

Nationalising Minority Ethnic Athletes

Danish Media Representations of Nadia Nadim around the UEFA Women's Euro 2017

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Nationalising Minority Ethnic Athletes. Danish Media Representations of Nadia Nadim around the UEFA Women's Euro 2017

Abstract

With the rise in nationalism and anti-immigration sentiments in Europe, debate has arisen in several national media when minority ethnic athletes opt to play for the national team of their country of origin. This article aims to examine how minority ethnic athletes who opt to play for the national team in their country of destination express and are ascribed national belonging. To do so, the article draws on Nira Yuval-Davis' distinction between belonging and the politics of belonging as well as perspectives from transnational migration studies. The article is based on a single case study of Danish newspapers' representations of the Danish women's football player of Afghan origin, Nadia Nadim. In the build-up to, duration and aftermath of the UEFA Women's Euro in 2017, Nadim was ascribed Danish identity, while her popularity as a player rose. However, the article points out how athletes who become exemplary others along ethnic and national lines are deprived of their transnational belonging and of their potentially critical voice. Further, the article discusses how ideas of national unity in sport are enacted in the media through apparently innocent descriptions of patriotism and national archetypes seeking to reconcile current divisions in European societies.

Keywords: Sport, integration, identity, policy, belonging

Introduction

Jürgen Klinsmann, former national football team player and coach of the German men's football team from 2004-2006 once stated that "to open national teams to immigrants' sons is important. It gives a better image of our country."¹ This observation from a prominent figure in international football alerts attention to the key position held by national football teams in terms of national identity. In other words, football provides the option of representing the nation through eleven players on the pitch in line with the idea that a nation is an 'imagined political community'.² Further, Klinsmann pointed out that the presence of minority ethnic athletes in a national team may help creating the image of football and the affiliated nation as being inclusive.

Nevertheless, the public debate about the presence of minority ethnic athletes in national football teams in European countries is ambiguous. On the one hand are the arguments that the presence of minority ethnic athletes in the national team showcases diversity and successful integration. On the other hand is the concern that many national team players from minority ethnic backgrounds will lead to a situation where the majority of the population cannot identify with the national team. It has even been indicated that racial quotas have been set up by the French Football Federation to avoid an overrepresentation of national team players with a minority ethnic background. This situation led to a public debate in the spring of 2011.³

Recently, a debate about minority ethnic athletes has also been evolving in the Danish media as a number of talented male football players have chosen to play for the national team of their country of origin. This is for instance the case with Emre Mor (Turkey), Youssef Toutouh (Marocco), Winston Reid (New Zealand) and the Muccoli brothers (Albania). These young players' choice of national team appears to be largely based on strategic considerations about where they can gain playing time and thereby visibility in international football.⁴ However, the debate in the Danish media has expressed an astonishment that players who have grown up in Denmark may continue to feel connected with other nations.⁵ In other words, it appears to be surprising that migrants hold feelings of belonging that extend not only to one but also across nation states.

While minority ethnic male players' choice of national team has caught attention, minority ethnic female players' belongings have rarely been given attention; neither in the media nor in academia. Elaborating on this topic, this article will focus on Nadia Nadim, a Danish women's national football team player of Afghan origin, who has become very successful and who has gained considerable public visibility. The considerable attention given to Nadim in the Danish media may be seen as a symptom of current social issues; thus illustrating the options that follow

when women's footballers gain visibility but also the problematic use of sport in national identity politics and in restoring social hierarchies.⁶

The current focus on the identity of minority ethnic athletes like Nadim does not appear to be coincidental. Denmark is often perceived as an ethnically homogeneous country. However, as immigrants and descendants have surpassed 12 % of the Danish population, various political attempts have been made to restore (the idea of) national unity in the Danish society.⁷ Following the particular increase in immigration to Europe in 2015, a debate about "Danishness" arose in the national media and among politicians. The debate was followed by the passing of a statement in the Danish parliament worrying that "in some places in Denmark there are more immigrants or descendants of immigrants from non-western countries than Danes".⁸ Thus in this official statement, a whole group of immigrants and descendants are distinguished from the Danish population and deprived of their possible dual identity.

This article will focus on how Nadim achieved and was ascribed belongings in the Danish media in the build-up to, duration and aftermath of the UEFA Women's Euro (the Euro) in 2017. Further, the article will include an analysis of the ways in which Nadim has connected with the debate about "Danishness" and how she is made Danish. Using Nira Yuval-Davis' distinction between belonging and the politics of belonging,^{9, 10} the article will analyse the ways in which talented minority ethnic athletes as Nadim are included into the nation, while representations of their national identity also intersects with other social categories such as ethnicity, gender, education, religion, class, etc. Further, the article will discuss how increasing visibility and recognition of women's footballers come not only with options but also with limits to the belongings that popular female footballers may be able to achieve and be ascribed. In becoming nationalized, Nadim is deprived of her transnational belonging and of her potentially critical voice in the debate about "Danishness". Finally, the article will point out that an imagined national unity

in sport is enacted in the media through apparently innocent descriptions of patriotism and national archetypes.

Nationalization and Denationalization through Sports

Within sports sociological studies, several scholars have pointed out that sports have been a key driver in but also a product of the globalization processes.^{11, 12} A variety of studies have thus described processes of global broadcasting of sport around the world¹³ and the increase in athletes, coaches and other sports personnel who migrate across the world to take up jobs.^{14, 15} Also, research has increasingly focused on naturalization, i.e. the allocation of citizenship to athletes of migrant descent, along with nationality changes of particularly football players.¹⁶ These trends in the development of modern sport have been termed denationalization.¹ Below, the existing literature about this development will be reviewed. In addition, the relevance of further studying the nationalization of minority ethnic athletes will be pointed out, and the analysis of Danish media representations of Nadim will point out that cases where minority ethnic players change citizenship are not simply expressions of denationalization, but rather social processes in which belonging is negotiated in contradictory ways.

According to Raffaele Poli, sport has long been marked by nationalization since national sports governing bodies have developed in periods with rising national consciousness. Thus, the prevalent ideological thinking about sport in national and even nationalist terms has led to attempts to preserve ideas of national unity rather than diversity in sport. For instance, national sports governing bodies have reacted to the immigration of athletes by dismissing dual nationality as simply unthinkable in sport (as in a state of war) and through setting up quotas for the number of ‘foreign players’ in national leagues. In the case of women’s football, little attention has been given to the fact that players have been migrating across borders for decades.¹⁷ Nevertheless, the current

period is marked by increasing globalization of and migration within women's football.^{15, 17} This also means that female players of migrant descent have gained not only mobility but also visibility.¹⁸

According to Poli, the current development of sport is marked by processes of denationalization identified in two forms. Firstly, a de-ethnicization of the nation that among others is represented through a greater ethnic diversity in national teams as a result of naturalization and nationality change of athletes. Secondly, a de-territorialisation that has arisen as global broadcasting of sport makes it possible to identify with teams and clubs that belong to other geographical scales than the local and national. In sum, Poli argues that denationalization is characterized by the processes through which the 'natural correspondence between a state, an identity, and a territory is called into question'.¹

Furthermore, other sports sociological studies have pointed to de-nationalization processes. This is the case in studies of the range of international sports heroes favoured by British university students¹⁹ and in studies of how sports tournaments and sports organisations have developed multiple attachments across nation state borders.²⁰ Michael Skey has studied the press coverage of the three most recent managers appointed to the totemic position of manager of the English national team. Two of these managers were foreigners.²¹ Even if the media appear to focus more on the merit of the individual manager than their nationality, Skey demonstrates that the national framework remains the default mode of evaluating the individuals. As such, the individual football managers' merits are linked with the value they bring to the national team, and the foreign managers are only conditionally included into the nation. This aligns with a study by Peter Millward, who points out that when the sporting performance fades, national differences between football players appear and are expressed in feelings of xenophobia against players from abroad.²² As such, migration of football players and coaches across nation states does not simply appear to

lead to de-nationalization. Rather, the media coverage of these individuals illustrates the contradictory nature of social identification processes.²¹

Belonging and Politicization thereof

To elaborate the complexity of the social identification processes involved in the negotiation of minority ethnic athletes' belongings, and to be more specific the belongings of Nadim, the article will draw partly on transnational migration studies and partly on postcolonial theory. While the transnational migration perspective of Nina Glick Schiller and Janine Dahinden points out the ways in which minority ethnic players may feel that they belong to several nations and localities at the same time, the work of the postcolonial theoretician Nira Yuval-Davis allows us to analyse the ways in which these minority ethnic athletes' belongings are politicized, as is the case with Nadim.

As a response to the dominant political and academic focus in which minority ethnic groups and individuals are merely considered as immigrants in the arriving nation states, Nina Glick-Schiller has coined the concept transmigrants.

Transmigrants are immigrants whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation state.²³

With this transnational perspective, migration scholars point out that minority ethnic groups and individuals often continue to have and develop connections that reach across nation state borders. This perspective suggests that minority ethnic athletes may feel connected to both their new nations and their countries of origin. Further, they may also have strategic reasons for choosing the national team for which they want to play. Further, studies by Janine Dahinden illustrate that transnational connections may not themselves hinder minority ethnic groups and individuals from integrating into

new nation states. Rather, the studies indicated that groups and individuals with strong transnational connections are also the ones with strong local connections.²⁴

Moreover, Dahinden points out that there is currently a blindness to non-ethnic forms of identification since ethnicity is used as unproblematic ‘explanains’.²⁵ In other words, national and ethnic categories of belonging play a major role in the ways in which minority ethnic athletes like Nadim are identified, while other social categories such as class, gender, education and socio-economic status that might be equally important in their identity building remain largely invisible. To interpret the political negotiation and selection of dimensions that are brought forward in Danish media representations of Nadim’s belongings postcolonial theory will be used.

Thus, the second theoretical perspective used in this article is Nira Yuval-Davis’ distinction between belonging and the politics of belonging.¹⁰ Yuval-Davis argues that “Belonging is about emotional attachment, about feeling ‘at home’ and I about feeling ‘safe’.”⁹ Furthermore, Yuval-Davis points out that intersecting social categories (such as gender, race, class, nation, age, religion, education and profession) can be included or excluded in the political representation of belonging. She writes,

“The politics of belonging comprises specific political projects aimed at constructing belonging in particular ways to particular collectivities that are, at the same time, themselves being constructed by these projects in very particular ways.”⁹

In this case, such politics of belonging can be examined in the ways in which Danish media represent Nadim’s belongings in particular ways, while prevalent ideas about national unity in sport are simultaneously being reconstructed.

Yuval-Davis also points to ‘the dirty work of boundary maintenance’ that underlies the politics of belonging. She argues that identity politics is essentially about deciding whether individuals and groups stand inside or outside of the imaginary boundary line of the nation and/ or

other communities of belonging; “whether they are ‘us’ or ‘them’”⁹. Thus, the identity politics surrounding minority ethnic athletes like Nadim may be seen as such boundary work through which the ‘national us’ as well as the ‘ethnic other’ are identified. Yet, Yuval-Davis also argues that identification processes are always up to social negotiation,

“The politics of belonging involves not only the maintenance and reproduction of the boundaries of the community of belonging by the hegemonic political powers but also their contestation and challenge by other political agents... The politics of belonging includes also struggles around the determination of what is involved in belonging, in being a member of a community, and of what roles specific social locations and specific narratives of identity play in this.”⁹

These perspectives on the politicization of belonging but also the resistance to these identification processes will help analyse not only how the Danish media ascribe the belongings of minority ethnic players like Nadim, but also how she and other popular minority ethnic athletes hold a particular voice in negotiating ideas about the communities to which they belong.

Learning from the individual Case

Focusing merely on Nadim is in line with the methodological understandings of a single case-study. The value of conducting single case studies and the options of generalising from such studies have been widely discussed. As the German-English psychologist Hans Eysenck wrote, “sometimes we simply have to keep our eyes open and look carefully at individual cases — not in the hope of proving anything, but rather in the hope of learning something!”²⁶ Studies of Danish media representation of Nadim may serve as an extreme case to learn more about the ways in which athletes may achieve and be ascribed national belongings. As will become apparent, Nadim is the player who is most likely to receive attention among the players on the Danish national team of

women's football. In other words, studying Nadim, who does have a considerable media platform, will help us examine how minority ethnic athletes are likely to have chances of negotiating their national belongings.

To be more specific, the basis of this article is an embedded case study with focus on a sub-unit, namely Danish nationwide newspapers' representations of Nadim. This approach differs from a holistic case study design in which various methods such as narrative interviews and analyses of autobiographies would also have been used to develop the understanding of Nadim's belongings. I have opted to entirely focus on Danish newspapers' representations of Nadim since I am particularly interested in accessing the ways in which her belongings are politicised in public. As has been pointed out by other scholars, the media form a key site in delineating who belongs and who does not belong to a nation:

“As a highly visible terrain of identity formulation, media can be a key site for the construction of mythologies of national belonging and in framing and consolidating how selected sports are articulated to nationalism.”²⁷

Above Mark Falcons points to the ways in which various sports, namely rugby and football, are used to articulate various aspects of national identity in New Zealand. The focus in this article is on the ways in which specific national team athletes' belongings are negotiated in the media.

Searching through the database *Infomedia*, which is the leading provider of access to articles from all Danish newspapers, along with a range of electronic journals, broadcast media and online media in Denmark, it soon became apparent that there is an enormous amount of media representations about Nadim. This paper focuses on the 398 articles on Nadim in national newspapers from the beginning of 2016 to the end of 2017. This period encompasses the build-up to, duration and aftermath of the Euro; a period in which the belongings of Nadim were particularly discussed, while her popularity as a player and public figure also increased. In the process of the

data collection and analysis, I read the titles of all of the newspaper articles to delete duplicates. I then read each of the articles and structured their representations into a narrative description of the politicization of Nadim's belongings and how this changed over time. These findings are presented in the following.

The exemplary ethnic Other

Within the period covered, 2016 is the year with the lowest number of articles (38) on Nadim in the national newspapers. The articles from this period present the transformative narrative of Nadim, which has also been described in earlier news coverage. Nadia Nadim was born in Afghanistan in 1988 as the second out of five daughters to a mother who was a vice principal in an Afghan school and a father who was a general in the Afghan army. Following the political changes in Afghanistan up through the 1990s, Nadim's father suddenly disappeared and the family discovered that he had been killed by the Taliban. Soon after, Nadim's mother fled with her five daughters. They were supposed to go to England where they had family but ended up being left by the truck, which brought them through Europe, in the provincial city of Randers in Denmark.

Several newspapers describe how Nadim started playing football when she was 11-years old in an asylum centre in Denmark. Only in more detailed coverage it appears that Nadim already played football with her father, who encouraged his daughters to engage in sports in their Afghan home. Nevertheless, it appears from the media that playing football in Denmark saved Nadim from being a miserable refugee child who had lost her father when she was 10 years old. This transformed her into a very talented football player who would be offered contracts in various clubs in Denmark and abroad and who would become a main figure on the national women's football team. For instance, a commentary in the tabloid BT argues that refugees and asylum seekers should not be sent home but should be provided with a pair of football boots like was the

case with Nadim.²⁸ This perspective on the significance of football for the integration of Nadim reflects the widespread political and public belief in the integrative potential of sports.²⁹

Several newspaper articles from 2016 compare Nadim with the famous Swedish minority ethnic player Zlatan Ibrahimovic. For instance, this is the case in articles in Danish tabloids describing Nadim as “cooler than cool; Zlatan”,³⁰ or headlines stating that “The Danish Zlatan is from Afghanistan”,³¹ or simply “The Danish Zlatan”³². The last-mentioned presenting a new TV series of four documentary programs on the life of Nadia Nadim made by the Danish Broadcasting Corporation. This added to a lengthy tendency for the Danish media to name young talented minority ethnic footballers in the Danish setting “the Danish Zlatan”. A conceptualisation that has also been used by, for instance, the former coach of the national men’s football team, Morten Olsen, when describing his longing for minority ethnic players with qualities like Zlatan.³³ Such media representations have also led to an external categorization of players with other ethnic and racial backgrounds through racialized descriptions of these players as particularly fast, strong and fierce players who are technically skilled but tactically underdeveloped.^{34, 35}

Further, the newspaper coverage in 2016 describes various matches of the national women’s football team paying particular attention to the role of Nadim in words and almost in every article also in pictures. Often, a picture of Nadim simply accompanies the description of a coming match of the national women’s football team. As such, it appears that in the boundary work around the Danish national women’s football team, Nadim is included into the nation. She represents the symbol of successful integration.

In sum, the nationwide newspapers’ coverage in 2016 presents Nadim as the exemplary ethnic other, describing her among others as ‘the dream of a citizen’³⁶ and as ‘a successful integration project’.³⁰ The focus on Nadim’s ethnic otherness renders intersecting social categories silently present in the Danish media representations. What makes Nadim acceptable as

the exemplary other is not only her integration into Danish club football and her selection to the national team in women's football along with her excellent ability to speak the Danish language (as well as six other languages). It is also her level of education, her coming profession as a medical doctor, and her upper-class position in Afghanistan, which have been transferred into a mainstream middle-class livelihood in Denmark. In other words, the desirable ethnic other who has become an insider is 'fleshed out in person' in national media representations.²⁷

Raising a critical Voice

In 2017, the newspaper articles on Nadim start commenting on various attempts to raise acknowledgement of women's football. This initiative was launched by the Danish national women's football commission, in which Nadim took part along with the former Danish Prime Minister Helle Thorning-Schmidt. At the beginning of 2017, the newspaper articles also report that Nadim has been nominated to the prize as the best Danish woman footballer in 2016. This results in reflections on Nadim's path into Danish football in the newspapers:

“For it (Nadim's talent) was far beyond the usual, but it was difficult for her to achieve the greatest honour: Becoming a Danish national team player. The struggle to become a Dane in FIFA's (the International Football Federation, ed.) eyes should prove to be a bigger struggle than the one she leads when scoring goals on the pitch.”³⁷

Above FIFA's regulations, which require that players must have lived in the specific country for a certain period of time before becoming eligible as national team players (in order to restrain naturalization and change of nationality), are presented as an obstacle that kept Nadim from being included in the Danish women's national team until 2009. A process described with emphasis on the great honour it was for Nadim to become a national team player.

However, the praising newspaper coverage of Nadim changes in 2017, more particularly in April 2017, when Nadim raised a critical voice against the public debate about “Danishness”. The debate evolved in the wake of the temporary rise in immigration to Europe in 2015 and the increasingly restrictive immigration and asylum policies. Nadim first phrased her criticism in a TV interview with the Danish Broadcasting Corporation. In the newspaper coverage, Nadim was quoted for saying,

“I follow the debate in Denmark and see where the country is heading. It is humanity, solidarity and tolerance that defines dignity for me. But it's not clear anymore. And that's annoying.”³⁸

Other newspapers refer to the question that Nadim was asked in the TV interview, namely whether she would have chosen the Danish national team (rather than the Afghan) if she had been able to choose now.

"It would not be so straightforward to choose the Danish team. And that doubt has arisen because of the tone and rhetoric of the immigration debate. It has become really xenophobic - and it affects me and many others with a different ethnic background", Nadia Nadim replied, dissociating herself from the "new Danishness" because, in her opinion, it increasingly removes itself from tolerance, love and others Danish values, which Nadim and her family felt that they met (on arrival) in 2000.³⁹

In the same article, Nadim describes the negative and stigmatic reactions she had received on the social media after the TV interview. She also points to the platform that popular elite athletes have in protesting against things that they do not agree with. Thus, she uses her achieved position as national women's footballer to resist and negotiate with the 'dirty work of boundary maintenance' that goes into defining who belongs and who does not belong to the nation.

One of the critical reactions on the social media was from a politician from the right-wing anti-immigrant political party, Danish People's Party (DF). Member of the Danish parliament for DF, Susanne Eilersen, complained that the media were focusing too much on Nadim who Eilersen termed a foreigner.⁴⁰ Further, Eilersen provided a link to a newspaper article that questions whether Nadim is a role model. In this newspaper article, the critical writer Sørine Gotfredsen states,

“If Nadia Nadim would like to be a role model, it is not possible for her as a national team player to hesitate on fully calling herself Danish. For her, too, it must be clear that some scepticism with regard to refugees and immigrants inevitably must arise under the current pressure (of migration). If a national team player is not absolutely loyal to the country she plays for, she risks meeting even more reluctance.”⁴¹

Somehow paradoxically, the critical writer argues, that Nadim is not allowed to criticise but only accept scepticism towards refugees and fully identify with the Danish population. Thus, being a national team player not only obliges Nadim to be Danish in a particular way. It also deprives her of linking herself with a broad group of stigmatised minority ethnic populations in Denmark, whose feelings of belonging are excluded rather than included by the boundary work of the nation state.

Re-awarded “Danishness”

In the second half of 2017, particularly in connection with the Euro from mid-July to the beginning of August, numerous articles on Nadim appear. Given her performance not only on but also outside the pitch, she became a media darling. As a Dutch journalist expressed, “She is the face of the Danish team”⁴²; thus drawing attention to the fact that not only Danish journalists but also numerous international journalists were keen to interview Nadim.

A series of articles in the tabloid press illustrates how Nadim is re-linked to the ideas of “Danishness” in connection with her appearance on the Danish national team in the Euro. For instance, the title of an article in the tabloid is, “Danish star is teasing Germany before the quarterfinal: Here is my favourite song.”⁴³ In this article, Nadim is quoted for saying that her favourite song is: ‘Deutschland, Deutschland alles ist vorbei.’ In other words, the Danish media represent a ‘non-threatening and playful patriotism’, which has also been observed in the media coverage of the German national men’s football team.⁴⁴

In this case, Nadim is also made part of the apparently innocent patriotism after the highly unusual win over Germany in the quarterfinal at the Euro. Again, it is primarily Nadim who is represented in words and pictures on the front pages of the newspapers. The front page reference in the tabloid is ‘tearful’, linking to an article describing the strong feelings involved for Nadim, who cried on screen after winning the semi-final over Austria.⁴⁵ Another report follows with the title, “Nadia Nadim talks about meeting the Crown Prince: ‘I love him’”.⁴⁶ The featured photo shows Nadim and some of her team mates embracing and being embraced by the Crown Prince of Denmark; thus appearing closely connected to one of the uttermost symbols of Danish identity.

At the same time, these media reports lead to a shared image of Danish national identity and the idea of clearly defined and distinguishable national identities (such as the German and Danish) that also tend to build on simplistic national stereotypes.⁴⁷ As such, sports media may be seen to play quite a subtle but still highly influential role in not only giving voice to feelings of belonging but also politicizing these belongings in the construction of groupism.

The ways in which some diversity in belongings are fused into the apparently shared national identity is illustrated in a newspaper article that focuses on the tears Nadim shed after the victory over Germany:

“In the minutes after Denmark's quarterfinal victory over Germany on Sunday, a Muslim, well-educated woman stood in front of rolling cameras with tears in her eyes of joy and pride.... Nadim's salty tears fell in front of a million Danish viewers.”⁴²

This report draws attention to a number of social categories (nationality, religion, education) that intersect with each other. It appears that the Muslim religion may be joined into descriptions of Danish identity when terms like education and patriotic joy and pride are also mentioned.

This re-embrace of Nadim as Danish continued after the Euro. She was nominated the role model of the year at the Danish Sports Award Show 2017, and she was voted the Dane of the Year 2017 by the national newspaper Berlingske. At the prize ceremony for this award Nadim said+ “It is crazy and quite indescribable. I did not think I would win and I'm so grateful. I feel it is a declaration of love from Denmark.”⁴⁸ However, this public embrace of Nadim as Danish and belonging to the Danish identity only includes the exemplary ethnic other. The embrace does not include un-educated Muslim women. This group of minority ethnic women is often in focus in the media due to their lack of language skills and jobs as well as their bad health conditions, etc.⁴⁹ Furthermore, it seems that the prize ceremony was followed by a silencing of the former critical voice that Nadim had raised against the debate about Danishness and of her links with stigmatized minority ethnic groups and individuals.

In sum, this single case study of Nadim points to the platform that follows with the increasing acknowledgement and visibility of women's football players. This platform has expanded with the success of the Danish national team in women's football, who finished second at the 2017 Euro, but also with the individual attributes of Nadim. Yet, the question remains whether rising popularity and increasing media attention enhance or rather limit the options for minority athletes to express their feelings of transnational belongings and to link themselves with subordinate identities as the broad population of minority ethnic groups.

Discussion

Looking into Danish nationwide newspapers' representations of Nadim in the build-up to, duration and aftermath of the 2017 Euro, it appears that increasing attention is linked not only to Nadim's success as a football player and her ability to skilfully express herself, but also to her well-integrated ethnic otherness. Using the transnational migration theory, this article points out that minority ethnic athletes like Nadim often continue being connected to various nations at the same time. Yet, the process through which Nadim used her platform in the media to raise a critical voice in the debate about Danishness shows that minority ethnic athletes must carefully negotiate their dual identity. Using the postcolonial theory and more particularly the work of Yuval-Davis, the article also shows how Nadim's belongings are politicised in Danish media in ways that connect her to the current understandings of Danishness, while there is a blindness to other aspects of her belongings.

The finding that minority ethnic athletes hold a unique but delicate media platform is not new. Among the most famous historical examples are the events at the Olympic Games of 1968 where Tommie Smith and John Carlos used their platform to support the Black Panthers' movement. Yet, studying the case of Nadim has provided novel insight in several ways. Firstly, the considerable media attention given to Nadim reveals hitherto unexplored options for gaining visibility in national media where women's football seldom earns many column inches. Secondly, the case of Nadim draws attention to the fact that the current interest for role models with minority ethnic background may result in substantial media attention that also expands beyond sports. This appears to be due to the fact that minority ethnic athletes like Nadim link well with current narratives about how the exemplary ethnic other should integrate into their new nation state. Yet, Danish media representations phrase specific aspects of Nadim's belonging; particularly her former

refugee status, her sporting abilities and higher education, while the upper-class position held by her family in the Afghan society is never pointed out in the media. Instead, Nadim is described as a poor refugee child who through sports (football) has gained a better position in the Danish society.

In other words, Nadim is ascribed Danishness in a way that reduces any detailed information about her transnational belongings. However, what is even more important to discuss is the fact that Nadim is embraced by a Danishness that simultaneously distinguishes itself from those minority ethnic groups and individuals who are not particularly skilled and well-educated. The hope that minority ethnic athletes may act as role models for other minority ethnic individuals may turn out to be of backlash character in the sense that the success of the role model may contribute to further categorisation of the group from which the individual athlete is an exception.

Conclusion

In the period 2016-2017, Danish nationwide newspapers' present Nadim as the exemplary ethnic other who has become successfully integrated into the receiving nation state. However, being ascribed Danishness Nadim was also deprived of her transnational belonging and her connection with subordinate identities. Even if Nadim involved herself in the debate about Danishness and pointed to the ways in which the minority ethnic population felt stigmatised by this debate, she received several Danish awards and was praised for being exceptionally skilled in relation to the minority ethnic population as such.

Further, in the media representations Nadim was mainly identified along ethnic and national lines as a former Afghan and minority ethnic individual and now a Danish national team player, and it was pointed out that Nadim was enrolled in education to the esteemed profession as a medical doctor. Nadim's Muslim religion is rarely mentioned and, if so, it is pointed out that it is moderate. Further, the media show a blindness to Nadim's upper-class position in the Afghan

society demonstrating how particular aspects of intersecting social categories are selected in order to develop belonging in ways that serve the current political purposes.

Through this article, it appears that media representations of minority ethnic athletes are highly changeable. Following his retirement from the German national team, Mesut Özil stated that, “I am German when we win, an immigrant when we lose.”⁵⁰ Özil’s retirement was followed by a media debate about German managers and fans’ racialised treatment of him. In addition, Özil’s connection to the Turkish president Erdogan, who is accused of violating human rights, was brought into a polarized debate on questions of immigration and belonging. As such, the case of Özil points out that the media platform, which minority ethnic athletes may gain, is not an innocent position from which they can connect with leading politicians while simultaneously trying to maintain their dual identity. Nationalization processes along lines that include or exclude the ethnic other still appear as strong identification processes in connection with globalization and migration issues in sports. As such, the existing literature on denationalization appears to capture only one trend in the complex identification processes involved in sports.

Now and then, sport and media representations thereof appear to be social institutions through which we seek to reconcile social divisions along national and ethnic lines. As such, sport plays a crucial role in restoring ideas of national identity, and minority ethnic athletes are key figures in identifying European nation states as inclusive and embracing towards diversity. However, the degree to which sports organisations and the media will be able to accommodate diversity within the nation and point to connections that cut across nation state borders is worth much further attention.

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