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Sport, War, Gender and Nationhood

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Abstract

This study explores the complex relationship between aspects sport war, gender and nationhood. This article seeks to answer that question or at least to shed some light on the issues that it raises. It does so by initially reviewing debates about the relationships that exist between sport, war and nationalism and then primarily by presenting data from a series of interviews conducted with women who have played for England in four team sports - association football, rugby union, cricket, and netball. However, before turning our attention to what these women have to say about their own status as well as the role of women in society more generally, let us begin by revisiting long-established arguments about the relationship between international sport and war.

Key Words: Sport, Nation, Gender, Orwell, International, Proxy Warriors

Introduction

Much has been made in the British media of the achievements of the country's female Olympians at London 2012 with gold medals being won in such disparate sports as rowing, boxing, dressage, cycling, and taekwondo. According to one review of the Games, 'women were being celebrated for doing something more with their bodies than model the latest clothes' (Turner, 2012). It was also noted that one of the rowing gold medalists, Heather Stanning, is a captain in the British Army and was being cheered on from afar by her battalion currently serving in Afghanistan. War and sport brought together in perfect harmony, it seemed. But to what extent can we expect female athletes to assume the traditionally male role of proxy warriors who represent the nation and whose deeds are treated by many as matters of life and death?

International Sport and War: The Orwellian Vision

Sport and war have often been used as metaphors for each other. Some believe, however, that the link between the two goes well beyond the metaphorical. One such observer was English essayist, socialist and novelist George Orwell whose reputed claim that international sport approximates to war minus the shooting has been the subject of both misrepresentation and misinterpretation. What Orwell (1945/1970, p. 62) actually wrote was that 'at the international level sport is frankly mimic warfare'. He was writing in the wake of a recent tour of Britain by the Moscow Dynamo football team and observed that 'sport is an unfailing cause of ill-will, and that if such a visit as this had any effect at all on Anglo-Soviet relations, it could only be to make them slightly worse than before' (p. 61). Nor, according to Orwell, could it have been otherwise. He writes that 'even if one didn't know from concrete examples (the 1936 Olympic Games, for instance) that international sporting contests lead to orgies of hatred, one could deduce it from general principles' (pp. 61-2). Sporting competition can lead to obsessive behaviour. According to Orwell, 'the whole thing is bound up with the rise of nationalism - that is, with the lunatic modern habit of identifying oneself with large power units and seeing everything in terms of competitive prestige' (p. 63).

In fact, large crowds had watched the Dynamo matches in London, Glasgow and Cardiff, enthused no doubt by the desire to return as quickly as possible to post-war normality whilst simultaneously taking the opportunity to salute erstwhile Russian allies. Orwell remained unconvinced.

I am always amazed when I hear people saying that sport creates goodwill between the nations, and that if only the common peoples of the world could meet one another at football or cricket, they would have no inclination to meet on the battlefield. Even if one didn't know from concrete examples (the 1936 Olympic Games, for instance) that international sporting contests lead to orgies of hatred, one could deduce it from general principles'. (p. 64)

He then added, 'if you wanted to add to the vast fund of ill-will existing in the world at this moment, you could hardly do it better than by a series

of football matches between Jews and Arabs, Germans and Czechs, Indians and British, Russians and Poles, and Italians and Yugoslavs, each match to be watched by a mixed audience of 100,000 spectators' (p. 65). For Orwell, the roots of this problem lie in nationalism and for him, nationalism inevitably leads to war.

Nationalism and Warfare

Nairn (1977, cited in Nagel, 2008) refers to the nation as 'the modern Janus' to 'contrast nationalism's two sides: a regressive, jingoistic, militaristic "warfare state" visage versus a progressive community-building "welfare state" countenance: guns versus butter' (p. 248). Holsti (1996) suggests that 'war has been a constant companion of the state-making process in European history' (p. 58), and many states in the modern era have been created out of war. Hutchinson (2007) explains that the study of warfare is, therefore, central to an understanding of nation formation. He claims, 'it is hardly an exaggeration to say that nationalism, in both its civic and ethnic varieties, was born in war' (2007, p. 42). Those who believe that the formation of nations takes place through warfare contend that the nation is founded on organised violence.

Political realists believe the driving force behind war is an increasingly competitive and militaristic state system (Hutchinson, 2007). As Rousseau understood, each nation-state must competitively arm itself against the threat of war, and as such, the price for a system of sovereign states is permanent insecurity and occasional war (Holsti, 1996). Moreover, despite Kant's belief that if the people rule, there can be no wars, war as a means of political action, conflict resolution or uncontrolled violence is still prevalent today (Holsti, 1996). The Swedish slogan 'one soldier, one rifle, one vote' further identifies the relationship between political citizenship and the willingness to sacrifice one's life (Hutchinson, 2007). However, in most instances, mass death as a result of war is far less a demonstration of collective will than a reflection of the coercive powers of the state (Hutchinson, 2007).

It is also worth considering what type of nation a person is willing to die for. For example, are people willing to lay down their lives for a civic

nation? Does the nation have to be ethnic in order to inspire those feelings of quasi-familial ties that are essential for inculcating a willingness to sacrifice oneself for the collective? Political leaders in times of war frequently appeal to the idea of defending a homeland, and to the concept of the nation as a family. If the nation is perceived to be ethnic, a feeling of kinship is attached to it, thus making it easier for men to lay down their lives for their alleged extended family. Of course, few people expect to die for their nation while playing sport. Yet, the comparisons, both metaphorical and actual, persist.

Sport, The Nation and War

Orwell's comments about the relationship between international sport and war can be interpreted in one of two ways. Either sporting competition could act in place of war, allowing nations to compete in the sports field, making war less likely; or international sporting competition could be seen as actually keeping alive tensions between nations, of which war is sometimes an inevitable consequence. For Bairner (2001), 'sport and nationalism are arguably two of the most emotive issues in the modern world. Both inspire intense devotion and frequently lead to violence' (p. xi).

Furthermore, one must consider how sport encourages people to see the world in terms of 'us' and 'them', just as war demands. As a consequence, it would appear easy to draw parallels between sport and war. According to Cosentino (1994), 'essentially, both sport and war are competition; war the ultimate form of it' (p. 48). Seeing sport as an imitation of war, Fischer (2002) states, 'competitive sport, it is said, both encourages and masks the sort of violence that finds its most complete expression in war or in war like attitudes within society' (p. 16). In outlining the way in which sport can inculcate national sentiment, Bairner (2001) argues that 'except in times of war, seldom is the communion between members of the nation, who might otherwise be classed as total strangers, as strongly felt as during major international events' (p. 17). This serves to highlight the similarities between sport and war in fostering a sense of national identity.

The tying together of sport and war has a long history. The similarities between sport and war have been identified since the emergence of codified sports, mainly in the British public school system. As Simons (1996)

comments, 'when the Duke of Wellington said that the Battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton he had certainly in mind the old unreformed schools where sport was based in physical violence' (p. 43). It is certainly the case that both sport and war involve contestation, and frequently sports require the invasion of opposition territory. However, as Fischer (2002) admits, 'the aim of competition in sport is not the destruction of the opponent but rather the defeat' (p. 24). Indeed, according to Cronin and Mayall (1998), unlike war, 'sport cannot win territory or destroy an opposing ideology or religion which the nation seeks to demonise' (p. 2).

This is a key difference as is the fact that in war, one risks one's life, something that is by no means anticipated in sport even though it can happen from time to time. Thus, sport can perhaps best be described as a 'playful' imitation of war, stemming from its roots in play like activities.

Fischer (2002) claims that 'war, by contrast, is most serious, and what it is most serious about, is victory' (p. 18). Yet, for many, of course, sports also seem concerned only with victory, not least at the international level.

Polley (2004) explains that the use of war imagery and metaphor adds meaning and nationalistic hype to sporting contests. For example, Mangan (1996) found that the language of warfare in Victorian and Edwardian Britain drew heavily on sporting metaphors. For Fischer (2002), however, the 'language of competitive sport is ubiquitously infused with metaphors of war and battle' (p. 16). Indeed, whilst the sport/war metaphor still exists today, Garland and Rowe (1999) argue that the language of sport now relies heavily on metaphors of war. Important in maintaining these sport/war metaphors has been their persistent use by the media. Thus, Jansen and Sabo (1994) describe how sport/war metaphors are 'deeply entrenched in the narrative structures of sport media' (p. 5). More specifically, having identified both 'sportspeak' in war journalism and 'warspeak' in sports journalism, they explain that action on real battlefields is often 'packaged in sports imagery for domestic consumption' (Jansen and Sabo, 1994, p. 4).

Garland and Rowe's (1999) analysis of English press coverage of the European Championships in 1996 found that Orwell's characterization of sport as 'war minus the shooting' had been fully embraced by sport journalists themselves through their use of militaristic rhetoric to dramatize their accounts. Tuck and Maguire (1999) also note that the media are quick

to amplify the linkages between sport and war by using sport as a metaphor for war, which can subsequently intensify feelings of nationalism and xenophobia.

For Jansen and Sabo (1994), the use of sport/ war metaphors also serves to maintain constructions of hegemonic masculinity in the two fields. They write, 'sport/ war tropes exaggerate and celebrate difference between men and women. They idealize and valorize men and masculinity, and emasculate men who appear to be weak, passive or pacifist' (Jansen and Sabo, 1994, p. 9). Both sport and warfare, therefore, represent institutions through which hegemonic masculinity has been constituted, and is bolstered by the association of men with violence (Jansen and Sabo, 1994). War is quintessentially masculine and represents a test of manhood, as does much sport. Jansen and Sabo (1994) state that the 'language of sport/ war represents the values of hegemonic masculinity', such as aggression, competition, dominance, as desirable (p. 10). Bairner (2001) comments that:

Bearing in mind Hoberman's (1984) description of sports people as 'proxy warriors', the fact is that, throughout the twenty-first century, sport has been one of the most valuable weapons at the disposal of nationalists, whatever their situation or respective aspirations (p. 177).

In addition, if sport can be effectively likened to war, then it is likely that it is male athletes who become the proxy warriors.

Gendered Militaries, Gendered Wars

History tells us that despite the belief that war is for men, women have in fact always played a key role in national struggles. However, whilst women's roles in national liberation struggles, guerrilla warfare or the military have varied, female combatants have generally been seen in supportive and nurturing (Yuval-Davis and Anthias, 1989). This is because of the intimate relationship between womanhood and femininity. As Brownmiller (1984) explains, 'femininity was a challenge thrown down to the female sex, a challenge no proud, self-respecting young woman could choose to ignore' (p. 15). Roth and Basow (2004) claim that the 'femininity ideology goes far beyond convincing society and women themselves that they are weak, the ideology actually makes them weak, or at least weaker

than they need to be' (p. 249).

According to Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989), women's wider contribution to the nation is clearly based upon their ability to reproduce, not only biologically and ideologically, but also on their role in the transmission of culture, the reproduction of ethnic and national boundaries and, to a lesser extent, as participants in national struggles. Moreover, as Meyer (2000) states, 'their centrality is also based on women's symbolic status, connected to the reproductive roles, as representatives of purity' (p. 7). On this basis, only pure women can reproduce a pure nation (Meyer, 2000). Mostov (2000) explains that the need to protect women inevitably comes to include the need to monitor women's actions as well. As women have been identified as the nation's reproducers, those who do not have the nation's children (either through not having children at all or by having children with men from other nations) have the potential to become the nation's enemies.

As mentioned earlier, many nations are created in wars. In such conditions, it is men who protect the nation, and thus the nation's women and future mothers. Hall (1999) claims that 'gender issues around nation and nationalism are perhaps most sharply articulated during periods of military conflict, when men's and women's bodies become the site of that conflict' (p. 51). When the nation is described as needing to be protected by its men from 'outsiders', it becomes feminized, likened to a weak woman needing protection from her man. Mostov (2000) explains, 'the Motherland provides a receptive and vulnerable image in contrast to the active image of the Fatherland, which is the force behind government and military action' (p. 91). Peterson (1994) describes how a woman's body represents the personification of the nation-as-woman, ever in danger of violation by 'foreign' males. The media often speak of the 'rape' of one country, and the penetration of its borders, by another, further symbolizing the nation as a woman (for example 'The Rape of Kuwait'). However, it is not only the personification of the nation-as-woman that makes war a gendered experience. The ultimate responsibility of citizenship used to be that of being prepared to die for one's country. This was at various times regarded as a sacrifice that only men could make in the course of fighting for their country. This has had wider implications. As Hall (1999), the '

masculinisation of war and of citizenship are intimately connected, and the exclusion of women from the military has been a key aspect of their exclusion from citizenship' (p. 52).

According to Yuval-Davis (1997), wars are gendered constructions, and being killed (or killing) in war is in itself gendered. Day and Thompson (2004) explain that although it is men who put their lives at risk for the nation, women are not exempt from the ravages of national conflict. Instead, their symbolic and material importance to the nation exposes them to retribution from the nation's enemies; the violation of the nation can be achieved through the violation of women (Day and Thompson, 2004, p. 125).

While the men are away fighting, up to eighty per cent of refugees are women and children, and the women left behind are vulnerable to rape (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Eisenstein (2000) describes how the act of rape is even depicted as a weapon of war. She states, 'war rape is sexualized violence which seeks to terrorize, destroy, and humiliate a people through its women' (2000, p. 48). In addition, Hall (1999) argues that 'the aim of rape is to shatter the fantasy structure of an individual and to attack the masculinity of the victim's fathers, husbands and brothers, for they have failed in their responsibility to protect "their women", a potent source of national feeling' (p. 52)

However, fighting in war is no longer even a male duty in many parts of the world. Rather it is a job for men, and now for women too. Modern technology and the professionalization of militaries have increased the participation of the latter as well as changing their social construction as soldiers (Yuval-Davis, 1997). Yuval-Davis (1997) claims that 'militaries and warfare have never been just a "male zone", women have always fulfilled certain, often vital, roles within them - but usually not on an equal, undifferentiated basis to that of the men' (p. 93). Furthermore, as Yuval-Davis (1997) notes, the 'formal incorporation of women into the military as soldiers has encountered a lot of prejudice' (p. 100). Moreover, analyses of the jobs that women undertake in the military suggest the existence of a gendered civil labour market. Women's roles are still predominantly as nurses, teachers and secretaries.

Yuval-Davis (1997) explains that 'if the experience of the military is

supposed "to make men from the boys", womanhood cannot be easily incorporated with such imagery' (p. 101). Despite the naturalization of the construction of men as warriors throughout history, there have also been constructions and images of women as warriors. Yuval-Davis (1997) notes:

These images usually have either enhanced the constructed unnaturalness of women as fighters, or have been made in such a way as to collude with more general notions of femininity and masculinity in the society from which the women fighters have come (p. 94).

Stereotypical images of femininity in times of war, such as women at home being good wives and mothers, are essential for militarized images of masculinity (Yuval-Davis, 1997). For Nagel (2008), 'men's honour and women's purity are important, though often overlooked, symbols in national ideologies, mobilizations and conflicts' (p. 899). War is still constructed as a male world, where men fight, kill and die on the frontline while women support them, or wait at home looking after the family awaiting their return. Men have to remain honourable, to their country that needs them, while women have to remain pure, avoiding the rape of foreigners, and nurturing the next generation, the nation's future. Nevertheless, women do on occasion serve on the frontline in war and, far more commonly, act as proxy warriors in sport. The final section of this article concentrates on the views of female athletes about these very different, but arguably intimately related, national roles.

Women on the Frontline: Athletes Speak

The idea of women in the army, and specifically on the frontline, was discussed with elite English sportswomen in the course of conducting a wider research study on sport, gender and national identity in England. In order to collect data to help understand the complexities surrounding national, gendered and sporting identities and subjectivities, a series of interviews were held, one element of each interview focusing on the general role of women in society and, more specifically, on debates surrounding women on the front line.

For Claire A, gender differences do not matter when it comes to physical jobs; all that matters is being up to the required standard:

'When it comes to physical stuff for example like in the army or sometimes the police, there need to be like a benchmark, so if you can reach a certain physical standard then you can do it but if you can't then I don't think exceptions should be made for women and men, if that makes sense. So if someone isn't physically able to do it, they shouldn't be there fighting for their country I don't think.' (Claire A, Rugby Union)

Serena's view on women's jobs and roles was more confused:

'Any job really. I think if you're a woman and you want to be something, you should be able to. I think the whole army type thing is a bit different if I'm being honest. I do agree that some women would struggle.' (Serena, Netball)

Despite believing that women should be able to do any job, Serena considers restricting women's entry into the army. This could be because of the feminine ideology, according to which women are weak, passive, and frail. Alternatively, her vision of the army as a place only for men could stem from the fact that, as we have seen, the military and warfare are so intimately tied to conceptions of masculinity. The idea of women on the frontline undeniably disrupts the relationship of nation-war-man. As Kennedy-Pipe (2000) explains, 'war was, and many would argue still is, in the Western world associated with masculine values such as physical strength, honour and courage' (p. 33). In the UK, women are present in the armed forces, although to date they have not been allowed to engage in hand to hand combat with the enemy on the frontline, which serves to reinforce this notion.

All of the participants were asked for their opinions about women serving on the frontline. Only one of them, Harriet, expressed the opinion that women should not be able to serve:

'No. Because, it's not sexist or anything, but women just aren't as strong as men in the slightest so what's the point, you are putting all the guys at risk by putting a girl in your group, than having a guy. Imagine if they had to, I don't know...pick something up and the women couldn't carry it quick enough. Whereas a man could...do it quicker and fitter, he will get told exactly what to do, whereas women aren't as regimental I

wouldn't say. It would just put men at risk; it would put other people at risk, even other women, if you put a woman on the frontline.' (Harriet, Rugby Union)

Harriet could not conceive of the possibility of women serving on the frontline, her objections stemming from an expectation that all women are physically inferior to men. Harriet was unique in her dismissal of the possibility, with all of the other participants open to, and in some cases advocates for, women not only working in the armed forces but also serving on the frontline.

Dani (Football): 'Yeh, why not, they are as good as any other aren't they really. If you think you are brave enough to put yourself in that position then yeh, why not give them the opportunity.'

Serena (Netball): 'Do I think they should serve on the frontline? I think they should be given the opportunity to see if they could...you do get very different kinds of personalities these days, and you do get women that, there is probably someone out there that probably could go out there and do the job, and stand on the frontline. But if you don't give them the opportunity then you can never learn if you can break that mould I guess.'

These two extracts highlight that the participants can conceive of women serving their nation on the frontline. Indeed, despite Serena's earlier concerns about women being in the armed forces at all, she clearly believes that those who are admitted should have no restrictions placed upon them.

The appreciation that women do already play a role in serving the nation in the army was only commented on by Charlotte in the following terms:

'I think if someone wants to put themselves in that position then they shouldn't be stopped. And just because they are a woman and they are supposedly, you know, more fragile than men, I don't think that should stop them at all. Especially in this day and age. And I think women play a vital role in the military anyway...I don't think you should be stopped from serving on the frontline.' (Charlotte, Rugby Union)

However, we again see the ways in which the participants imagine women as restrained by femininity, through Charlotte indicating their

fragility. As Yuval-Davis and Anthias (1989) note, women as participants in the military are often assigned to roles that are predominantly nurturing and supporting, such as nursing. This further identifies women in accordance with traditional conceptions of femininity.

Sophie R (Rugby Union): 'I think they should be allowed too. Because I think that the world has come to the stage where there shouldn't be any discrimination now. Although I do wonder like on the front like, whether women could possibly lack things like aggression and the ability to make snap decisions under pressure. I think sometimes women can...bring emotions into it, too much.'

Despite Sophie R recognising that for there to be equality between the sexes, women must have the same access as men, she questions whether a woman would be successful. The woman Sophie R describes is certainly consistent with dominant ideas about femininity, such as being emotional and lacking aggression. This idea of women contrasts with what is required to be a successful warrior for the nation: strength, aggression and determination. For Sophie R, women should be allowed to serve on the frontline simply because it seems fair for them to do so, but she questions whether or not they would be good at it. This highlights how this participant views women's capabilities as being restricted by the boundaries of femininity. Kennedy-Pipe (2008) explains that one debate surrounding women in the military involves those who argue that 'women are physically and emotionally ill-equipped for the tasks required of 'warriors' (p. 32). Despite this, many of the participants noted that women should be allowed the same opportunities to fight for their country, as long as they are physically capable.

Raff (Football): 'There is no reason why you can't like...go through the training like the men, obviously they pick the best ones from the training. And if you don't make the training then you don't go, so if you can do it then there is no reason why.'

Kerys (Football): 'If that's what women want to do, you know, and they are capable of doing it for their country so you shouldn't stop them, if they have got the physical capabilities to do it then yeh, you should do it.'

Stacey (Netball): 'I think if a woman wants to, and isn't a detriment to those around her, because I know...that females have limitations, like I'm not as strong as a guy, I probably won't be able to do the same things as a guy, but I think if you are not a detriment to what would be the rest of your group then you should be given the opportunity.'

As long as women are physically capable then, the majority of the participants identify the frontline as a place where women can succeed.

Having women on the frontline is possible as long as they can meet the required standards, i.e. those set by men. However, imagining a woman on the frontline was still framed by femininity by some of the participants, who questioned the physical capabilities and emotional strength of women.

Joining the armed forces represents a way in which a woman can legitimately represent the nation, whether it is on the frontline or not.

Keeping women off the frontline, however (as hegemonic notions of femininity do), serves to retain the nation for men, and maintain the matrix of nation-war-man. None of the women who participated in the study are themselves members of the armed forces. However, as international sport can be variously regarded as mimic warfare, a substitute for war or, at the very least, an activity that contributes almost as much to the self-esteem of the nation, the fact that these women have represented their nation at sport may conceivably transform them, in the media and in their own eyes, into proxy warriors.

Female Athletes as Proxy Warriors

We noted at the outset that the British media showed a high level of interest in the achievements of female UK Olympians at the 2012 London Games. We would also argue that, given the importance of sport to national identity, most sports fans (with the help of the media) cast their sporting heroes in the role of 'proxy warriors' for the nation (Hoberman, 1984). Indeed, Garland and Rowe (1999) identified how, during major international (men's) football tournaments (such as the FIFA World Cup), journalists seem to embrace George Orwell's characterization of (men's) sport as 'war minus the shooting' by frequently drawing on military references to dramatize their accounts. We have argued that the use of war

rhetoric by the media helps to link sport with war and with national identity.

Throughout the course of the research, media articles have been selected for their relevance to the research question, namely, issues of national and gendered identities. The selected material has come from numerous sources (tabloid press, broadsheet newspapers, online articles and magazine extracts). Wensing and Bruce (2003) acknowledge that media coverage of women athletes is, at its best, ambivalent, meaning that positive descriptions and images are juxtaposed with descriptions and images that tend to undermine and/or trivialize women's efforts and successes.

However, Wensing and Bruce (2003) did find that 'coverage during international sports events...may be less likely to be marked by gendered discourses or narratives than reporting on everyday sports' (p. 393). Bruce (2008) completed a media analysis in New Zealand, focusing on gender ideologies and the positioning of sportswomen who represent the nation on the international stage. She describes how coverage during major sports events demonstrates that 'women who win for the nation are highlighted as worthy of attention.' (p. 62). Indeed, Bruce (2008) found that 'in stark contrast to gender ideologies of female weakness, they were represented in ways that emphasised physical power, strength and domination' (p. 66).

It was found that, in certain contexts, there was certainly evidence of war metaphors in match descriptions of women's sport. These closely resemble the ways in which the sports media usually present male national athletes, and highlights how women can on occasion also embody the role of proxy warriors for the nation in sport:

'Battling England narrowly failed to dethrone the all-conquering Kiwis who have ruled women's world rugby for 16 years...New Zealand had to fight every inch of the way' (Talbot, The Sun, 6th September 2010, p. 53, 'Brazier boot helps Ferns beat Roses.')

'Against a team who were fast, accurate and crunchingly brutal, England did not hide from the physical battle from before the start, when they advanced in a line towards New Zealand as they performed the haka, to the final whistle...England continued to put everything into the tackle... Nothing illustrated their never-say-die attitude more than McGilchrist.'

(Kidd, The Times, 6th September 2010, p. 66, 'English hearts left broken by the speed and ruthlessness of champions')

These two extracts evoke war-like connotations in their descriptions of the match, using words such as 'battle', 'fight' and the imagery of advancing in line. Similarly, in an article titled 'Overpowered: England can't halt the mighty Germans' (Grey, The Daily Mail, 11th September 2009, p. 105), the coach of the women's football team was quoted as saying 'we didn't lie down and die', implying that the women carried on fighting until the very end. Furthermore, descriptions of the players themselves also adopted war-like imagery:

'Their bravery had been extraordinary, the strength of their willpower almost scary...England's valour in defeat was magnificent...Emily Scarratt put her body on the line to spectacular effect...Barras's try...was stunningly brave.' (Kitson, The Guardian, 6th September 2010, p. 8, 'Heartbroken England rue missed opportunities as New Zealand rule again.')

'Those who cannot comprehend that women have the same relish as men for the physical, the confrontational and the gladiatorial aspects of the game can be referred to Amy Garnett, a 34-year-old Metropolitan Police officer, England's hooker through two World Cups and a gruelling 86 caps. "It is definitely the battle up front that is the attraction".' (Jones, The Sunday Times, 15th September 2010, p. S15, 'World in her hands')

'England have a fierce pack in which Rochelle Clark is an imposing scrummager and Amy Garnett a warlike hooker' (Jones, The Sunday Times, 5th September 2010, p. S5, 'Wonder woman')

Defining sportswomen in this way allows them to be imagined as national, sporting 'proxy warriors', in the same way that national sportsmen are presented in the press. However, this presentation is highly contextualised, and apparent only in special circumstances, such as major championship final appearances.

The participants themselves also adopted war imagery when describing their experiences of playing sport for their nation. Tammy describes how singing the national anthem:

'Makes you really pumped up for the game, and you do feel like you're really going out to represent your country that day. And it really does lift you up, and sort of drive you towards going out and almost like doing battle with the opposition' (Tammy, Cricket)

Tammy also invokes war imagery in her description of the sporting field, emphasizing the link between sport and war as seen previously in this research. Claire A also states:

'Really, really important I think. I think our national anthem is a bit boring, but I do like it because it's, everyone always buzzes off the national anthem, as soon as the national anthem is done everyone is ready to go, ready to like, almost like go to war, so it's, if we didn't play the national anthem it would be like part of our routine building up to the game definitely gone.' (Claire A, Rugby Union)

The use of these war metaphors by the players themselves highlights the ways in which they at least imagine themselves as proxy warriors for their nation.

Conclusion

The use of warspeak and war imagery identifies ways in which the women could transform their sporting experiences to ones that represent proxy warfare - thus they adopt themselves into the role of proxy warriors. We have seen how the media, during certain high level sporting events can present these very women as proxy warriors for the nation, through the use of 'warspeak' and the disappearance, if only temporary, of the traditional ways that women athletes are presented in the sports media (as heterosexualised, feminised, marginalised athletes).

Although the participants in this study expressed a variety of opinions about women serving on the frontline in times of war, they generally accepted that women who want to do so and have the ability should not be prevented from so doing. There was even more agreements that, in many respects, they too are fighting for their nation albeit on the field of play as opposed to the battlefield. It is readily apparent that the trivialisation of women's sport remains a feature of media coverage and also of popular

discourse. Nevertheless, at moments of greater sporting significance, evidence supports the women's own self-perception that they do become national 'proxy warriors' - warriors minus the shooting.

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