It indicates a higher amount of pressure within the male team than the girls team. The way of communication towards each other varies but is clear, on point and sometimes a bit rough. As a coach told me, every team has their own language and phrases during a match. This helps to distract or secretly control the game. When both groups play rugby together there is clearly a difference in way of communicating. The male team is used to play in these kinds of settings and knows exactly how to react in several situations. The whole structure of the training is focusing on match situation and improving techniques and physical condition. It seems that they ‘continue where they stopped last time’. The girls do progress in the way of establishing

common techniques and improve their skills but preferably on a playful level as the reliability is not as high as within the boys team. Some boys I talked to expressed some uncertainty towards the sinfulness of girls. Ali, one of the ROB boys, told me in an informal conversation on the 10<sup>th</sup> of March 2019 that he identifies a clear difference between girls and boys when they play. Many girls are not able to play, according to Ali. Later on, he refused this argument and told me, that there are girls who can play like “machines”, for example Louise. Louise is a friend of Ali and plays in another Viennese rugby club. Shortly after our informal conversation I interviewed Ali and Isi, other male ROB members. Ali further clarified:

*„Of course girls can play with boys, but it is something different. It is good when girls against girls and something different when they play against boys. Of course you know who wins in the end [...] well, because of the body and the strength. Boys are clearly way better, more strength than girls.“ (Ali, 2019:2)*

Talking to Ali and others showed that gender stereotypes are something constructed through social life and is still not yet diminished. Often, young boys implemented statements of ‚natural‘ superiority that differentiates ‚them‘ from the girls. Carle and Nauright (1999) observed similar tendencies in their research on women rugby players. The reaction of a womens rugby match „ranged from amusement, to direct interest about the format of the women’s game, to out-and-out disgust, and, only for a minority, general approval“ (ibid:143). In terms of the training sex-segregated groups are active parts of the structure. But this was not something forced but rather wished of mainly the girls. We can now ask why girls wish to play in separated groups. Another aspect that has to be mentioned is that many of the female participants are Muslims and sometimes need to play in an environment which is purely made for girls. This is of course not the common case as Sali, Judi and many others who are present. They position themselves in liberal terms. Again, ROB represents an intersection of gender, religion and patriarchy which all correlate and influence each other (Gerami, 2005; Gardiner, 2005). The training implements many ritual elements that help to create a sense of belonging within a short amount of time. By learning those rituals the young girls and boys are able to be part of the Viennese rugby world. After I learned those rituals and initiations I felt connected to the club and its members. Again, this then helped to integrate into a social fabric, which means the Rugby Union Donau and further the social life surrounding it.

## 9.6 Rugby is not only Sport - Social Interaction and Club Life

Rugby is a team sport that comprises a range of social activities as well as a clubhouse to host those social events. In rugby there are several types of games that can be played. Specifically, the Rugby Union Donau Club focuses on two types that are played in tournaments. In training another type is performed – the touch game, as I outlined in section 9.5. In tournaments the teams play either rugby union which includes 15 players per team or 7th rugby, which means, 7 players per team (Fieldnotes, March 23 2019; April 12th 2019). The touch game is commonly performed in training or hosted as a social event.

*„Yes, so on monday we always play social touch girls and the boys play together and if not we would see each other at the parties or the meetings.“ (Sophie, 2019:3)*

Before and after training or a match several rituals are performed that enable the creation of close bonds between the team members. Gill (2007) identifies rugby teams as a configuration of „mutual trust and dependency, although not necessarily upon liking“ (ibid:421). During a match the rugby players „rely on the physical presence and support of team mates“ (ibid:421). Fallon (2010) extends this statement, in particular for female athletes. Social recognition for athletes are often ensured through the presence of teammates and defined further through them (ibid:34). It then creates an interdependency and a „unit“. Gill (2007) exemplifies:

*„For example, in a strum, the players must all work together as a unit, and are intimately ‘bound’ together. This physical support may be extended to support of team mates in other situations on the pitch outside normal play such as fights.“ (ibid:421)*

Physical contact in the form of a fight was observed during a rugby match on the 23<sup>rd</sup> of March in 2019. The situation incited due to an illegal tackle and then caused a general unrest. Although this case occurred within a few minutes the game continued and did not cause any repercussions. Sophie explained that rugby establishes a transnational community without prejudice.

*“If you meet another rugby player outside you would be together have a drink together. It connects you also around the world. If you would see someone with a rugby jersey you could go and say Hi. Most people are really nice and in the sense of the community that you cheer for your team but you don't „boo“ the other team.“ (Sophie, 2019:1-2)*

In the ROB project people from various countries interact, connect, cheer, eat, laugh and play with each other. Not only the participants but the coaches as well are from either Brazil,

Argentina, Chile and other countries. All together they create a social club life that affects the young participants who join the ROB training in a positive way. Theberge and Birrell (1994) explored women's rugby teams and identified them as „sites where women consciously rebel against cultural definitions of appropriate sporting practices for women [...] their intrusion into the rugby subculture deconstructs that space and those practices as quintessential male practices“ (ibid:366). Analysing and observing the space of the Rugby Union Donau indicated a male defined area, as discussed in section 9.1. Nevertheless, the club and its members continuously try to reconsider the space and its social activity to unclose patriarchal systems and enable women and girls to perceive the space as their own too. During the beginning of Rugby Opens Borders social interaction between boys and girls was intended and actively promoted. The bonding between all participants of ROB took a while, as Udo explained.

*„When it comes to interaction, as I said, at the beginning they were super shy and not interacting so much, and now often you can see that some of the boys will come and talk to them [girls]. They just joke together and so on.“* (Udo, 2018:6)

For Sophie one core aspect of rugby is the bonding through ‚sport‘, that creates for her a common space. She relates that statements mostly to her own connection with the boys. This can be not unified with the observations and experiences of the ROB participants.

*„But I think we have quite a good bond I am friends with many of the guys. Ähm, yes, and we get to know each other and we are always connected through the sport.“* (Sophie, 2019:3)

During my fieldwork I was able to observe a progress in social interaction of the boys and girls. In particular on the pitch the girls and boys started to properly interact during touch game after a few weeks of training. The ROB project implemented a WhatsApp group for everyone to stay informed about upcoming trainings, rescheduling and social activities like watching a movie, attend a rugby match, host a barbeque etcetera. Within this chat some new participants started a conversation with questions like „Hi, how are you?. This shared chat is rather about organizational issues than actual conversation.

Through the project many girls acquired a mutual respect for each other. Minnie mentioned, that the girls would behave disrespectfully and even insult other girls or their own relatives and friends.

*„They had a lot of disrespect within each other. I don't know how much this is normal in 13/14*

*years old but they would say very nasty things like „I kill you“ or „I hate you“ and stuff like this to each other. At some point I got fed up with this and said this doesn't happen in rugby first of all but also under my watch. You can't talk this to your teammates and you can't talk like this to your S I S T E R S (laughs) and no. Yes, this has stopped and all of this has stopped.“ (Minnie, 2018:6)*

During the social activities, everybody speaks German or English. Although Minnie and Mato are not fully able to talk in German, many of the girls started learning English during their time at ROB. Salih and Judi experienced irritation in the beginning as they were not able to understand what Mato or Minnie were saying.

*„The first time I learned English I was with Minnie, I love her, she helped me too much, she is the best trainer I have ever seen“ (Sali 2018: 3)*

Sali and Issi as well as Judi told me, that they are connected on social platforms like Snapchat or Instagram. Judi showed me some ROB participants on her phone when I interviewed her. One girl also mentioned in the group interview:

*„Yes, I know some from Insta. Some are from our shelter and when we finish training we all go home together.“ (Group Interview, 2018:2)*

Apart from being connected on the internet, some girls and boys share a common domicile like the same refugee house. The girls predicated their attendance on certain conditions like the joining or not joining of friends or relatives what destabilizes the girls team.

*„[...] two of them are sisters and the other ones are also siblings, äh they are auntie and niece. So if the one doesn't come so the other doesn't come and they say if my friend doesn't come so I do not come. This really destabilize the team.“ (Minnie, 2018:2)*

For Udo, Minnie, Bennie and the other project members it was important to have other forms rituals of the pitch, like a „get together“ to enable a space of communication and unconstrained interaction.

*„[...] we want something were can make sure that of the pitch the people have also the possibility to meet, to communicate, to exchange, and to form these friendships even more. We thought, the best way actually to meet people is over a meal. You know, you share a meal, you're talking to each other, having a conversation, and that's where the magic often happens. You*

*know, maybe you say we wanna hang out sometime or whatever. Yeah, so that's also something that really also grew nicely so we've been having this every week, ehm, after our training sessions that we have our get together.“ (Udo, 2018:2-3)*



Fig. 4 „Get together“ After the Sunday Training

In this picture you can still recognize a gendered arrangement. Most of the times, the girls and the boys preferred to sit next to friends or relatives who joined the training too. This changed, when Camilla, Judi, Sali and the other girls came by themselves. Despite this biased photograph, eventually some girls interacted with the boys and the other way around. Still, the projects focused target was to create a sense of bonding and friendships. Many of the girls who are seen on the photograph suddenly stopped coming to the training. But they joined social activities. Sophie, Udo and Bennie explained during their interviews, that the project is not just about rugby but about the social life surrounding the sport.

*„We still see them sometimes when we go ice skating or do ROB events. For social things they would come and I don't think it's bad because the project is for integration and if rugby is not their sport or if they want to do something different, I don't have any problem with that and if we go ice skating I am happy to see them.“ (Sophie, 2019:6)*

Also many boys decided to quit rugby but still help with other tasks or just enjoyed being on the field and watch the others train.

*„Yes, and it is about friendships also some of the boys. Some of them don't really want to play rugby so they would just help in the kitchen or do different projects or just sit besides the field and watch the boys train and talk to them while they have a break and so we would sometimes just eat together have a fun times.“ (Sophie, 2019:6)*

Bennie further highlighted the universal approach of the project. Rugby is important, but social life and activities represent an integral part of ROB. So, if someone engages in different duties, it is fine for everyone.

*„[...] we do journeys with them, we go to the cinemas, and you can also always help in the kitchen, to cook, to clean, cleaning the dishes afterwards, if anyone wants to join, everybody is welcome.“ (Bennie, 2018: 2)*

Udo supports Sophies and Bennies statement by pointing out the projects social aspect.

*„If they don't wanna become a rugby player that's fine with us. We always tell them that they can just hang out and come to the social parts.“ (Udo, 2018:7)*

Bennie regards the boys he used to train as friends. For the project team it was important to know why the girls and boys do not come. This helps them also to adjust the structure of the project accordingly and find solutions for specific problems concerning the girls and boys.

*„I have more contact with the boys, since I am coaching them, and I want to know if they showed up in social activities, if they did not show up, what happened.. I also call them when they do not show up in trainings in two or three weeks just to figure out why are they not coming.“ (Bennie, 2018:2)*

Since the beginning of the project, many attempts were undertaken to establish an inclusionary and open space for everyone. Due to the transformative character of the project, it was able to adapt quickly to arising problems and created a sense of belonging especially for the girls.

## **9.7 Outcomes of the Project – Benefits and Constraints Concerning Gender Relations**

In this section a ‚four angle’ approach will give an insight to the benefits as well as constraints concerning the Rugby Opens Borders project. By applying four perspectives, I want to facilitate a

broader discourse of several voices and perspectives. This should provide a more holistic and comprehensive overview of lived experiences and perceptions.

Four angle approach:

1. Organizer (Udo and Ike)
2. Coaches (Minnie, Mato, Bennie and Sophie)
3. Participants (Salih, Judi, Ali, Issi, Group Discussion)
4. Researcher

As Carle and Nauright (1999) elaborated, women and girls version in rugby disrupt „the male, heterosexual hegemony of the rugby subculture by exposing female physical capability in a typically male enclave, while openly expressing a distinct identity and lifestyle through its social proclivities“ (ibid:136). Womens and girls notion and performance of rugby contests its underlying patriarchal system, which is present in „sport and leisure and social and sexual relations“ (ibid:136). During my observations and in the interviews ideas about normative femininity was constantly questioned (Sophie, 2019; Minnie, 2018; Salih, 2018). Chase (2006) highlights the contradiction women and girls have to face in rugby. The female sporting body, in particular in rugby, are identified by the women and girls themselves „as resistant and transgressive, and as a result, construct their bodies as undisciplined and demonstrate an acute awareness of the ways in which their bodies resist ideas of normative femininity“ (ibid:245). Although, they are trained and shaped to compete in tournaments, many women and girls often fail to express normative constructions of the ideal female body, which is skinny, slender but also fit. Consequently, as Chase (2006) observed during her research in a women's rugby team, the female sporting bodies are then further defined as „unruly and not properly disciplined“, which then creates a contradiction in itself (ibid:245). Hence, „female rugby bodies are shaped by contradictory discourses that produce docile, resistant, and transgressive bodies“ (ibid:245).

Sophie experienced stereotyped thinking of women in rugby as being „short haired lesbians“:

*„Once I went with a friend to a bar who also plays rugby and wanted to convince another friend to play rugby and our friend said „No, rugby is brutal“ but then he said „No, also girls play rugby, so it is not brutal“ or anything ... äh.... and then the other said „Oh, but they are just short haired white lesbians“ and I was sitting next to him and like „No, my hair is pretty pretty long*

*and no, not everyone is a lesbian like come on“. Well, he was embarrassed. It is a weird thing. So, I have had that sometimes. They often only know the stereotype.“ (Sophie, 2019:2-3)*

Sophie mentioned her own concerns before she started playing rugby. She thought rugby is a purely ‚brutal‘ sport (Sophie, 2019).

Therefore, the process of undoing „normative conceptions about sexual and gendered life“ is necessary in order to create new perspectives about gender representations and femininity and provides a greater liveability for sporting women and girls in rugby (Butler, 2004). This notion implies varied masculinities, which are not able to represent normative conceptions of masculinity. These ideas resonate with the feminist work of Hills and Croston (2012) who explore „the capacity of sport to ‚empower‘ girls and women through the provision of alternative visions of female physicality and the disruption of oppressive notions of femininity and masculinity“ (ibid:594). ‚Undoing‘ gender hereby does not mean, as Hill and Croston (2012) define, „identification of girls‘ capacity to display sporting skills, demonstrate confidence and engage with male peers in sporting endeavours“ (ibid:594). This notion signifies a limited form of resistance that conceptualises women and girls as „the exception to female embodiment“ that is an element of reinforcing practices „associated with the masculine landscape“ (ibid:595) Especially in a contact sport like rugby women and girls are stigmatized and face a „low social approval“. Fallon (2010) concludes:

*„Sports in which strength, bodily contact, and endurance are emphasized have traditionally had low social approval and women participating in sports of these types have been socially stigmatized, while sports emphasizing skill, grace and beauty and not involving touching one's opponent have been more socially approved.“ (ibid:23)*

Deutsch (2007) proclaimed important suggestions on researching gender in sport and how to analyse if projects and programmes help or not help to ‚undo‘ gender:

- (1) „when and how social interactions become less gendered,*
- (2) whether gender can be irrelevant in interaction,*
- (3) whether gendered interactions always underwrite inequality,*
- (4) how the institutional and interactional levels work together to produce change, and*
- (5) interaction as the site of change.“ (ibid:106)*

I want to refer to those suggestions in order to be able to situate my observations and interview

arguments concerning gender relations in Rugby Opens Borders.

## 1. Organisers

The information provided in this part will be based on the interview with Udo, project manager and founder of the ROB programme. The current representative of Udo, Ike is now in charge of the project and will be included through statements I collected in informal conversations.

The initial idea for the project was to constitute a space for minor refugees, as they are confronted with a new social and cultural setting. Udo verbalized the need for the young refugees to be active as they often „don't have an asylum, until they have an asylum which can take some months, a year, even longer, they are often not really doing something except sitting in the shelters with all the other traumatized kids. That's crazy, because how should they even get started to integrate and learn the language and get to know the Austrians. So, I thought maybe we can just go there and get them into the rugby so there will be a social network" (Udo, 2018:). In conclusion, the project intended to have a social and inclusionary approach that creates interaction as a site of change. Hence, minor refugees are able to establish a sense of belonging and mutual trust. According to Udo, sport serves as a good point of entrance and social activity. So, they can „blow some steam off" and it naturally helps to get in social and physical contact with Austrians by exchanging experiences and stories (Udo, 2018:1). In particular rugby is „really international" and a „open sport" where nobody is pressured in certain positions (Udo, 2018: 1-2). Since the beginning of the project they were progressing and constantly adapting the structures. Udo recognizes his goal to involve girls in the project but mentioned difficulties to approach them properly.

*„We made a lot of progress, of course, I mean as you see, for example, one of the biggest differences is that now that we even have girls in the project. That was really important to us because first it was really hard to get girls even motivated especially due to this, äh, several cultural differences.“ (Udo, 2018:2)*

This statement indicates the projects goal to include girls in the project. While they managed to recruit a lot of boys it was hard to find girls who would attend the training. A question that arises, how they were initially approaching the girls? Still, from being a gendered project it turned into a program that actively involves girls and female coaches. Udo further highlights cultural and social repercussions, that made it hard to get girls into the project.

*„It’s not common in some countries like Afghanistan etcetera that woman would do sports and then even do a, äh, a contact sport so [...].“ (Udo, 2018:2)*

How Muslim women and girls practice sport is varied and depends on their own religious regulations. Some attend in sport courses or sport related activities „with head, legs and arms covered“, others choose to wear Western sporting outfits that exposes their flesh and others prefer to practice in sex-segregated settings (Jawad, Al-Sinani, & Benn, 2011:32). There is no normative way of Muslim women and girls to dress or behave when participating in sport. Religious practices vary as well and have to be interpreted within the context it appears. In Islam sport is an important medium for health and as the prophet says: *„The strong believer is better and more beloved to Allah than the weak believer.“* (Dahl, 2017:197)

Although it was easier to convince the boys to participate in the training, Udo saw the potential for girls and boys to „break cultural barriers“ and then feel more included in the rugby community.

*“Here it’s perfectly fine to do sport and just do things that you enjoy, and nobody is telling you what to do or not. You know, we really wanted to get this going and thought that we could really help them to grow into the society better trough that.”* (Udo, 2018:6)

Due to the lack of girls in the ROB project, the team adapted their own structure and involved girls into the project team to coach the girls and promote ROB in refugee shelters and schools.

*„So that’s where we also got the girls time from rugby Donau involved a lot and they have been really building this up. It showed how much ..., how well it worked once you got the girls from our team involved as well and we made sure we had this diverse project team so that you have some girls and not only guys. So, you can reach out better also to the girls we want to have as players and so on.“* (Udo, 2018:2)

The project team consists of girls and boys from the Rugby Union Donau teams and aims to be 50/50. This works in consequence as an important representation of gender equality and promotes an unbarred space. Despite this, the project team respected wishes and concerns from both boys and girls. Udo, Minnie, Sophie and the others respect the cultural differences, and did not want to force someone into doing something that is not acceptable for them. When the first girls appeared in the training all, boys and girls, trained together. After a couple of trainings some girls expressed their insecurity. They were really shy and asked for a separate training. Still, for Udo

as well as the coaches it was important to mingle the teams and play touch in every end of a training session.

Udo confessed, after asking him, if he noticed any changes concerning the interaction between the boys and girls, that he is not often at the training and is currently in Madrid for his master thesis. But from his distant view he observes alterations in their attitudes. Many of the participants are „super positive, they are opening up and its just super fun to hang out with them“ and „that is always something really great, when you are investing time and it is bearing fruit“ (Udo, 2018:7). Girls and boys did not interacted a lot in the beginning. Udo was not able to provide any specific cases and talked about the boys and girls interaction in general terms. He is aware that it is not perfect, and that it takes time to find people that understand each other well (Udo, 2018:7).

*“At the beginning there were so shy even to talk to us and now there are coming and giving us high five. This is just beautiful to see how this developed over time. And also looking at the boys - We had some examples where they came and didn't even speak a word German and everything. And where are they standing now, fluent German, working, you know, even looking for education to get a better job in the future, really pushing things ... You know, you are just happy to know that these is everything that we were hoping for, that there can just unfold, flourish and grow. That's actually the main aim... not that they all became great rugby players... On the one hand growing into the society but also personally grow... We also have this rugby code with moral standards and so on were we try to show how to behave also outside the pitch. You need some rules that things work better. So, this is also the way we also want to teach them.”* (Udo, 2018:6)

To reinforce the participants talents and skills, they are further able to play in other club teams for free and eventually be part of the team. It helps to connect ROB with the rest of the club members and players.

*„[...] which is great because they can play more rugby, and this is where the real integration happens when they play in a team that is composed entirely of people that are local here. That's where they can also bond and make friendships, so you don't only have refugees playing with refugees. We want them to reach out for other Austrians. One of the boys is already a coach now of the local clubs here which is really a great achievement.”* (Udo, 2018:7). This happened in the case of Salih and Judi. Both train or trained in other club teams. If participants do not want to join the training, it is fine for Udo and the others. They are always welcome to be on the club area and

engage in other activities if they feel like.

Concluding the key characteristics of the project, according to Udo:

- creates a sense of belonging
- engage in social activity and take responsibility
- making friends and contacts
- compensate negative energy
- learning German and Austrian society
- personal grow and becoming a part in a society
- empowerment in the way of self-confidence
- “breaking cultural barriers”
- create gender equality through direct interaction
- possible further engagement in rugby club

Concerning gender relations Udo's interview showed that his perspective is a rather positivistic one. Furthermore he situates gender relations in general statements. Although the projects characteristics are focusing on inclusion, it was partly highlighted that girls were essential in complementing the project. As this project was quickly planned and rather impulsive, it faced constraints in the beginning as they did not involve girls in the project head team.

## 2. Coaches

The information presented in this part are based on interviews with Minnie, Sophie, Bennie and Mato, the former and current coaches of the Rugby Opens Borders project. Sophie's entrance into rugby is comparable to the experiences of the girls who participate in the ROB training. She expressed some concerns during the interview about rugby. Although, the beginning was uncertain, Sophie fell in „love“ with the sport.

*„One of my friends played rugby and he said, well, Sophie that is a sport for you but ... I ... always kind of wanted to try out but I never had the courage until a friend of mine forced my and asked me go trough and would practice with her. And I said yes and then we were stuck. I loved it first sight.“ (Sophie, 2019:1)*

She further mentioned, that she was scared about the reaction from the family and friends. Stereotypes about rugby as „being brutal“ and therefore „not suitable“ for girls were ideas that immediately emerged. The reaction ranged from being a little bit irritated, surprised and amazed.

*„'Oh, you really play rugby, is it a sport for girls?'. It also was my family from the countryside they were a little bit more irritated but most of them were not really big surprised. I was always quite active. I would explain it to them. I initially would thought that the people would react differently. So, I was afraid that people would think that I am brutal but it was not like that at all. Many people would support me and say ,So cool, that you do that'. Most of my friends were happy because they could now tell that they have one friend that plays rugby. Not many people know how to play rugby especially women. So I had only positive feedback. Also funny ones like ,You look tiny for a rugby player' but I have never been called tiny or skinny but suddenly I am skinny for a rugby player (laughs).“ (Sophie, 2019: 2)*

Especially the ROB project provides for many of the coaches positive impacts on the boys and in particular on the girls (Mato, 2019; Sophie, 2019; Minnie, 2018; Bennie, 2018). For Bennie ROB served as an way „to let off some steam, and that you get in contact with other people, and you start talking and [...] that sporting aspect is a kind of icebreaker“ (Bennie, 2018:3). Mato explained the reason why less girls attend the training in comparison to the boys. For him it is connected to social expectations. Since Mato trains the girls and boys together, he is able to see direct similarities and differences.

*„I think... because the girls, I think in their mind they are like weak they cannot play. You know. I think this something that only comes from their minds because maybe they grow like this, like you cannot play sport or something like that. You know. Yeah, that my...but in reality it's totally the opposite. The girls are much more stronger, braver than boys. I have some groups here and... when I have training here only like a hundred percent with just girls sometimes I have some problems because then I need to say hey hey.. take it easy. Like, don't hurt yourself because they are like crazy and boys are more like oh, don't touch me don't touch me (changes voice).“ (Mato, 2019:1)*

Mato recognized the enthusiasm of girls and their full engagement into the training that sometimes exceeded the boys engagement. His training is not gender biased, although his way of talking depends on the gender and is then still biased. „Like my coaching is the same for boys and girls maybe the way that I am talking with them maybe is different but the training is the same. Same thrills, same exercise, same intensity.“ (Mato, 2019:2) This contradiction can be explained as a form of ‚empathy’ due the fact, that Mato is a man and therefore needs to be more careful with the girls than the boys. The coaches perceived some stereotyped thinking even within the rugby community. Mato stated one case with another men from Chile, who came to

Austria to play rugby at the Rugby Union Donau.

*„Once I lived with a guy from Chile and one day we were talking about gender and girls and boys and he said, ‚no Mato it’s impossible girls play like a shit’ and I was like what are you talking about... easy... it’s just comparing it out of TV. Like soccer male soccer like no one watches female soccer and asked like yes but because of the girls or what? And he said, ‚no they cannot run cannot play they cannot do nothing’. Like, what a stupid men. That is not true. But you know they have it in their mind. That the problem is that the performance of the girls is not good that’s why nobody watches, but in my opinion this is not true.“ (Mato, 2019:3)*

This statement can be considered as an expression of patriarchal perspectives in sport and especially in rugby. Other arguments of the coaches supported the progress the girls made. Minnie explained in detail how the girls, that had also different prerequisites when they started the training, acquired new capabilities.

*„Also, when they started they no body mass or body knowledge or whatsoever. Like, you can’t imagine. I mean we started with (...) so many girls so many were even worse äh ... but of course of course you have to think that first of all Somalia or Afghanistan has been in the war since ages they don’t have school system that we have here so clearly they are not used to gymnastics at school and even less to do after school activities, ya. And so the basically only usage that they do of their body is walking up and down and that’s it. Äh, so there are so many girls particularly they have no muscle no nothing like they couldn’t do the basic moves you know that activity that somebody goes on their hand and somebody picks up your feed and you have to walk they were not able to do that. The Syrians are a bit better because they had a stable school system and they possibly do äh ... what ever but the other ones don’t. So what this is one thing that I really noticed. I started seeing that they grow some muscles and now they can do Push-ups. It was really hard to make them do a proper Push-Up with you know with the Bump up and everything. So physically I think they learned a lot on that and also the attitude.“ (Minnie, 2018: 5-6)*

As Minnie coached the girls in 2018, she was able to see a lot of difference after they started. For Sophie, as another girls coach, she observed their growing self-confidence but also cultural differences more than with the boys (Sophie, 2019:4).

*„Yes, so, their movement and body position was better and you could see their muscles growing. It was even we only trained once a week you saw that they got stronger and also I think they got self-confidence from playing rugby it was like we are playing rugby and they thought it was*

*something cool because none of their friends did it and I think they had this fear pressure for what are you really doing. ‚It is not for girls‘ and it is highly different and so cool. It was kind of balanced but then I think what came and was problematic was puberty. “ (Sophie, 2019:5)*

To approach the girls appropriately took a bit time to understand. Sophie explained some cases, when they promoted rugby in refugee shelters and the girls „would shake my hand but would not shake the hand of the male coaches“ (Sophie, 2019:4). Bennie experienced those issues too. While he was presenting the project in the shelters, he reflected that the girls would think „OK, there is a man, telling me about contact sport, this is nothing for me“ but eventually girls attended the training who „do not feel too comfortable with so many boys around“ (Bennie, 2018:6). So, as mentioned before, they separated the groups to meet the needs of the girls. Further, they encountered some problems then during the training. Some girls „never done sports in their lives“ (Sophie, 2019:4). Concerning difficulties that arises, Sophie clarified:

*„So, that is what I saw most and then getting them to start playing rugby was also quite hard and to teach them rugby because it is a very intense sport and you need your entire body we really had to with basics like how to I run properly and how do I get body strength that could make a tackle because they had the completely wrong body positions for that and not enough strength in their core. “ (Sophie, 2019:4)*

Not only the body strength grew but also the respect and commitment developed.

*„And when they came they had NO discipline or whatsoever. Like, I would say ‚kurze Wasserpause‘ ... and then they will be like sitting in the ground, drinking water and then I would say ‚kurze Wasserpause‘ means you go there you drink and you come back. It would take me like 10 minutes to get them off the floor and go back into plane. “ (Minnie, 2018:6)*

Complaining was a common case in the beginning. Sentences like „Ich kann das nicht“ occurred often and indicated their insecurity. The girls expressed their inability to perform certain tasks and did not have confidence in themselves (Minnie, 2018:7). Another fact was the pressure some girls perceived from their parents. Salih explained this issue during her interview and Minnie mentioned it too. Salih's mum questioned the ability to earn enough money from being a professional rugby player. Minnie offered Salih some perspectives for her „future in rugby“. But currently women struggle to live off rugby in contrast to men who receive a salary and are actually able to live off rugby – just to mention Mato, the present head coach of ROB.

*„And then I told her you know you can become a coach or referee and get paid and (...) yes, you can do that. And she said ah, yes, because my mom is interested that I spent my time on something that is gonna bring me somewhere you know if I would become a professional rugby player at least I will get payed and get a job and a profession out of it and I can't get that from rugby. I was like well .... I can't give you a profession but you have to keep studying [...].“* (Minnie, 2018:8)

What occurred repeatedly during the training was the anxiety of creating mixed groups for exercises. In the beginning the girls as well as the boys preferred to make a group with either a friend or relative. The building of a mixed team just appeared when there was no other option around. This slowly changed after the girls and boys developed a friendly relationship through mutual trust.

*„They don't have so like when I say they don't have a partner I can easily make a group of a girl and a boy. This is not easy this is not easy usually when I have like three boys and three girls I never saw they would mixing up. No, just girl with a girl and then girl with a boy because she doesn't have any partner you know.“* (Mato, 2019:4)

Concerning the contesting of gender relations, Minnie identifies a progress, as the girls and boys in the beginning avoided to touch each other. Through playing the ‚touch‘ game together and in mixed teams, they experienced a sense of shame. Nevertheless, Minnie highlighted their young age to be one reason and outlined that they play ‚touch‘ now without problems (Minnie, 2018:6). At the end of each training session, all create a circle together. This causes some irritation, even now. According to Minnie, and through observation, the girls in particular try to be between either Minnie and Sophie or other girls (Minnie, 2018:6). In that moment, everybody is sweating and hugging the other person, so, it is also a very intimate moment. Since rugby is a democratic sport, it allows varied body types and physical abilities to be part. Mato therefore considers rugby as a positive way of blending gender and varied body representations.

*„Yes, totally different. That's a good part of the rugby because rugby is really democratic sport. We accept short, tall, fat, small, skin. It doesn't matter you always have some position.“* (Mato, 2019:3)

The internationality of the club is further encouraging a holistic approach. There is no official language spoken. It is always a mixture of English, German and other languages depending on the composition of the group. Bennie and the other coaches always seek to include different kinds

of communication, like hand signs, to create a comprehension (Bennie, 2018:5). The coaches involved many ROB members in other club activities. They wanted to reinforce their skills and abilities. Rolemodels like Khaled were able to coach underages teams. Implementing those role models helps to reach further and inspires other young people to join the project.

*„So he could also get a kind of a reward. There are also others that I could mention, but especially Khaled, who is a role model for the others, because I think it is important to have these role models, to approach someone who I see is doing a great job, and they want to be like him or like her, and that is easier, to have them within the group.“* (Bennie, 2018:6)

Still, referring to gender relations, boys and girls are biased in terms of social expectations. During the research some prejudices arised. Mato is not able to speak German well enough now but nevertheless perceived conflicts between the participants. This illustrates the contradiction in rugby:

*„Even I don't understand German I can feel they make jokes with each other. I remember one day we were at the gym me, Ali, Isi and Judi and I feel that Ali were like ,ah, this girls cannot lift that or do this' (change voice). They have this in their mind it's like they won't show that thing they inside really feel [refers to Ali]. Like everybody is welcome but really deep inside it's not like that.“* (Mato, 2019:3)

Being a women or man are social categories that are created by sociality and cultural codes. In sport all those categories are maintained and reinforced through sex segregation, specific attitudes and behaviour. As Connell (2003) notes: *„The meanings in the bodily sense of masculinity concern, above all else, the superiority of men to women, and the exaltation of hegemonic masculinity over other groups of men which is essential to the domination of women.“* (ibid:85 ) Despite hegemonic masculinity, attempts are made in the ROB project to renegotiate those existing prejudices. When Rugby Opens Borders started, Sophie joined the boys in the training. This caused irritation and many boys underestimated her rugby skills.

*„And for example, Sophie smashed one guy, while playing rugby, and all of the sudden, they were like ,O shit, she is strong too', and not only physically, but mentally to, she does not shut up, or when someone says something stupid, she and the other girls come back and show them – OK, this is how we do it. And the boys really took it well, and that was one thing that we were*

*scared of, since in the media and all the information you get is – Ah, they do not talk to women, they treat women like garbage.“ (Bennie, 2018:4)*

The projects highlight, for Bennie, is observing the girls and boys „grow into a person, personality“, who constantly reflect upon themselves. Bennie mostly refers to the boys.

*„And a lot of them were really shy, when they arrived, hardly speaking, they did not want to talk, you saw that the body language was really defensive, the shoulders were hanging and the back was hunched, and now I look most of these guys, they walk with the head up, we joke around and we also meet not only on the rugby team, but with a couple of them we meet to do work outs, or just to hang out and drink coffee and cook together, so with some of them they really started a friendship [...].“ (Bennie, 2018:3)*

Concluding the key characteristics of the project, according to the coaches:

- creates a sense of belonging
- engage in social activity and take responsibility
- making friends and contacts
- compensate negative energy
- change in attitude
- reconsider and contest prejudices about gender
- create a knowledge of rugby values like respect, teamwork, discipline, integrity, friendship
- learning German and get to know the Austrian society
- empowerment in the way of self-confidence
- “breaking cultural barriers”
- create gender equality through direct interaction
- possible further engagement in rugby club
- personal growth and becoming a part of a society
- reinforcing role models
- body language and learning about gender equality and breaking the stereotypes about women playing rugby
- gaining body mass, muscles and physical and mental strength

### **3. Participants**

The information in this section will be based on the interviews with a focus group of both girls and boys, Sali and Judi. They are all participants of the ROB project. Many of the boys and girls

represent the only person in the family that plays rugby. Sali even mentioned, that she is the only girl in her family that is physical active.

*„Because my cousins, parents are not sportive and I’m the first and the last guy, girl from my family who does sport.“ (Sali, 2018:5)*

So, for a lot of the participants it really entailed breaking a barrier to engage in physical activity. Rugby in particular represents an open type of sport, that accepts everyone, no matter what size, age, body type, according to the participants. When I asked Ali and Isi about the main difference of rugby to other kinds of sport they answered:

*„In soccer there are just skinny people, who are fast and have a little knowledge. From my opinion, rugby is different. You can be heavy, skinny, bad or good and everybody can play. And you are also able to learn quickly how to play rugby. This is the difference between soccer and rugby.“ (Ali & Isi 2019:2)*

Sali expressed a genuine ‚love’ for rugby. She prefers rugby to many other types of sport, she does dancing and tennis too. Rugby evokes a feeling that is, for Salih, hard to explain, „ I cannot say the feeling, but, yeah, rugby is my life, how I can say this, it is really my life. I know that is crazy because everybody says how is that rugby is your life, but yeah the feeling is when you want to do something , just do it [...]“ (Sali, 2018:5). Judi has been engaged in many different kinds of sports like volleyball, tennis but defines rugby as different from the others because of its intensity. For her, it requires more body movement and strength (Judi, 2019:3). Since ROB is a project including miscellaneous nationalities and languages, it promotes equal access. Ali admires the team spirit:

*„You can learn many good things ... like friends and so on ... from different cultures, different countries. You have to have the team spirit and take care of each other, this is so important, you can make good friends. This was nice for me.“ (Ali & Isi 2019:1)*

Ali further mentioned, that ROB is for him like a ‚family’ and they always do things apart from the training, which is important for him (Ali & Isi 2019:3). During the focus group interview with the girls, they emphasized the aspect of „having a lot of fun and excitement, while playing together [boys and girls]“ (Group Interview, 2018:1).

*“It is very exciting and we have a lot of fun playing with the boys too. We sometimes play against*

*another team, I like that a lot.” (Group Interview, 2018:1)*

During the group interview with the girls, they encouraged the idea of playing and training with the boys repeatedly. Due to a higher amount of people, it would provide more fun for the whole group (Group Interview, 2018:2). It indicates, that they do not see the gender as an issue, just a practical side of having a larger number of players, so for them it does not matter if someone is boy or a girl. The important aspect is to create a successful and joyful training. Additionally, the participants benefited from the internationality of the project. Sali, Isi and others emphasized the positive impact on speaking and practicing German and even English (Sali, 2018; Ali & Isi, 2019; Group Interview, 2018). Sali was able to fully learn English by talking to Minnie in English.

*„First time I learned English I was with Minnie, I love her, she helped me too much, she is the best trainer I have ever seen... I want to go to Italy because I love it, and I need to learn English and I asked Minnie if she can speak English to me.” (Sali, 2018:2)*

After the training all participants and coaches join to share a meal. This aspect was for Judi and Isi an important ritual.

*„When I first came they made some food for after the training. It was my favorite meal. Spaghetti with sauce and so on. Well, this was great ... yes, this is why I stucked to it then (laughs).“ (Judi, 2019:3)*

Isi was able to learn German and make friendships through the project. This was important for him, as he was an unaccompanied minor refugee and did not know anyone in Austria. Since he started to be part of ROB he made new friends (Ali & Isi, 2019). They would, and often do recommend this program to their friends, what indicates that they are satisfied with the project and feel comfortable. Sali promoted the project and rugby in school.

*„Yes, I made a presentation, because it was of German, because I told my teacher that I play rugby and she said ,oh, that’s cool’ [...] I think, anything that I have, ball, shirt everything, that I normally take for the game, and I show everybody what it really is and they were so happy and this was so funny.“ (Sali, 2018:1)*

During the interview with Sali and Judi, they both experienced irritation and had to break the stereotypes of rugby being a „crazy game“ (Sali, 2018:1). Salihs mother is scared, that her

daughter will be injured. Sali told me, that her mother never watched the training and has just a little knowledge about rugby.

*„She says I will never let you go to something like this, I said why. She says, yes, it is just like crazy the rugby why you play that? I am so scared that you break your body. I said ,no, mom, there is no problem that I broke my body, often when I break my body, I can learn, how I can play better. That’s normal, when I break my body. It’s a game’.“ (Sali, 2018:3)*

When Sali was asked what is the main thing in rugby different to other sports she said that she likes when she sees that she will „not break her body“, as everyone thought (Sali, 2018:5). First, everyone hated her playing rugby in the beginning (Sali, 2018:5). Salih further explained her favorite part of the game. When she is able to speak freely and loud to indicate where she is, makes her really happy - “Pass! Left! Right!’ I don’t know how to explain, but I love it to say that, yeah. Often, when Minnie says Pass! , you take the ball and throw the ball“ (Salih, 2018:5). Judi was confronted with concerns by her parents. But she explained to them how rugby works and clarified its structure after she participated.

*„In the beginning everybody was surprised that I play rugby, because they thought rugby is just for boys and not for girls. Yes, but after I explained them everything in detail how it works and so on ... My parents were scared first because of all this contact and stuff. Because you have body contact they thought I will get injured. But know I explained it’s good (laughs).“ (Judi, 2019:1)*

Since Sali started playing rugby, she replaced anxiety with self-confidence. As she had to drive home late she was scared sometimes going by herself but this has changed. Her father once said, “ah oops, you are coming, you are a rugby player, no one robs them” and encouraged her playing rugby although he showed some resentments in the beginning (Sali, 2018:3). Rugby created a new perspective for Salih to identify her body in other terms. She started to „grow muscles everywhere“ and reinforces that „girls can do everything what the boys can do, that is normal“ (Sali, 2018:3). Despite her mother being very anxious about rugby her brother and father are proud of her and she is able to relieve negative energy (Sali, 2018:3).

*„Ah yeah, before I play rugby I was often angry, when my mom told me something, I was too much angry... and now when I see everybody is happy I am trying to be as my parents , yes I changed myself something, like it was crazy before, but when I begin to play rugby I have also... I often run, I also have muscles (laughs) everywhere!“ (Sali, 2018:4)*

During Judis first training she injured herself. Nevertheless, she continued coming and enjoyed the training with Mato, Isi and Ali (Judi, 2019:2). She further developed her running skills and physical condition.

*„Yes, I got better in running. Before that I was really bad in running. But now it works better. I improved my movement a lot. Normally I do not do all these movements and things, but in rugby I do. Now everything is working better.“* (Judi, 2019:3) Even after one month Judi felt a difference in her movement and body.

Concerning the relationship between the girls and boys, many participants considered them as either ‚brother‘ or ‚sister‘. During the game no differences are made, according to Sali, Ali and Judi.

*„I mean they are like my brothers, my bigger brothers, my younger brothers, it’s normal. It is not important, with whom you play rugby, I just play [...].“* (Sali, 2018:4)

As some of the girls and boys reside in the same building, they were able to establish a friendship before the ROB project.

*„Yes, I know some from Insta. Some are in our house and when we finish training we go home together.“* (Group Interview, 2018:2)

Ali mentioned some friends he made through rugby and even showed me some pictures on Instagram of her. Her name is Louise and he is impressed by her skills. They write and meet sometimes. There is no direct difference of girls and boys in making friends, for Ali. *„I have friends in my club. There are also girls. If we are on the pitch, we concentrate on the game.“* (Ali & Isi, 2019:4) In particular Bennie is for Ali like an ‚older brother‘ who takes care of him. *„He supports me with everything. No matter what I need he does it. He understands me. I am for him like a younger brother he his the big brother for me.“* (Ali & Isi 2019:3) The aspect of belonging is a key pillar of the project for the participants. Their notion of being equal derives from a practical perspective. A great amount of participants means for everyone - „more fun and joy“.

Concluding the key characteristics of the project, according to the girls and boys who participate in the project:

- experience the sense of belonging and being part of a „family“
- having fun and excitement while playing together (with girls and boys)

- learning languages
- making friendships
- having a good trainer (strong and supportive role model)
- getting in contact with boys and challenging gender stereotypes (they do not see gender as an issue for training, realizing that girls can do everything that boys can) – boys and girls see each other as „brother“ and „sister“
- feeling stronger and confident
- gaining muscles
- having a sporty, healthy life (not drinking alcohol or smoking cigarettes)
- being proud of playing rugby
- compensate negative energy

#### **4. Researcher**

The information provided in this section will be based on my observations of the training and social activities as well as social interaction within the ROB project, informal conversations with the coaches, participants and project managers and fieldnotes created during the research.

The project turned out to be more complex and comprehensive than expected. The physical activity is not the central aim to this project. ROB wants to provide a holistic space that includes social activities, social work and a safe and trustable place to stay. In the beginning in particular the boys were supported by the project team to seek for jobs and training courses. During the research the weather changed from very cold to very hot – no matter what weather, people participated in the training. Although more boys than girls participated it indicates that the project is something joyful. Since 2018 some changes in the project occurred, that impacted the training. In 2019 the ROB project team nominated Mato as the new head coach. Minnie is still available to coach a separate girls team, if there is a need for it. On the 7<sup>th</sup> of April Mato mentioned several concerns that reduce the full potential of the project. As Udo moved to Madrid in order to write his master thesis Ike, Udo's brother, is now the representative of ROB and manages the project. Further ROB is since 2019 officially registered in the World Rugby Organization and supported with 8000 Euro of funding per year. Mato criticized that no efforts are being made to recruit new boys and girls in refugee shelters and schools. It would further be important to target young refugees as the new government reduced the availability to enter the country drastically and the focus group has grown older now. Many former ROB participants like Sali, Ali, Khaled and others left the group to play on other teams in the Rugby Union Donau. Bennie is not involved in the coaching anymore and focuses on other aspects of the project. Structural and social changes

impacting the rate of participants. In 2019, not many girls and boys have joined the training. Mato convinced the project team in May 2019 to change the focus group and start recruiting new participants to create a fun and joyful space for everyone (Fieldnotes April 7th 2019). When asking Mato about rugby his opinion on contesting gender relations, he responded, that girls do not own the space in rugby and in particular in the Rugby Union Donau. An explanation was the attendance during games. When the men's team plays far more people watch it than in comparison to the girls team (Fieldnotes April 7th 2019). Although those internal conflicts arise, it represents a common case in local organisation that are on a grass-root level. Nevertheless, they are integral to „win support and change opinions“ (Hargreaves, 1996:287). ROB is a highly adaptable project that enables girls and boys to enjoy a reliable space. As many of the participants are Muslims, the coaches even changed the training during Ramadan to make it easier for the girls and boys to participate.

A progress and positive impact of rugby on the girls could be observed. Despite their initial insecurities and constant complaints, they were able to perceive their bodies in new perspectives and create a „stronger self“. Emilie and Judi were complaining a lot in the beginning and used phrases like „I am not able to do that“ or „I am so bad at this“ quite often (Fieldnotes June 17th 2018; April 7th 2019). When Judi and Camilla trained for the first time, they wore their casual clothes. After a few trainings this changed and both as well as other girls replaced it with sports clothes and running shoes (Fieldnotes May 13th 2018; March 22nd 2019; April 7th 2019). After Judi realized she is not able to perform skilfully with casual clothes she changed it in order to participate successfully in every exercise. She even started wearing sweatbands on her arms and head (Fieldnotes April 7th 2019). The observations and active participation in the training revealed that Judi, Camilla, Salih and other girls expressed a great interest and had changed their attitude, movement and behaviour. Rugby is a very communicative sport. Hence, it is important to speak loud and clear to indicate where the player is positioned. All of the girls developed a clear and loud communication (Fieldnotes April 7th 2019). In training Camilla was able to express her emotions like anger, excitement (Fieldnotes May 27th 2018). In the beginning she was very shy and insecure. The female teachers like Charly and Sophie are constantly encouraging them by doing funny things (Fieldnotes April 15th 2018). The female coaches were empathic and tried to make the girls feel comfortable. Rugby is a very respectful sport, this value is transmitted permanently during, before and after the training. Many of the girls and boys expressed anger during the training. This was often linked to their own insecurity. After each girl and boy continued participating in the training, this attitude changed. This turned then into a

better body movement. Through throwing exercises, running, gym sessions and tackling Sali and other girls developed a lot of muscles and physical strength. Rugby is a physically intense sport, that I was able to experience myself. Tackling was another part that involves unusual movements. During the active participation in the training Sali and Judi enjoyed the tackling part. If there are group situations the participants always tend to take a same sex partner (Fieldnotes February 2nd 2019). When female athletes tackle during training or a match, Chase (2006) identified this as a „powerful act“ which „makes them feel powerful“ (ibid:239). In Carle and Naurights (1999) research on women playing rugby many women expressed their „genuine love for rugby and the social interaction surrounding the game“ (ibid:146). Through physical contact sport like rugby the players were able to „test their bodies“ and discover them in many new ways (ibid:146). Chase (2006) and Carle and Nauright (1999) findings were also observed during my research. The girls felt „strong and powerful“ when they could tackle a boy or a girl and further questioned the normative body conceptions of femininity. While femininity is constructed as a normative notion in Western society women rugby players contest them by exposing injuries and expressing multiple forms of femininity (Chase, 2006:229). They do not expect gendered ideas of a female bodies. For Salih and Judi getting injured was nothing shocking. They both continued coming and laughed about their injuries in the changing room.

The project helps to contest and challenge gender stereotypes in several ways. Although rugby is not a welcoming space for girls, according to Mato, ROB influences the girls and boys in a positive manner. In 2018 ROB was separated into two teams. Although they trained separately, they were able to observe each other as they trained on the same field. In the end of each training they played touch together. This caused some irritation and concerns in the beginning for the participants, both girls and boys, but they play it with no problem now. The coaches try to include girls and boys into their training in order to create a social interaction. For example, during the training of the girls, Sophie or Minnie include male members after a while so the girls would slowly get used to training and playing together with males. Also, the type of exercises that the girls do are physically demanding, what demonstrates the girls, and the boys that girls can be strong and skilful too (Fieldnotes April 15th 2018). In building mixed teams for tackling exercises and trust games the girls and boys get to know each other on a physical level. Some girls and boys expressed uncertainty during those exercises. Another aspect to contest gender relations is the time of training itself. Both teams train on the same day at the same time on the same pitch – next to each other. This can be regarded as an attempt to accomplish a common sense of belonging and familiarity within the project. Since they can perceive each other in every

moment they might find similarities but differences in each others training and structure. So, they are able to reflect and question certain social expectations. Through this interconnectedness on several levels before, during and after the training, girls and boys are reinforced to bond, share experiences and enjoy time together.

Eventually this can lead to friendships within the project. While I was talking to Khaled on the way home after the training one day, he told me, that Farhard and others are close friends for him. He all met them through ROB (Fieldnotes June 17th 2018). Ali created a friendship with another girl, called Louise. He called her a ‚machine’ because of her skills (Fieldnotes March 10th 2019). Observing Isis and Judis interaction during the training was something very positive. Isi emphasized to play with Judi in a team against Mato and myself (Fieldnotes April 7th 2019). When Judi expressed her insecurity and inability to perform certain exercises Isi always encouraged her (Fieldnotes April 7th 2019). Still, boys tend to highlight physical difference as ‚natural’ given while girls try to reduce those prejudices. Ali explained, that he clearly sees difference between girls and boys when they play. For him, many girls including Salih are ‚not able to play properly“ (Fieldnotes March 10th 2019). During his interview he created a contradiction because he suddenly switched into a rather neutral position. This was an interesting observation as it indicated that in general terms the stereotype of girls playing not skilful is still a vital part of everyday life. Mato further mentioned during the training exclusively phrases like „Well done boys“ or „Let’s go boys“. When I confronted him with this, he replied that he thought it refers to both girls and boys (Fieldnotes February 2nd 2019). Mato also told me that for him ROB does not in particular discusses issues of gender but it emphasized through participation of girls and boys equality – Rugby in general “is no space” for girls, he told me (Fieldnotes April 12th 2019). There is a need to reconsider gender relations in rugby (Fieldnotes April 12th 2019).

Communication and trust are important aspects and values in rugby. Therefore the coaches implemented exercises like blindfolded steeplechase in mixed teams. This created a bonding moment and respect between all participants (Fieldnotes April 15th 2018). The training further emphasized to learn new languages like German or even English. Since Mato and Minnie prefer to speak English the participants quickly acquired some English and German. Within one year Sali, Isi, Judi and other were able to either speak English or German or both (Fieldnotes 2018; 2019).

Concluding the key characteristics of the project, according to the girls and boys who participate

in the project:

- create a sense of belonging
- challenging gender relations
- fabricate a safe and joyful space
- critical reflect about gender stereotypes
- becoming comfortable with mixed groups
- creating different opportunities for the youth
- project goes beyond sport
- learning German and in some cases English
- becoming more self-confident and open
- acquire values like mutual respect, team work, communication and making friends
- project is adaptable to ensure well-being of participants
- gain physical and mental strength

### **Final Remark**

Referring again to suggestions made by Deutsch (2007) it can be argued that ROB contributed to be a site of change. Although the project implements gendered practice it has to be recognized that the coaches and in particular the participants are an vital part of contesting gender relations and create an equal space – therefore ‚undo‘ gender. There has been a discourse from requesting “gender equity in sport”, to pushing “sport for gender equity” (Meier, 2005:3). This paradigm exceeds the notion of „including girls into existing gendered projects“. It has to be considered that girls in rugby is still confronted with a „male identity formation as they emphasize masculine body performance such as forceful actions, physical contact, muscularity, bigness, power, and strength“ and therefore „fixate boys‘ sense of self as masculine in opposition to girls‘ feminine behaviour in sport“ (Azzarito, 2012:72). The arguments of the boys represent this tendency.

Hence, it is imperative to understand the group of adolescent girls as a heterogeneous unit that needs be associated within social and cultural terms (Meier, 2005, 3). Designing and implementing a girls‘ sport program requires a number of specific actions. According to the UN report on women and sport, the program should include a “girl-centered” approach (learn directly from girls about their needs and interests and seek their input in the design of program), „create girls-only spaces“ (provide girls with an arena for self-expression where they feel safe), „seek parental and community permission“ (for girls‘ participation which will enhance girls‘ ability to

take part), „enlist female coaches, referees and trainers“, since developing a talent pool of female leaders is very important, etc. (UN, 2007, 19). Many of the theoretical considerations were observed during the research. The idea of a “four angle approach” was important in order to get a better perspective of the results and enables to present every perspective as explicit as possible. The research provided an insight on how the programm tried to establish a safe and joyful space where girls and boys can personally, physically and mentally grow. The organizers and coaches were motivated, committed, professional, flexible and carrying, full of support and understanding, and the fact that organizers and trainers are aware that the program is still not perfect points to their self-criticism and their intention to search for even better ways to create an equal and participatory space for girls.

Concluding the central characteristics of the project, according to the organizers, coaches, participants and researcher it can be said that it provides a more positive impact than constraints:

- create a sense of belonging
- challenging gender relations
- fabricate a safe and joyful space
- learning about other gender and becoming comfortable with mixed groups
- creating different opportunities for the youth
- project goes beyond sport
- learning German and in some cases English
- becoming more self-confident
- acquire values like mutual respect, team work, communication and making friends
- project is adaptable to ensure well-being of participants
- gain physical and mental strength
- holistic and participatory approach
- personal growth
- making friends and contacts
- get rid of the negative energy
- living a healthy life
- having good role models

## 10. A step forward? - Conclusion

In this thesis the influence of rugby in Vienna on reconsidering gender relations has been examined in terms of an anthropological fieldwork that was conducted throughout 2018 and 2019. As conceptualized by scholars (Hargreaves, 1986, 1996, 2014; Hall 1996) hegemonic configurations represent a vital part of women and girls in sport, particularly rugby. Considering this, sport as a social practice pursues to implement and maintain, according to Theberge and Birrell (1994), a „patriarchal privilege, unrestricted capital accumulation, white skin privilege, compulsory heterosexuality and the reproduction of privilege“ (ibid:362). Through those given patriarchal elements that were observed during the research the project including its managing team, coaches and participants are constantly trying to reconsider normative conceptions of femininity and masculinity. Participation of women and girls in sport challenges gender stereotypes and discrimination, and can therefore be a vehicle to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls (UN, 2007).

Deutsch (2007) argues, that in sport clubs and physical education women and girls are either directly or indirectly be forced to adopt stereotypical gender approaches and create gender normatives that have been displayed on their developments and bodies (ibid:111). This can be observed in many individual and club sports. Bryson (1994) identifies, that gender differences are still seen as being ‚natural‘ and fails to recognise the ideological implications (ibid:51). For him, it is „the grounds of ideology because of its apparent autonomy from ‚biased‘ interpretation“ (ibid:51). Girls, women, and femininity have been defined in relation and contrast to men and masculinity, and sports world had been tied with the masculine domain. In the past few decades, this trend has been confronted and challenged - increasing numbers of girls and women are participating in “traditional male sports” like rugby have grown. Being physically active and engaging in sport such as rugby enables women to control their bodies and decide for themselves in their best interest. The evolving resistance against the state and men as the executive tool of power helps to increase physical liberation and acts as a way of empowerment.

*„It therefore seems ironic that, until recently, the majority of feminist researchers have ignored female sporting bodies, nor have they always seen the relevance of physicality or empowerment through physical activity, to feminist politics‘.“ (Carle & Nauright, 1999:129)*

Sports and the sporting world have been tied to the masculine domain, and there has been a legacy of bias against the female athlete. Girls and women have “tackled” narrow, negative, and limiting concepts and ideas that they should not participate in sports, sweat, show aggression, or compete, and begun to include physical strength and athletic prowess in the definition of femininity. The large increase of female participation in athletics seems to be related to the rapid growth of many professional women’s sports leagues, and the increased coverage and representation of women athletes in the world of sports. In addition, women have started to completely change how they are viewed in the sports world by participating in male-dominated sports. This shows how women have considerably changed how they are viewed in the sporting world, by challenging stereotypes against them. Since women have entered the sporting world it has been associated with a „genuine quest for equality, control of their own bodies, self-definition“ and liberation of the existing male dominated organizational framework (Messner M. , 1988:198). Messner further argues, „it remains for a critical feminist theory to recognize the emergent contradictions in this system in order to inform a liberating social practice“ (ibid:208). With the evolution of gender roles in our society, we have started to see women participate in certain sports that were at one time only associated with one gender. There are suggestions that participation in sport helps to increase self-esteem, self-confidence and improves the ability to have control over one’s body (Haugaa Engh, 2010:63). Feminist theory on sport stresses the importance of sport as an integral instrument of women to control their bodies and make choices in their interests (Cahn, 2015; Hargreaves, 1986,1996; Hall, 2016; Messner,1988, 1990) This is why, in recent years, there has been a significant shift from advocating for ‘gender equality in sport’ towards using ‘sport for gender equality and personal development’. Women have considerably changed how they are viewed in the sporting world, by challenging stereotypes against them through the positive effects on girls and women in sports (Chinurum, Ogunjimi, O’Neil, 2014).

This paper presented theoretical concepts related to my research question. I adopted the theory of gender reversal and undoing gender to help examine how sport acts as an agency to challenge gender stereotypes (Butler, 2004; Deutsch, 2007). While dealing with location, project structure and spatial organization of the Rugby Union Donau Club, I discovered that it promotes sport values like fairness, tolerance, and respect for others, thus creating the gender-friendly, culture-friendly and religion-friendly environment, through the hard work of trainers and volunteers. Nevertheless, it was observed in several cases, that the space comprises elements that represent the masculine defined character of rugby like photographs, rituals and media material. Hence, the

project team reflected on those issues and developed new strategies. While researching the training itself, I discovered that it is structured in a way that it challenges the gender stereotypes, and by implementing these techniques the girls not only get in physical contact with other female body but also understand ways of using their bodies, as the different parts of the training, as playing touch or having group hug at the end together. The forms of interaction were explored through different dimensions of social activities that examined communication, language and body language, clothing, activities, support and volunteering. Despite those constraints that were part of the ROB project, it represents an attempt to question historical, social and cultural constructed conceptions about normative femininity and masculinity and provides a space for equal participation and self-reflection. During the research I encountered several benefits of Rugby Opens Borders for the refugee youth. Creating a sense of belonging, making new friends, understand the new society and its social structures, learning German as well as other languages, develop physical and mental strength and mutual respect for each other but further rethink social constructions about gender and reconsider gender roles and stereotypes were direct outcomes of the project that resonated in an overall well-being of the participants.

Thus I conclude that the Rugby Opens Borders can be considered as a project that enables refugee youth to reconsider gender relations.

This research evoked great enthusiasm and curiosity for the social dimensions in Rugby Opens Borders that facilitated a critical engagement in re-thinking social constructions of gender and their corresponding prejudices. Further research is aspired. I want to broaden the perspective by looking into literature of feminist theory in sport and strategies that diminish gendered practice in sport. My research process can be seen as a basis for further research in the future. Regarding the the project and its social elements it can be argued that there is space for deeper discussion about other topics concerning gender in sport. Through the different methods I applied in the field research during a one year period I was able to create a mutual trust and furthermore connected with the girls and boys on a level that revealed interesting insights. The whole team was supportive and willing to help me collect information by including me in all activities they offer like trainings, playing touch, eating together, watch rugby matches. I wish to facilitate a critical understanding of the complexity of gender in sport, particularly rugby and provide a comprehensive outline for prospective considerations of local organizations like Rugby Opens Borders.

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## **Interviews**

Ali, I. &. (10. 03 2019). Semi-Structured Interview. (J. Hübler, Interviewer)

Bennie. (13. 05 2018). Semi-Structured Interview. (J. Mihajlovic Ignjatovic , J. Hübler, T. Nsubuga, & L. Cornils, Interviewer)

Group Interview. (29. 04 2018). Group Interview. (T. Nsubuga , J. Mihajlovic Ignjatovic , L. Cornils , & M. Postnikova , Interviewer)

Judi. (12. 04 2019). Semi-Structured Interview. (J. Hübler, Interviewer)

Mato. (29. 04 2019). Semi-Structured Interview. (J. Hübler, Interviewer)

Minnie. (08. 04 2018). Semi-Structured Interview. (M. Postnikova, J. Hübler, T. Nsubuga, & J. Mihajlovic Ignjatovic, Interviewer)

Sali. (24. 06 2018). Semi-Structured Interview. (T. Nsubuga, & J. Hübler, Interviewer)

Sophie. (16. 04 2019). Semi-Structured Interview. (J. Hübler, Interviewer)

Udo. (22. 04 2018). Semi-Structured Interview. (T. Nsubuga , J. Mihajlovic Ignjatovic , & L. Cornils, Interviewer)

## **Fieldnotes**

Fieldnotes, 15.04.2018, Josefine Hübler

Fieldnotes, 27.05.2018, Josefine Hübler

Fieldnotes, 13.05.2018, Josefine Hübler

Fieldnotes, 17.06.2018, Josefine Hübler

Fieldnotes, 25.11.2018, Josefine Hübler

Fieldnotes, 25.02.2019, Josefine Hübler

Fieldnotes, 10.03.2019, Josefine Hübler

Fieldnotes, 22.03.2019, Josefine Hübler

Fieldnotes, 23.03.2019, Josefine Hübler

Fieldnotes, 29.03.2019, Josefine Hübler

Fieldnotes, 07.04.2019, Josefine Hübler

Fieldnotes, 12.04.2019, Josefine Hübler

Fieldnotes, 16.04.2019, Josefine Hübler