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MEDIA IMAGE : SPORT, GENDER AND NATIONAL IDENTITIES IN FIVE EUROPEAN COUNTRIES¹

Abstract

This article investigates the media construction of female bodies in relation to the symbolic processes of national-making through the European Championship in handball in 1998. The focus is on mediated texts from Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Norway and Romania, in which cultural differences and similarities through cultural metaphors in a feminist perspective are the main issues. Contradictions and ambivalences are also included in the analysis.

If sport contributes to the construction and reconstruction of national identities in a global world the following four criteria must be included: First, the sport must be mediated as having a glorious history (Denmark, Hungary, Norway and Romania). Second, if this is applied to women`s sport, the sport must be represented as "sex-appropriate" in a historical context and/or today (Denmark, Hungary, Norway and Romania). To do so, female athletes cannot be understood as "the Other" in the overall context which is analysed (Denmark, Hungary, Norway and Romania). Third, the athletes` bodies must be mediated as aggressive, tough, strong, and non-fragile with power to play in competitions in a historical context and/or today (Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Norway and Romania). Fourth, European Championships in the sport must be presented as media events in the country (Denmark and Norway). For countries in the former eastern bloc, both state politics and politics in the field of handball may have a decisive say as to whether the sport is mediated to contribute to the (re)construction of national identities (Hungary and Romania).

Claims that national myth making is supposed to deny issues of gender is problematized through the concept of doxa (what is taken for granted and not reflected upon).

I hereby thank all the researchers from the countries involved. Without their efforts this article would never have been written.

Key words: Mediated texts, the European Championship in handball, national identities, gender, sexualities, cultural metaphors, doxa

Introduction

Ignoring MediaSport today would be like ignoring the role of the church in the Middle Ages ...; large parts of society are immersed in media sports today and virtually no aspect of life is untouched by it (Real, 1998:15).

In this article, we investigate the media construction of female bodies in relation to the symbolic processes of gendered-nation-making through sport from a feminist perspective. Media images in sport tend to legitimise and reconstruct hegemonic gendered divisions, although these stereotypes might be mediated in a series of contradictions.

The doxa of these texts - what is taken for granted as the "natural world" and not reflected upon, and therefore not questioned - (Bourdieu, 1977:164-171) are often based on the ideas that men have the "natural" and universal sporting

bodies. Conversely, sporting females are often mediated not as doing sport per se, but participating in a special branch of sports; women's sports. Thus, male sport is normally associated with the notions of nation building and the recreation of national identities; for example men's soccer (Denmark, Germany, Hungary and Romania) and men's skiing (Norway).

The focus of our research is on newspaper articles devoted to the European Women's Handball Championship in Amsterdam in 1998. Newspaper articles from Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Norway, and Romania were all used in the analysis. The choice of these countries was not fortuitous. All have a long tradition of handball culture. In addition to the newspapers, comments are included from Norwegian and Romanian television to pinpoint certain aspects of gendered bodies in sport.

The construction of female bodies through mediated sporting texts

At the beginning of the 20th.century the small number of female athletes who took part in aggressive and traditional male sports had their sexualities questioned and were labelled "mannish" or presented as androgynous or "super-feminine" (Hargreaves, 2000:2).² Texts both in newspapers and scientific research tended to glorify male achievement and either ignore or trivialize women's achievement (Pfister, 1999: 140-155, Lippe, von der, 1997:236-247). Simone de Beauvoir's 1949 classic, *Le Deuxieme Sexe*, is important here for de Beauvoir's concept of women as "Other". So too is the work of Judith Lorber. She argues that much of contemporary society is still gendered in the sense of the processes of everyday life (Lorber, 1994:1). This very fact might be one reason why it is difficult to detect gendered practices and thoughts because they are taken for granted and not reflected upon.

Also relevant in this research is the following metaphor put forward by the Norwegian, female antropologist Jorunn Solheim:

As long as gendered notions of the maternal (the feminine) stick to women like "klister", a fundamentalism is reproduced in which the feminine varies between sacredness and pollution (Solheim, 1998: 100).

Solheim claims that our concepts about sex and gender are associated with symbolic and unquestioned metaphors. According to much research in the western world, females are less visible, when one considers female athletes specifically (Fasting og Tangen, 1982: 158-180, Hargreaves, 1982: 127, Duncan, 1990:22-43, Hargreaves, 1994: 193-198, Duncan & Messner, 1998: 170-185, Kane & Lensky, 1998: 186-187, Lippe, von der, 2001: 198).

- there is less focus on their sporting results,
- more attention is paid to their male coaches,
- greater stereotyping as the other sporting sex with emotional vulnerability as explanatory to account for sporting failures,
- sexualization; i.e., more attention paid to body image, dress, leisure time practices and sexual partners.

Women might be featured as heroines in individual sports, but according to Rowe, et al. not at the level of team sports, where the source of pride is collectivized. Hence, women seem to be denied the status of bearers of national qualities that the media and the state apparatus conventionally accord men's bodies (Rowe et al, 1998: 126). When women are featured as representatives of the nation, Rowe et al. continue, it is in a way that usually sexualizes performance, objectifying the female athletes for the male audience. An important reason for this is believed to be that sport organizations, television, and newspapers construct images of female sport that have been powerfully influenced by the ideologies and aesthetics of hegemonic masculinity.

The gendered making of national identities

In contemporary social science, the idea of the nation has become problematic. Hence, the theme of national identity – how a citizenry sees and thinks about themselves in relation to others – ranks as one of the most complex issues that appears in discussions of nationalism (Morgan, 1997: 1-20).

According to Benedict Anderson (1991: 6), nations are “imagined communities” in the sense that what holds members together in a nation, as distinct from other nations, has to do with a collective imagination and not “reality”. Even the smallest nation is comprised of people who have never met and never will.

In the global world of today, nations might be understood as entities in which politics, welfare and economy which could possibly contribute to the different basic needs of the state are eroded. Through sports, however, the "nation" is represented. National flags flying, national anthems are played, national politicians are part of the audience and the athletes compete in national uniforms. In this sense, mediated sporting bodies are critical articulators in the construction of the symbolic making of the nation.

The images of the nation in 18th and 19th century Europe were masculine ones. The actual bodies symbolizing the nations were mostly male: kings, prime ministers, cabinet ministers, senior governmental officers, lawyers, scientists, bishops and army commanders (Lippe, von der, 2001:196). And while there were exceptions to this male dominance, Queen Victoria of Great Britain, for

example, these exceptions were interpreted as strong women with considerable power, i.e., de-sexed or mannish, but also as the “other”.

The terms identity construction and identification are derived from the work of the German psychologist Sigmund Freud (Dunn, 1998: 3, Hall, 1997: 3). According to Freud, the processes of identification is ambivalent from the outset (Freud, 1991: 134). The idealized object of identification is as likely to be the one that is adored as the one that is hated. For Stuart Hall (1997: 3), identities are constructed within a discourse produced in specific historical and institutional sites with specific practices and strategies. These identities, Hall argues, are constructed through relationships to the Other; that is, the identity is juxtaposed to the Other in relation to what it *lacks*, to what it is *not*. In the context of the nation building period in Europe, the nation symbolized civilization and white male dominance in contrast to the Other, the so-called primitive black men in the colonies.

Hence, the making of national identities tend first and foremost to be what a nation lacks and secondly what it celebrates. Norway, for example, is not a country with long hot summers and many large urban centres. Nor is it a country of flat landscapes, but rather a place where nature and snowy mountains symbolize the Norwegian identity. A winter sport (skiing) emerged as the imagined sporting tradition of the country. The idea of strong nations, the pursuit of economic prosperity, territorial stability and population growth, assumed the man and not the woman as the public symbol of these hopes.

How is national sports reconstructed in a country? “Common culture” and “collective experience” are presumed to be established when people share a moment defined by the witnessing of greatness (Jackson et al., 1998: 85). In other words, the live audience and subsequent readership need victories. More than one sport in a country might create national identities if hegemonic cultures interpret the victory as a profound cultural experience (Lippe, von der, 2001: 94-100).

The mediated national myth making is supposed to deny fissures of for example gender (Rowe et al., 1998:121). This might be the case if one does not try to detect the doxa of gender in this myth-making. If this detection is not done, biology (man is stronger, faster, better, etc.) is often understood as the reason why man is the natural symbol. But in this research, we interrogate the doxa of gender to ascertain whether female sporting bodies in handball contribute to the construction of national identities in the five countries.

Metaphorical approaches to culture

Cultural metaphors by definition includes a significant amount of symbolism (Gannon, 2001:91). Hence, metaphors are tied to the construction of national identities.

People might interpret the same written text, quotes and pictures differently because of differences in experience, gender identifications, age, time and space. The basic unit of a text, a sign, for example *h-a-n-d-b-a-l-l*, refers to culturally determined implications, or *connotations* which have additional meaning (Lakhoff & Johnson, 1980: 3). In Norway, for example, connotations of handball might be “a typical women`s sport”, while in Germany it might be “a typical men`s sport”.

The analysis on metaphors in the context of handball as potential national identities is based on the cognitive approach developed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnsen. The aim of this article is to view metaphor as a conceptual phenomenon to reflect underlying values:

... metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature (Ibid.:3).

Metaphor allows us to talk and think about one area of experience in terms of another. We are normally not aware of our conceptual system. The fact that the war metaphor is often used for sport is taken for granted, because it has become an everyday reality. (Players *surrender*, *attack* and construct unbreakable alliances in the *defence* zone.) Metaphors that structure the ordinary conceptual system of our culture are called conventional metaphors (Ibid.: 139). Most metaphors in Norwegian newspapers seem to be conventional rather than creative and imaginative ones. As will be noted later nature is used as a key metaphor for Norwegian national identity. According to Montesquieu the climate is important for the construction of the character of people (Midre, 1999:23). Cold air is supposed to make the muscles stronger, the blood flow more easily and the heart stronger. People who live further south (for example in Hungary) are in this context, on the other hand, regarded as less brave and resilient.

The interpretation of the written texts and pictures in this article, given the different countries of analysis and the different cultural origins of the researchers, might also be connotated in different ways because of cultural variations. The principal investigator is a Norwegian female researcher with athletic experiences in top level sport, but not in handball. As to the problem of translating metaphors from one language to another the principal investigator

has attempted to remain faithful to the connotations of the signs in the different cultures. The context in all five countries are mediated texts of the same event, and the cultural differences and similarities are in focus.

Newspapers and television

As noted previously, newspapers (three) were analysed in Hungary, Norway and Romania, and two in Denmark and Germany.³ The following newspapers from the six capital cities were analysed both quantitatively and qualitatively:

- The Danish papers were the conservative tabloid BT and the subscription paper, the liberal, Politiken.
- The German papers were the liberal subscription paper, Berliner Zeitung and the Der Tagesspiegel.
- Nepszabadsag, a former Hungarian state communist paper is now a social-liberal one, while Nepszava a former socialistic paper before the so-called communist period and now a liberal one and Nemzeti Sport had a monopoly on sports politics as the only daily sports paper and is today a liberal one.
- The Norwegian tabloid and liberal Dagbladet, the tabloid and conservative VG and the subscription and conservative Aftenposten.
- From Romania all the papers are subscription ones: the conservative, Curierul National, the radical, ZIUA, and the liberal, Romania Liber.

In addition, to the newspaper articles, remarks from male journalists in the Romanian national television 1 (TV1) and the television 3 (TV3) in Norway have also been cited to pinpoint aspects of constructing gender and national identities.

All the journalists in the papers and television were males, except for one female on staff with the Norwegian Aftenposten and one on the Danish BT.

First, a short overview of the history of handball in the five countries will be introduced as a point of departure for the gendered construction of handball today.

A short overview of the gendered history of handball.

The focus is how the gendered history of this sport is linked to the media construction of handball of 1998, which will be dealt with later on in the article. Male administrators and coaches produced the authoritative written rules, and from the beginning dominated and continue to dominate handball in all five countries. Further, in all the countries except Denmark and Norway most players were and are male. The actual origin of the sport is debatable. Historians in both Denmark and Germany claim their respective country as the inventor of

handball. Since it is beyond the scope of this research to deal with this debate, the historical overview will use insights from both of these countries.

The Danish Handball federation *Dansk Haandball Forbund* was created in June, 2nd., 1935, and the Federation held the first national championship in 7-a-side game for men and women in 1939 (Skjerk, 2001: 230). The golden period in Danish women's handball were both in the 1960s and in the 1990s. The Danish female national team won a gold medal in the Olympic Games in 1996, and finished first in the European championships in 1994 and 1996. The Danish men did less well. The best result for the men was a silver medal in the 1967 World Championships and a ninth place finish in the 1999 championships.

Nonetheless, handball is considered to be both a men`s and a women`s sport in Denmark. Membership in the Danish Handball Federation best expresses this. In 1999, 55% of the adult membership was female and 45% male in the federation (www.dif.dk/Idrætsgrene/DHF/). By comparison, in 1998 the corresponding numbers in the Danish Gymnastic Clubs (DDG) and the Danish Shooting and Gymnastic Clubs (DDSGI) were 56% and 44% respectively.

Although Max Heiser developed rules for women in Berlin by applying those from the sport of "Torball" to handball as early as in 1917, handball was regarded as a male game from 1922-23 after Carl Schelenz created the 11-a-side game with body contact as the determining factor for men (Deutsche Sportbehörde für Leichtathletik, 1938: 62, Riekhoff, 1943: 7). Official championships are believed to have started in 1922 for males and 1923 for females. The Germans did initiate the formation of the International Amateur Handball Federation in 1928. Hence, the language of handball was German and not English. Today, the central leaders and coaches are male; in addition to two thirds of the members in the federation are male. Although the German women`s national team had a golden period in the middle of the 1990s, it is regarded as a male sport in Germany in mediated handball texts.

If the game is symbolized as a men`s sport in Germany, it is a women`s sport in Norway. These facts are extraordinary in the gendered history of sport in Europe. In 1937, when the Norwegian Handball federation was formed *Norges Håndballforbund*, 69% of the members were females and 31% men, which is the same percentage as today. With small variations this ratio has been historically consistent (Lippe, von der, 1997: 311). There is still a gendered aspect to Norwegian handball, however.

There are more female players than male, while men dominate as administrators, national federation leaders, coaches and referees. The women also fare better than the men in international play. Since winning the bronze

medal in the 1986 World Cup, the national women`s team has performed at a top global level, in contrast to the Norwegian men. The women`s team won the silver in the European Championship in 1996 and silver in the World Cup the following year. Mediated handball texts from 1939 have normally presented women`s handball as the “natural” handball bodies as a doxic position.

Handball in Hungary and Romania was tied to the state from 1946 until 1989 during the period of official state communism. In 1923, the first men`s handball match, supported by the Hungarian Soccer Federation, took place. The Independent Hungarian Federation, *Magyar Kezilabda Szövetség*, was formed in 1933. In 1928 the first national championship for both sexes in 11- a-side outdoor handball took place in Hungary, while the first indoor 7-a -side national championship was in 1938 for both sexes. The golden years of the Hungarian women`s national team were in the 1960s. After 1989, the women`s national team gradually became more successful. In 1995, the team won silver in the World Championship. In 1998, a new male coach created an optimistic and winning attitude among the players. In 2000, the Hungarian national team won the European Championship. Conversely, the national male team has never been able to match the record of their female counterparts. About 55% of the teams competing in the Hungarian leagues are male and 45% female.

The Romanian Handball Federation, *Federatia Romana Handbal*, was formed September, 29th, 1933 within the Romanian Basketball - Volleyball Federation. Three years later, the first national championship for men was arranged. It would take the women over ten more years, in 1947, to have a national final organised for them. The golden years of Romanian handball for senior women was in the 1960s and in 1995 for the junior women (Ghibu & Todan, 1970). Both won gold medals. The golden years of men`s handball, were in the 1960s and the 1970s.

Handball in Romania is the sixth most important sport in the country, after soccer, track and field, chess, field tennis and basket (Rares, 2000). Most of the members in the handball federation are male.

According to the history of handball, in addition to the international level of the national team of today in the five countries, Germany is the country in which the sport is first and foremost understood as a male preserve, while Norway is the country where handball is clearly regarded as a female sport. Denmark approximates Norway`s gendered position, while Romania mirrors that of Germany; Hungarian handball shows evidence of both a male and female game.

The following theme was based on investigating Norwegian handball in which the sport is regarded as female and for which the national team was expected to win or at least get a medal at the championships. Conversely, Romania was predicted to be unsuccessful. Germany as a country in which handball was regarded as a male sport would finish in the middle of the competing nations. Newspapers tend to present potential winning, popular national teams quite differently from those that are expected to do poorly, although they have a honorable history of victories. Is this the case in this research as well?

The coverage of the mediated stories of handball during the European Championship in 1998 in relation to sex and other sports⁴

Sport traditions in general and handball in particular, in the countries and expectations about chances to win or lose are important points of departure of the mediated texts.

The championship was held in Amsterdam from December 11th until December 20.

First, an overall picture of mediated sports event during the period in question.

The difference of handball coverage in the three countries is very marked. In all countries, female handball athletes are the focus of attention in contrast to men's, because of the Championship in Amsterdam. Men's soccer in Norway, in contrast to Germany and Romania, had to compete with skiing as the number one winter sport. Thus, whereas men's soccer received the most coverage in all the German and Romania papers, this sport was not given primacy in any of the Norwegian papers. Handball received the most coverage in two of the three Norwegian papers. Skiing was number two in all the German papers in this period, and number one in one Norwegian paper and number two in the two others. Volleyball was sport number three after soccer and handball in all the Romanian papers.

In Romania the Curierul National covered the women's handball with 12% of the total space for sport. Further, ZIUA with 20 % of the total space, and Romania Libera with 15% of the total of sport covered the handball slightly better than Curierul National. Conversely, men's soccer dominated coverage in all three papers: 50% in Curierul National, 60% in ZIUA, and 50% in Romania Libera. After soccer, volleyball received 10% in the first mentioned, 12% in the second and 10% in the third.

In the Berliner Zeitung, handball including both men and women (mostly women's) accounted for 5% of the total coverage of sport, whereas soccer

included 45% and skiing 9%. The corresponding numbers in Der Tagelsspiegel are 4 %, 38% and 10 %, respectively.

In Dagbladet handball (mostly women`s) received 40% of the coverage, skiing (mostly men) received 23% and soccer (only men) received 11%. The corresponding numbers in VG are 31%, 29% and 22%. Skiing was the number one sport in Aftenposten with 32%, then came handball with 29% and soccer with 24%. (Aftenposten is a subscription paper, and is supposed to focus more on tradition and less on pictures than the other two papers).

The countries with the least and the greatest coverage of handball in relation to the total coverage of sport were Germany and Norway, respectively. Table one summarizes this coverage.

Table 1

The coverage of handball in two capital newspapers in Germany and Norway during the European Championship in 1998 in square cms¹.

	Germany		Norway	
	women	men	women	men
Papers no. one, total	1829,0	266,0	17806,5	736,5
pictures	173,0	-	5574,0	387,0
written text	1656,0	266,0	12232,0	349,0
Papers no. two, total	1499,0	444,0	27193,5	64,0
pictures	192,0	126,0	15526,5	-
written text	1307,0	318,0	11667,0	64,0

The mediation of this event in the German Berliner Zeitung and Der Tagesspiegel are similar to the Norwegian ones. The event was covered with written text for both sexes. The Norwegian Dagbladet featured a tabloid aspect in the sense that pictures covered more square cms than written text; the converse for the subscription paper, Aftenposten. There was a difference between the coverage of women`s and men`s game, however. Women`s handball outweighed the mediation of men`s handball clearly. Der Tagesspiegel included more square cms of men`s handball than did Dagbladet.

¹ Papers no. one are both subscription papers; Berliner Zeitung in Germany and Aftenposten in Norway, while papers no. two are Der Tagesspiegel in Germany (subscription paper) and Dagbladet (tabloid) in Norway.

There are important historical factors that help interpret the difference in coverage of the female athletes in the German papers and the Norwegian ones. First, handball is considered an important women`s sport in Norway and a men`s sport in Germany. Second, the Norwegian women`s national team is for the time being more successful than the Germans, having won in 1998. Germany finished sixth. Thus, whereas the tabloid Norwegian paper Dagbladet used 2289 square cms of pictures and 2489 of written text the day after the final and Norwegian gold in 1998, in 2000, the paper did not present any pictures of the Hungarian winning team and only 3,5 square cms of written text from the European championship the corresponding day.

Mediated female bodies: a potential for constructions of national identities

The point of departure here is that all national teams in sport have a potential for constructing symbols of national identities. According to Hargreaves (1982:127) media treatment of gender issues and sexualities may be summed up as follows:

Sports tends to be presented in the media as symbolic representations of a particular kind of social order, so that in effect they become modern moral plays, serving to justify and uphold dominant values and ideas.

What are the dominant values and ideas constructed in the mediated texts of handball? How are these tied to national identities? The focus in this research was on gendered values and ideas of the male dominated media institutions. Research focussed on female athletes as stereotyped. Here our aim is to analyse both gender stereotypes and new perspectives. A thematic approach based on the following was used:

The sexualized body

The emotional body

Sport is war

Sport - in a state of stagnation?

Top level handball - a world of male leaders and coaches

The successes

The failures

All these themes include aspects on gender and sexuality, but the first subcategory might serve as a category including all the issues.

The sexualized body

Today mediated sexualized bodies are so common that these aspects are easily absorbed within the ideas of national identities under certain conditions. Are the pictures or written texts of the papers in this research featured female handball players as sexualized in the traditional way in the sense that the focus during the matches was *not* on their athletic abilities but on the potential of their female titillating bodies?

A picture of Kjersti Grini (the captain of the Norwegian team) in a swimsuit was taken with the athlete in the water, and only her face and not her body was visible. A picture of Camilla Andersen`s head (the playmaker of the Danish team) lying smiling in bed together with the following headline covered about one tabloid page of BT:

Sweet dream about gold (BT, 16th.)

It seems unlikely that a male captain of a national team would have been presented in the same way with the same “babe” heading.

Berliner Zeitung commented on female handball players doing PR-promotion:

... then “Selfposition” is a fact in women`s sport, as the English- new-German term indicates; the ability to present oneself. Further, factors like the influential ability to “go with the flow”, rhetorical sharpness, which play an inferior role to the men: the looks.(BZ, 15th.)

This statement as the Germans would say “... *der bei den Herren der Schöpfung eine untergeordnete Rolle spielt: das Aussehen*” has of course nothing to do with the athletic abilities of the females, and it is a typical mediated device used to change the focus into women`s appearance, which is an element of sexualization of female athletes. This device was, however, only used in this German text.

Mia Hundvin, a good looking player from Norway, was featured at the victory party in her party dress with her arms up when she was dancing. We see her smiling and the reader could see her stomach. This was before the journalists learned that she is lesbian, and before she married the Danish female, national player, Camilla Andersen. The text under the picture was as follows:

Stylish: Mia Hundvin was the dancing queen at the victory-party with the toughest dress and coolest dancing steps. (VG, 21st.a.)

Also in the texts in this project there are many pictures and written texts of female athletes as Amazons in war in the sense that the athletic qualities of the

players, such as toughness and aggressiveness are more in focus, especially when they are successful. Female athletes are featured both as sex objects (Mia and the supposedly sleeping Camilla) and sex subject in the sense that the athlete seems to be her own choreographer (Kirsti) off stage in the water, when they are not playing handball.

None of the pictures or written texts of the papers featured female handball players as sexualized in the sense that the focus during the matches was not on their athletic abilities but on the potential of their titillating bodies.

Is the idea of female athletes as the emotional sex clearly recreated, reproduced and reconstructed in all papers during this championship?

The emotional body

Female athletes are often featured as the emotional sex and individuals unable to control their nerves in sport. According to Friis Thing this characterization has its basis in the Freudian perspective of traditional masculinity and its mechanistic pictures of emotional life (Thing, 2001: 275-288). If the idea of rationality is still tied to the construction of national identities, then the mediated texts of the athletes ought to include the ability to control their nerves in decisive moments of a winning team.

After the German team had beaten Austria 25-24, Ukraine 28-27, and the Netherlands 19-18, the headline before the match against the supposedly better Hungarian team was the following:

Noch liegen die Nerven blank (DT, 16th.) Or, as the English would say:

Will the German choke against the formidable opponent?

The pronouncement referred to the 'nail-biting' victories in all the matches played thus far.

Close victories have so far been a tradition in this tournament, which we have to alter quickly. If not I will go crazy, says Kathrin Blacha. (DT, 16th.)

After the finish of round robin play, a male coach in Hungary, not the women's national coach, is alleged to have observed:

...the female psyche is unpredictable but I knew that before. I believe that they can play better, some times up, some times down... (NB, 19th.)

After the Norwegian gold in the final one of the headlines of VG was as follows:

Gold, tear and joy.(VG, 21st.)

The subtitle “*Tjugum (one of the two best goldkeepers) cried both before and during the match*” pinpoints this aspect. Further:

She played with her emotions on her sleeve and she cried golden drops both before the start and before the final was finished. (VG, 21st.b.)

If the writer had been describing male handball players, the text would probably have been as follows:

He was so intense and focussed, his eyes began to water.

Further:

Most of them (the Norwegian team) were singing and dancing, while the indisputably best player, the goalkeeper Heidi Tjugum, was crying.

After Norway defeated Denmark in the final this heading was presented in the Danish BT:

*Emotions ran wild in the Norwegian camp
- Heidi`s (one of the Norwegian goalkeepers who is playing on a Danish team) golden tears (BT, 21st.)*

Nerves and crying seem to be associated with female athletes to such a degree that the following headline is presented after the match Danmark- Spain on December, 12th:

Lotte Kiærskou (Danish player): I was not nervous (BT, 13th.)

One of the male journalist in the Norwegian TV3 asked the captain of the team the following after the gold on December 20th:

Do we not detect a small tear in the corner of the eye?

Imagine the journalist asking the same question to the captain of a national male team after achieving a gold medal in a European championship!

The idea of female athletes as the emotional and uncontrolled sex was clearly reconstructed both on and off the court in all the papers. The contradiction is dealt with in the discussion.

Sport is war

The concept of war is tied to the construction of national identities in the 19th and the first half of the 20th century. The last years these terms are perhaps most often seen as metaphors in a sporting context. Arguably, more newspaper comments have, in the past few years, described successful female athletes in terms active agents, of aggressiveness and toughness.

Does the metaphor *sport is war* permeate most texts in this research?

After the Danish match against Macedonia (37-21), the Politiken wrote the following about Anette Hoffmann, one of the best athletes on the Danish team:

The whirlwind from Kolding took personal control and the result was an awesome display of Danish superiority over a badly outplayed Macedonian team. The massacre of the Macedonian team was a clear indication of a team in disarray. (P, 12th.)

After the Danish beat Poland (29-21), the paper stated the following:

Matuszewski, the leading goalscorer, who the Poles expected to bomb the Danes, did not succeed. Neither did her team mates. (P, 17th.)

The Polish team did not succeed, because:

... the two Power forwards Tonje Kjærgaard and Karen Brødsgaard constructed an unbreakable alliance in the center defence zone. (P, 17th.)

After the Danish victory over Austria (35-24), BT wrote the following:

As we predicted before the tournament, the young lions were ready to growl. (BT, 20th.)

The Austrian coach did not impress the Danish journalists:

After the half time break the Danish machine continued its onslaught, and Prokop (the coach), sitting in his plastic chair on the sideline, could do little but slump down in a position of surrender. (P, 20th.)

Before the final match with Norway, BT featured the situation like this:

It`s going to be war tonight. (BT, 20th.)

The Politiken anticipated the preparation for the final as follows:

We shall soon find out how we will crush these Norwegians – even with just one goal differential. (P, 20th.)

Since the Norwegian team played successfully (i.e., won 24-16) the Norwegian texts were filled with terms like *take the initiative, take control, crush Hungary in the semi-final, take over the Danish hegemony, no fear, liberated* and so on.

In the Danish papers, the Danes who won silver, we find the following two expressions in the tabloid BT and the last in the subscription paper, Politiken:

The pressure is gone (after Danmark-Polen 29-21), *the petite captain squeezed the massive Russians* (after Danmark beat Russia 27-21) and *An iron grip in the defence* (after the same match).

Most of the pictures in the Romanian papers featured female players as Amazons in war. The pictures illustrated the tough bodily contact between players. A typical comment was as follows:

Renata Cieloch again destroyed the block attempt made by xxx. (RL, 14th.)

The metaphor *sport is war* permeated most texts. They were, however, all conventional: for example massacre, lions, to bomb, the Danish machine and crush the Norwegians.

In a state of stagnation?

If a national team, which contributes to recreating ideas of national identities is featured in a state of stagnation, the critique may be interpreted as more serious than if the team was not associated with this state of affairs.

Do we find a focus on the low skill level of the athletes as a general tendency in the championship?

The male Swedish coach, Blomback, the coach of a Norwegian male handball club was, however, far from impressed:

Do you regard the European championship so far as a very long yawn – without any sort of excitement? If so: You are not the only one. (Stokstad, 16th.)

The journalist continued:

People talk about the final even before the tournament has started. Before (the final) they (the Norwegian team) only met teams they have beaten 100.000 times before. Half the players on the Danish team are just very young girls. If Norway does not win this time, it is really bad, Blomback claims. He thinks that women`s handball is totally uninteresting...The difference is as big as between male and female soccer. "Women`s handball is not my cup of tea...It is in a state of stagnation. You would have to go back in history to find a situation where there were so few top level teams".

He thinks that woman`s handball is "totally uninteresting" in comparison to men`s handball. The doxa here is the male body. The latter is not mentioned directly, but indirectly. That is the way in which a doxa works. Even Aftenposten commented on the supposed stagnation of the best national teams:

The quality of the play in international women`s handball is all in all not too dreadfully high. (Hanstad, 11th.)

The journalist in Der Tagesspiegel in Germany covered the quality of the play in the final as follows:

At times in the game the finalists played with absolute world class execution in a sports hall in the south of Amsterdam, sold out for the first time to an audience of 3000. Denmark had only one problem this evening: The Norwegian goalkeeper Heidi Tjugum formed the basis for the great success of the team with her world class play. (DT, 21th.)

In the eyes of the German male journalist, the finalist at times played absolute world class. Although one might find the same superlatives in Norwegian papers commenting on the final, there was never a hint in the German papers about a supposed stagnation of top level women`s handball.

With the exception of two Norwegian articles, no focus was placed on the low skills of the athletes as a general tendency. Most comments in the Norwegian papers and television were very positive as to the achievement of the national team.

Top level handball - a world of male leaders and coaches

This male word is taken for granted by most media, whether the sport contributes to reconstruct ideas of national identities or not.

In what way is the male world taken for granted in this research?

The Norwegian national coach in handball, Marit Breivik, is the only female national chief coach of a team sport in Norway and was the only female chief coach of all other countries in this project. Both Hungary and Romania had female assistant coaches.

This was commented on by the editor of VG after the success in the final:

Top level sport is an extremely male dominated world. There is always a man in power behind every woman. When the golden girls from Norway win it is an important victory against male dominated top level sport. What makes it even more decisive, is that it occurs with a female coach, Marit Breivik, because her leadership is not accepted by everybody. There have been rumours and rumblings of discontent that question her leadership ability. Marit is too nice, too democratic, and she lacks what was needed. Bluntly, she is not a man. Hence, she did not have the toughness to create winners out of girls who had never won before. The backstage scepticism underlines a smouldering carpet of discontent, which has been waiting to erupt into a full scale fire. The victory yesterday at least for the time being, smothered the possible fire. (Dæhli, 21st.)

Here the male journalist makes the doxa come out, which will be commented upon in the discussion.

Male journalists in countries where handball is a typical male sport do not seem to be aware of the fact that the chief coach of the Norwegian team is a woman and a male is the assistant coach:

After five finals with no international victories the (Norwegian team) at last won their first title. Coach Arne Högdahl called this decisive 24-16 victory a “historical day for Norwegian handball”. (BZ, 21st.)

The Danish female national team was often featured as if they were the property of the male coach, in contrast to the relationship between the Norwegian female coach and the players. Comments in BT like the following seem to be so naturalized that it is seldom reflected upon : “Kiærskou (Danish player) is the joker of Pytlick” and “Pytlick`s flowergirls”. The last headline covers the whole page of the newspaper, in which the male coach, his male assistant and two other male leaders are in front of the picture and the Danish national team in the background.

Romania Libera featured handball in the following way:

Although we participate in the Women`s European Handball Championship in Amsterdam, our understanding is that we are still in a male world. The 12 delegations participating in this championship have a staff consisting of 79 persons – coaches, medical assistants, etc, – of which only 14 are female. The most emancipated delegation from this point of view, is the one from the Netherlands, which has 6 officials of which 3 are females. (RL, 16th.)

Delegates from the participating countries followed dominant sporting traditions: most of them were males, with only Norway employing a female chief coach.

Successes

The audience and readers love successes. In order to reconstruct a sport in the context of national identities successes have to be associated with that sport (Lippe, von der, 2001: 94-98).

In what way are female handballplayers in this research linked to ideas of success?

According to Der Tagesspiegel the German team made a good start:

Such a start is important for the self-esteem and the morale” said the national coach Ekke Hoffmann after the 28-27 (18-14) win against the Ukraine. After starting the tournament with a surprising 25-24 win against Austria this German Handball Federation (DHB)team may now achieve its dreams against the host country the Netherlands. (DT, 14th.)

This comment from ZIUA (Romania) associates three successful Romanian players playing on unsuccessful teams with flowers:

... only Simona Gogarla and the goalkeepers Ramona Mihalache and Luminita Hutupan were like flowers in the desert. (ZIUA, 18th.)

After the Hungarian team had beaten Austria 30-24 in the bronze final, the conventional metaphors in one of the headlines of Nepszabadsag were as follows:

...after hell - the heaven (NB, 21st.)

The headline of the Norwegian subscription paper Aftenposten after the team had beaten Denmark in the group play covered 77.5 scms and was as follows:

Norway played dreamhandball! (AP, 18th)

The female journalist framed the article of the female athletes covering 248scms as active agents:

The whole team played dream handball, which might give most of us ideas of gold and green woods (Norwegian expression of “milk and honey”) in this championship. The 28-19 victory over the Danes showed that they were clearly outclassed. Norway used the old Danish weapon; go, go, never give in and offer everything in defence and attack.

The whole article is permeated with active female agents who want to win and are able to do so. The captain of the team, Kjersti Grini, was unable to play this game. Instead the female coach used her team captain as the game strategist. The coach was not featured as passive, but as active because she let her captain assist with the overall strategy,:

Marit Breivik went all out in this match... The young players took initiative, backed by the more experienced veterans.

The only agent that was featured as passive was the Danish audience:

The Danish supporters turned tame, a rather unknown situation.

The Norwegian tabloid papers, Dagbladet and VG also featured the Norwegian players as active agents, but to a lesser degree than that presented by the female journalist in the subscription paper.⁵ In the tabloid papers the headlines and the pictures covered more scms than the written text, of which a few players, rather than the entire team were in focus.

The day after the Norwegian gold medal one of the headlines of the tabloid VG was as follows:

Tough girls win with style (VG, 21st.)

This is a new way of mediating the successful female athlete; she is featured both as aggressive and stylish.

The winners are the active, successful “we/us” who beat the others, because “we” “outclass” them and deserve the victory. The metaphor “flowers in the desert” might indicate a hope in the future for the unsuccessful Romanian women`s team.

The failures

A defeat or loss in sport is associated with the idea of national identities in the way that a “whole” nation is constructed to mourn or taken for granted to do so. This was evident in the portrayal of Romania. Previously it was noted that sports used as symbols of national identities must be successful, which can be tied to mediated historical victories in the different countries. The audience and readers want their favourites to win often in competitions with lots of tension. In this way, it is possible to identify with “us”, our nation in contrast to the “others”.

Norway won the championship, while Denmark won silver and Hungary the bronze. Germany finished sixth and Romania, eleventh.

There have been victories in Romanian handball which might contribute to the construction of a national identity. After the fall of Soviet-state communism, organized sports in eastern Europe lost much of its financial support from the state. This situation created problems in some sports. The fact that former Romanian players (both men and women) understood as one of “us” are now playing for the “other”, namely national teams of others countries, especially the Austrian national team, seems to intrigue Romanian journalists, audience and readers. In this way the financial problems of Romanian sport is not only visible but is tied to a very emotional question: national identity.

After the loss 24-32, against the Ukraine, Romania Libera wrote the following:

We lost a medal, we lost the qualification to the World Championship, what else do we have to lose? (RL, 16th.)

Not only had the women`s senior national team been playing badly recently, so also had the men`s national team. The following comment on Romanian TV and in some newspapers is an example of this fact:

...the Past Days of Glory for Romanian Handball... Hands up, Romania! Stop this shame! The nightmare is over! Throw in the towel! What a humiliation!

After the loss against the Netherlands (23-30), Romania Liber wrote:

If humiliation had a name, it would be called Russia and Romania. (RL, 18th.)

After the Hungarian team had lost 14-28 against the Norwegian team, Nemzeti Sport published a picture from the match. The Norwegian Kjersti Grini was surrounded by two Hungarian players. One of them had her foot on the hip of Kjersti, while the other is trying to stop her when she is dribbling towards the

goal. The Norwegian player is not stoppable. The heading of the picture on the front page is as follows:

Hildre tettek a magyar esapatot (the Hungarians surrender to the cold ice). (NS, 20th.)

The iceberg is a Hungarian metaphor for Norway and a characteristic of the people living near the North pole. The Norwegian team could symbolize the unapproachable, distant, hard, cold and tough.

After the Danish defeat in the final, the Politiken commented as follows:

It was a liberating victory for Norway. They have struggled for a title for twelve years; for twelve years now they have shovelled home all kinds of medals to their wooden cottages – except for gold. For twelve years they have disturbed their surroundings with the ringing of bells and other kinds of noise polluting behaviour from mountains and local rural areas. And it has been painful for the Norwegians to experience the Danish success of the 1990s – because it was the success of the Norwegian efforts to build up women`s handball which inspired Ulrik Wilbeck (the Danish coach) in his work. This indeed pushed the Norwegian players out of the slow lane and into the passing lane where they have come full speed. (P, 21st.)

After the Norwegian gold, the tabloid Dagbladet presented a picture of the two celebrating goalkeepers and the captain of the team, Kjersti Grini, which covered the whole front page. The written text was as follows:

Yes, we love You (DB, 21st.)

This refers to the opening line of the national anthem “Yes we love this country”, a song written by the well-know author Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson in 1858 which was illegal to sing during the Nazi occupation of Norway from 1940 till 1945.

The fact that the Norwegian successful goalkeeper, Heidi Tjugum, plays for Viborg, a Danish team, created this comment in the Danish Politiken:

Nevertheless, Tjugum did not thrive in the shadow of Leganger, who had the whole handball-crazed country at her feet. Only after she came to Viborg and under the wings of Wilbeck`s wings has she really blossomed. (P, 21st.)

Der Tagesspiegel in Germany covered the failures as follows:

In the end the German handball women finished sixth at the Third European Championship. The sixth place finish left a bitter taste with the team because the women lost only once in group play, in a group in which they were ranked third. To reach the semi-finals, the goal difference did not favour the Germans....

"The strengths of the German team were not evident, "sadly commented the German captain Franziska Heinz as she considered the table of results. In comparison to Austria and Hungary, we did not deserve to win a medal, and if we had it would have been to throw dust in the eyes of others. (DT,20th.)

Also in this article the three German victories in the group play are featured as "*drei glücklichen Siegen*" (*three fortunate victories*), a commentary on passive female agents.

The Danish team lost the first match against Norway:

The Norwegian team is better than ours. Yesterday we shot as if our eyes were in our ass end. (P, 19th.)

Romanian sport in general and handball in particular lacks financial support. After losing to Austria (24 – 26) Curierul National commented in this way:

We had to win, but in sport it is not always the best team that wins. The connections of the billionaire Prokop (the Austrian manager) were once again decisive. (CN, 14th.)

The whole of the Romanian media accused the referees, two Bulgarian men, of accepting financial bribes paid by Gunnar Prokop (the Austrian team manager). The comments were very emotional, because the same referees had previously been accused of favouring Austria in an earlier match against Romania. In that European Club Cup incident, the Romanian team, Valencea, had lost out to the Austrian, Hypo Bank.

As a result of the first mentioned bias, the *Federatio Romana Handbal* made an official complaint to the International Handball Federation. According to Manfred Prause, the chief referee of the 1998 Championship, he did not know that the same referees were involved in the earlier accusations and were officiating in this match as well. The Romanian journalists and readership were convinced that the referees had been bribed to favour Austria.

Another comment on the 1998 match was as follows:

It is incredible. The psychological impact of biased officiating at this level, could be destructive for the (Romanian) team. (RL, 14th.)

Hungarian handball also lacked financial support before 1998. Nepszabadsag commented on the situation in this way:

...small country - small money - (referring to a former well-known soccer player in the 1950s, Ferenc Puskas, who said: small money small soccer "big" money "big" soccer). (NB, 19th.)

The loss to Romania and the fact that Hungary was winless, were blamed on the the bad economic conditions of the eastern bloc after the fall of the "Soviet Empire". This perception adds a clear political perspective to the question of the gendered national identities.

Discussion

The focus is first on the construction of national identities, then, the consequences of "carpe phallum" (the hegemonic masculine logic of continually successes), stereotypes, contradictions and ambivalences and at last on metaphors for the construction of national identities.

The construction of symbolic processes of national identities

Earlier in this paper I stated that it might be understood as national myth making to deny fissures of gender in questions of national identity. I categorize this position as a possible *male bias*, because it needs to be problematized, for example through the concept of doxa.

If a women`s team sport contributes to the construction and reconstruction of national identities in a global world the following four criteria must be included: First, the sport must be mediated as having a glorious history (Denmark, Hungary, Norway and Romania). This does not need to be a reality, but can be mediated ideas which represent a hegemony in the sporting cultures. Second, if this is applied to women`s sport, the sport must be presented as a sex- "appropriate" one in a historical context and/or today (Denmark, Hungary, Norway and Romania). To do so, female athletes cannot be understood as the "Other" in the overall context which is analysed, because national identities are constructed through "we/us" in relation to the Other (Denmark, Hungary, Norway and Romania). However, this does not included subthemes, for example

with a focus on the construction of “uncontrollable nerves” of females during the matches, if the team does not win (Denmark, Germany and Hungary). “We” must succeed in contrast to the “others”, at the same time as “the other” features “us” of what we *lack* in comparison to other countries. In these contexts issues of gender might be understood as denied, a doxa, or ambivalent. Third, the bodies of the athletes must be mediated as aggressive, tough, strong, non-fragile with power to play in competitions in a historical context and/ or today, which might symbolize an Amazon warrior (Denmark, Germany, Hungary, Norway and Romania). This does not necessarily exclude traditional sex stereotyped texts (written texts and pictures) and comments. Fourth, European championships in the sport must be presented as media events in the country (Denmark and Norway).⁶

According to Margaret Duncan and Michael Messner (1998: 182) mediated texts of female athletes tend to be those who participate in sex “appropriate” sports. Handball is a male sport in Germany. This was seen indirectly by the paucity of coverage of the European championship, and could be interpreted as sex-typing - not in the text itself, but in the sense that these texts were lacking or marginal. In this way German female handballers indirectly represent the Other in contrast to Norway and Denmark. In the last mentioned country handball is supposed to be a sport for both sexes. In Hungary and Romania the gender fissures in handball seem to be more ambivalent. Hungary and Romania are situated in the heart of eastern Europe and have a history of war especially against the Turks, but also against Russia. The theme of nationalism seems to be a contested question in Hungary, mainly because Hungary has lost much of its territory the last 80 years. In 1920 the country was forced to give away 2/3 of its territory to their neighbours, but got some of it back in 1938 and 1940, a part of which came at the expense of Romania. Today 3 million people of Hungarian descent still live in Transylvania in Romania.

Is the European championship in women`s handball a “media event” in the countries in this project? The Norwegian TV 3 bought the rights to cover the European championship in women`s handball in 1998 for 34 million Norwegian “kroner” (Dagbladet, 1998, November, 11th.). The size of the audience of the women`s final after the break was 867.000 with an average of 803.000 for the entire match in a country with 4.3 million inhabitants (Lippe, von der, 2001: 198). This is more than during ordinary soccer matches in the Norwegian league and more than the size of the audience of the Champions League match in soccer between the Norwegian team, Rosenborg and Turk, Galatasaray in the same year.

With the audience size of TV3 and 40%, 31% and 29% of the sports coverage in the tabloid Dagbladet and VG and the subscription paper Aftenposten during the European championship, this tournament can be interpreted as a media event in Norway. This championship was the number one sports event in two of the three newspapers of the capital in addition to its great audience size.

In Denmark the subscription paper Politiken covered the handball tournament to 28% of the total of sport during the championship and 20% in the tabloid BT.⁷ The fact that the male co-coach, Högedahl called the victory “*a historical day for Norwegian handball*” and not “*women`s handball in Norway*” may be interpreted as an indication of an ungendered event on the level of a surface understanding, (national mythmaking of denying fissures of gender). On the level of the doxa, the universe of the undiscussed, the gendered social order in the field of handball takes, however, female bodies as the “natural” sporting bodies for granted.⁸

The mediated texts on the Danish and Norwegian team included all the four criteria: a mediated glorious history, a sex-appropriate sport, mediated bodies as strong and non-fragile and a media event in the country; Hungary included three, Romania two criterion, and Germany one.

“Carpe phallum”, stereotypes, contradictions and ambivalences

None of the pictures or written texts in the papers of the five countries focussed on their potential titillating bodies. Instead, their abilities as athletes during the matches was the focus with the exception of one headline in a Norwegian paper. Two good-looking players (a Danish and a Norwegian) were featured in a sexualized way off-stage in a leisure context (celebrating the gold medal and sleeping). This one exception reproduces images from previous research.

The fact that all the papers featured female athletes as emotional bodies is an example of both stereotyped journalism and the fact that women dare to show their feelings in a way men normally do not. There is, however, a difference in these contexts. If tears are shown during the match it may symbolize traditional femininity and uncontrolled bodies (Denmark, Germany and Hungary) in contrast to the reactions of a winning team (Norway). This last example is becoming more and more common in men`s sports as well. If a person on a winning team (the Norwegian Tjugum) is featured as crying, this reaction may be interpreted differently because of the significance of the outcome. Depicting female athletes as both sexy at parties, crying, tough and active agents may be interpreted as the ambivalence of journalism of today, because the days of traditional femininities and masculinities are gone.

Top level sport is an extremely male dominated world. The fact that handball is traditionally supposed to be a women`s sport in Norway and that the female national team is world class might be understood as a paradox. Like most sports, handball`s administrators and coaches are mostly male. In this world Norway has a male co-coach and a female head-coach in Marit Breivik. She has blue eyes, blond hair and she does not normally scream on the sideline like most of the male national coaches. She is featured as too kind, too feminine, too democratic and so on.

“Hence she did not have the correct toughness to create winners... The backstage scepticism underlines a smouldering carpet of discontent, which has been waiting to erupt into full scale fire. The victory yesterday at least for a time being smothered the possible fire”.

If we tie this together with the attitude that women`s top level handball in Europe was in a state of stagnation the very year when the Norwegian national team had a chance to win gold, the bottom line of the male textual hegemony is as follows: women are not good coaches and if Norway wins it is just a gold medal with a low status. What makes this text so brutal is that the *doxa* of the male social order is *revealed*. The naturalization of its own arbitrariness has become visible (Bourdieu, 1977: 164). Marit belongs to the wrong sex, to the Other, which lacks the necessary qualities. The editor not only constructs a heterodoxical belief and reveals the quasi-perfect fit between the male order and the alleged lack of female abilities, he also takes a stand against this mythico-ritual homologues between myths about male superiority of today and the past.

The coach who uttered most clearly the attitude about the stagnation of top level handball was a Swede, who was coaching a male club team in Norway. In Sweden handball is a typical male sport and male athletes receive much more attention than they do in Norway.

The mediated texts of the coach Marit shows how vulnerable women`s top level sport is in the media, even if it contributes to reconstructions of national identities. In the logic of “carpe phallum” she and her team have continually to prove that they are capable of success, more so than coaches and teams in male top level sport. As shown by Solheim “the feminine” varies between what is understood as sacred and pollution or between the symbols of madonna and whore. The Norwegian female coach might have been interpreted as a symbol of pollution by some male journalists if she had not been successful in 1998. Because she did succeed, she could be interpreted as sacred for a while and may be as a symbol of madonna as well. Although female handball playing bodies do

not seem to have any serious competition from the male national team yet, a quick symbolic ride from heaven to hell seems possible.

Successful female handball players from Denmark, Norway and Hungary were presented as engineering their own successes and causing their opponents to fail. These characteristics tend, according to most western research to frame male athletes. Women are often framed in a more passive role; they tend to win because they are lucky or lose because they do not control their own games (Duncan & Messner, 1998: 177).

According to two articles in Der Tagesspiegel the German female team was fortunate because they won 25-24 against Austria. Arguably, if a male national team had done the same, the comments would have been focussed upon their power, risk-taking and strong nerves and that in the end, one goal more was sufficient to secure the victory.

Successful female athletes are not framed in a stereotyped way as passive agents in the Danish, Norwegian or Hungarian papers. When they do well there seems to be a tendency to focus on their abilities as athletes, while the focus is more on injuries and the stronger winning teams. Even in this case with the swimming Norwegian captain, she was not sexualized in the traditional way with the focus on her half naked body, but her face. Of course this frame might be interpreted as sexualized, but in a way feminists readers, audience and research persons might accept, as sex subjects who contribute to the staging of their presentation. The athlete also has some control of the situation. Perhaps the Norwegian captain insisted that she should be in the water when the picture was taken.⁹ It seems to be easier for an experienced athlete, such as Kirsti, to reflect on these questions than it would be for a younger, less experienced athlete.

That which is connoted as sexual bodies is dependent upon individual, cultural factors and the context. Men, mostly heterosexuals, in contrast to most women (also mostly heterosexuals) tend to understand all beautiful females with visible breasts or bottoms as sexual.¹⁰ *If this is the case with most male journalists, female athletes might easily be featured in sexualized terms, if the focus is not on the sport performance.*

Metaphors for national identities

Most of the metaphors were conventional and not creative.

The Danish liberal subscription paper, Politiken, featured Norway and Norwegians when they beat Denmark in the final as noted earlier with the following metaphors: (For twelve years the Norwegians shovelled home all kind

of medals but not gold) *to their wooden cottages*, (the Norwegian supporters were) *ringing of bells and other kinds of noise polluting behaviour from mountains and local rural areas*".

An important element in the construction of national identity is, as we have seen earlier in this article, to show through the relation of the Other what it lacks. Norway, a country on the periphery of Europe, was under the Danish throne from the 13th century until 1814. The concepts "wooden cottages", "ringing of bells" and "mountains" are metaphors for the "backward" country of Norway, instead of the more flat and "civilized" Denmark, which is situated closer to the centre of Europe. This is similar to earlier Danish mediated texts on Norwegian soccer as "mountain ape soccer". (Until the last years, Denmark nearly always beat the Norwegian male national team in soccer.)

According to Dag Kullerud (1999), this rhetoric is two hundred years old. The Norwegian bishop Johan Nordal Brun described the journalism of Copenhagen as "murders" and "poison" in the 1790s, because he thought that they ridiculed Norwegian way of life. A Danish journalist answered with a graphic metaphor about education and geography. He wrote as follows:

Who is able to resist the power of the dark? Just as the early morning sun drenches the Danish plains while the Norwegian mountains remain shrouded in the darkness of night, so too we hope the soul of Danish education would kindle the very soul of the Norwegian mountain of illiteracy.(Dagbladet, 1999, December, 8th.)

We recognize the rhetoric and the metaphor *mountains in the darkness of night* for Norway and the uneducated people in the mountains of Norway. In the 1790s, Denmark was ruled peacefully by a monarchy with power over both state and church. However, the king had to, at times deal with a hostile and "uncivilized" Norway. According to Kullerud, the Danes have an unfulfilled love relationship to Norway, because the Danish king had to give Norway away to Sweden at the peace treaty after the Napoleonic war in 1813. In addition, the Danes regarded Norway as an inferior nation concerning European culture and education, but at the same time they also admire the Norwegian "mountain-apes".

Nature is in this context the overarching metaphor to represent Norway and *civilization* to represent Denmark. In the following a submetaphorical construct from a Hungarian text is consistent with the key metaphor for Norway.

In the Hungarian newspaper, Nemzeti Sport, we recognize the metaphor "iceberg" for Norway, however, without a negative flavour. The relationship

between Hungary and Norway has never been close or hostile. When Norwegian and Danish female national teams are successful, they might contribute to the construction of a gendered national identity. If one closes the eyes and visualizes a handball player, most Norwegian people would tend to see a female body, while most German people would see a male body, and most Danish people would see either a male and female body. When men and a few women see a female body they tend to understand that the field on which these bodies act is gendered. If they, however, detect a male body they tend to understand this body as ungendered and universal. This is one of the ways through which male biases are produced and reproduced in research.

The comments from the Romanian papers about the failures of women`s handball in the championship might also be regarded as an element of national identity in relation to handball for both sexes, i.e., what is wrong with the game is mediated with terms such as “*stop this shame, the nightmare is over*”. These are expressions of both failures and that some of the best players are included in the Austrian national team instead of where they rightfully belong, in Romania. The fact that some of the best Romanian players were constructed as Austrian athletes who played against their “own” team in 1998, in addition to the mediated hostile attitude towards the Austrian coach, seem to pinpoint the vulnerability of national teams with less economic resources. In this sense, the difference between the identification with “us” and the “other” might be understood as problematic.

Conclusions

I have argued that women`s ballgames in Europe should become important vehicles in the construction of national identities. In particular, the national, womens` handball teams of Denmark, Hungary, Norway and Romania are interpreted and believed to have such a potential. What has made this possible is the slowly changing images of womens` sporting bodies especially in the last 20 years.

Successful female players may be featured as crying of joy and strong, aggressive athletes while shedding tears of joy because of an important victory. In this context sport is a terrain in which emotions are negotiated, staged and practised, rather than one in which traditional female practices are taken for granted. The emerging female athletic bodies symbolize non-weak and non-fragile women with power to play. According to Chris Shilling (1993: 60) the historical practice of equating personal worth with *his* body has favoured dominant groups in society. He goes on to observe that the naturalistic views of embodiment tend to construct women`s bodies as weak.

In comparison to earlier research, this project has shown several mediated texts which might indicate paradoxes, ambivalences and new findings as to gender

construction in general and gendered national identities in particular. The implication will have considerable impact on the mediated cultural metaphors that help construct national identities in a global world.

Further research on gendered bodies need to problematize the concept of emotional and sexualized bodies in terms of sameness and difference.

The increasing production of sexualized human commodities involves both sexes in a way we have not analysed before. As well, there should to be further debates on the difference and consequences of a sexualized object and subject in addition to the potential ungendered and not degendered/de-sexed bodies in some contexts¹¹.

Notes

¹The newspapers were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively and utilized the research skills of different investigators. Thus, Ole Skjerk and his master student, Laura Munch, Denmark, further, Gertrud Pfister, Germany, Szikora Katalin, Hungary, sport students at the University College of Telemark; Norway: Marius Johannessen, Ingve Nærland, Marita Annekre and Gry-Anette Torvik carried out the quantitative research, while Gerd von der Lippe conducted the qualitative research. Further, Monica Stanescu, Romaina conducted the Romanian research. Susan Bandy, now Hungary, assisted with the translation of the Hungarian research and corrected the article into proper English, while Hart Cantelon, Canada, discussed with me how to translate the metaphors of the quotations into English.

² According to for instance Barbara Cox and Shona Thompson concepts like “unfeminine” are used as derogatory synonyms for lesbian. (Cox, B. and Thompson, S., 2001. “Facing the Bogey: Women in Football”, *Football Studies*, forthcoming.

³ This could of course be interpreted as a bias, because the diversity is supposed to be better with analysing more newspaper.

⁴ Only two papers in three countries are analysed here.

⁵ She has been a former handball player herself.

⁶ Not in the sense of global media events like The Olympic Games in Dayan.D. & Katz, E. (1992) *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*, Cambridge, M. A.: Harvard University Press.

⁷ BT was the most tabloid of all the papers in the research with 22565 square cms of pictures during the championship.

⁸ In this context male handballplayers might be interpreted as “the Other”, because the male national team is not mediated as having a glorious history in contrast to the female, in addition to the fact that handball is regarded as a minor male sport and not so important as soccer. The idea is here that female sports are more easily constructed as national-making if males in the same sport are rather unsuccessful.

⁹ I interviewed her in 1996, so this seems to be her way of staging herself.

¹⁰ 60 first year sports students at the University College of Telemark were asked to evaluate pictures of top level athletes.

¹¹ The processes of mediated de-gendering/de-sexing is a consequence of being “punished” by losing ones images after “bad” sporting results in important competitions (men) (Lippe, von der, 2001: 223-224) and taking part in the “wrong” competitions (women).

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E-mail addresses of the handball research team:

Dr. of sport history, Ole Skjerk, Institut for Idræt, The University of Copenhagen :
oskjerk@ifi.ku.dk

Dr.of sport history, professor Szikora Katalin, The university of Hungary, Budapest.
szikora@mail.hupe.hu

Dr.of sport history and Dr. of sport sociology, professor Gertrud Pfister, now
The University of Copenhagen
gfister@ifi.ku.dk

Dr. of sport history Monica Stanescu, National Acedemy of Physical Education and Sports, Bucharest.

monica_iulia@yahoo.com

Dr.of sport history and sport sociology, Gerd von der Lippe, the institute of sport and outdoor leicure
activities at Telemark University College, Bø. Professor competence in sport sociology.

Gerd. v.d.Lippe@hit.no