THE POLITICS OF SPORTS IN LOUISE PAGE'S GOLDEN GIRLS

LOUISE PAGE'İN GOLDEN GIRLS ADLI OYUNUNDA SPORUN POLİTİKALARI

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Abstract

The 1960s and the 1970s witnessed the transition in British sports from amateurism to professionalism. Thereafter, sportspersons have obtained material opportunities with sponsorships and attracted entrepreneurs. However, since sponsors in this new era have been using sportspersons to manipulate consumer behaviour, the vested interests of capitalists led to the misuse of the media and medical industry at the cost of the health of sportspersons. The commodification of sports has put much pressure on sportspersons for sportive success. This pressure, on the other hand, has been tried to be circumvented by the illegal use of doping. Although sportspersons in countries of the Iron Curtain were state sponsored, thus were not pressed by entrepreneurs for sportive success, they faced a similar pressure by their states. To show their political superiority, countries of the Iron Curtain forced their sportspersons to use doping. Louise Page in her Golden Girls (1984) criticises, in a light tone, the politics of sports in the Britain of the 1980s. She looks at the result of the transformation of sports from amateurism to professionalism, deals with the free use of doping in Iron Curtain countries to contrast it with the illegal use of doping in capitalist Britain, and focuses on the topical issues about British sportswomen and the oppression they have felt because of their gender by the male dominated world of sports. Therefore, this article will first give a brief history of the development of athletics in Britain from the 1960s onwards, then the relationship between media and sports that commodifies sports in the Britain of the 1980s, and lastly the use and effects of doping as they are reflected in Golden Girls.

Öz

1960 ve 1970 arasındaki dönem İngiltere'de sporun amatörlükten profesyonelliğe geçiş dönemine tanık olmuştur. Bundan sonra, sporcular sponsorluklar sayesinde maddi olanaklar elde etmişler ve spor girişimciler için de önemli bir odak haline gelmiştir. Ancak, bu yeni dönemde sponsorlar sporcuları tüketici davranışları tetiklemek ve manipüle etmek için kullandıklarından dolayı, sermaye sahipleri çıkarları doğrultusunda medya ve tıp sektörünü sporcu sağlığını hiçe sayarak kullanmaya başlamışlardır. Sporun metalaşması sonucu sporcu üzerinde baskı yaratılmış ve üzerinde baskı hisseden sporcu bunu yasadışı doping kullanımı ile atlatmaya çalışmıştır. Devlet tarafından desteklenen demir perde ülkelerindeki sporcular serbest girişimciler tarafından sportif başarıya zorlanmamış olsalar da, onlar devletleri tarafından benzer bir baskıyla karşı karşıya bırakılmışlardır. Demir perde ülkeleri siyasi üstünlüklerini göstermek amacıyla kendi sporcularını doping kullanmak için zorlamışlardır. Louise Page Golden Girls (1984) adlı eserinde ince bir alayla sporun politikaları eleştirilmiştir. Page, sporun amatörlükten profesyonelliğe dönüşmesinin sonucu olan İngiltere'deki spor anlayışını, demir perde ülkelerinde serbest doping kullanımı ile bunun İngiltere'de yasak olmasının karşılaştırılmasını kullanarak, İngiliz sporcular hakkındaki güncel konuları ve özellikle kadın sporcuların toplumsal cinsiyetlerinden dolayı sporun erkek egemen dünyası tarafından ezilmesini irdelemiştir. Bu nedenle, bu makale ilk olarak 1960'lardan itibaren İngiltere'de atletizmin gelişimi ile ilgili kısa bir tarih verecek, sonrasında 1980'ler İngiltere'sinde sporu metalaştıran medya ve spor arasındaki ilişki incelenecek, ve nihayetinde Golden Girls'de yansıtıldığı şekliyle doping sorunu ele alınacaktır.

Louise Page (1955-...) is a versatile playwright who has run long-lasting shows on radio and TV and has been awarded several prizes for her works in drama (Kritzer 989-990; "Louise Page: Biography"), which is why she can be considered as one of the most successful playwrights among the second wave feminist dramatists. With a slight inclination towards using the Brechtian technique, Page has "brought the model of the multiple heroine before large audiences beyond the fringe"

(Goodman 196; Keyssar 4; Carlson 203). For instance, although her *Golden Girls* (1984) can be classified as a comedy, she uses very little conventional comic themes, seen when she minimises romantic relationships that do not function as a central theme of the play (Carlson 204). The aspect of comedy, on the other hand, especially through dramatic irony and irony of situation, enables Page to satirise contemporary society and its stance towards professional sports. Particularly, with the five-dimensional narration through its five principle female characters, *Golden Girls* sheds light onto the world of sports of the 1980s that is closely interwoven with capitalism and consumerism. It shows the pressure put on sportswomen from liberal humanist societies by patriarchal forces, such as Noël, Sue's father (1.3.12),[1] Ortolan, the sponsor (1.3.20-1), and the media, through Tom Billbow (1.5.33). Another source for the pressure put on these women is seen when the individual training of the British team cannot cope with the systematically training of the state sponsored athletes from the other side of the Iron Curtain who are mainly supported with the illegal use of doping (1.3.24). Therefore, this article will analyse the politics of sports and focus on the topical issues that urged Page to write about British sportswomen and the oppression they felt by the male dominated world of sports. First, a history of the development of athletics in Britain from the 1960s onwards will be given, which will be followed by an examination of the relationship between media and sports that commodifies sports. Finally, the early uses of doping in sports will be another focal point in the analysis of the play.

As a reflection of one of the most crucial moments of the history of sport, *Golden Girls* depicts the subsequent period of the transformation of sports from amateurism to professionalism. Particularly, after the 1960s and 1970s athletes, who had been mere amateurs so far, began to demand more open management by officials, which, on the other hand, added commercial pressures on sportspersons with the growth of commercial sponsorship (Crump 55). In the play, the disappearance of the "notion of the amateur" is lamented because athletes can no longer run for "fun" as they have to sustain themselves solely through sports, which makes them more and more money oriented: "I'll get one, one day. You'll see. Not a Porsche but something" (1.5.31, 1.5.36, 1.2.17). Nevertheless, it must be stated that even after 1982, when the trust fund was fully established, sportspersons remained officially as "amateurs" (Crump 55) because, as Laces in the play argues, "They are amateurs. That's why they need Ortolan to sponsor them" (1.3.20). The

[1] All references to *Golden Girls* will state first act number, then scene number, and finally the page number, since line numbers are not indicated specifically.

trust fund, through which sportspersons get their money, is a system where all money from sponsorship and advertising contracts is paid into a fund which, which can be used for subsistence and training by the athletes (Crump 55). For instance, Janet, who has to wait until she is 18 years old to have "her golden card," buys later with it necessities she could not afford on her own: "Four pairs of spikes. And meat. This huge piece of steak. Bigger than the T-bones you get at the Totem" (1.6.46, 1.7.53). Consequently, the introduction of professionalism to sports, especially athletics, killed amateurism but gave more material opportunities to sportspersons.

Nonetheless, in the play, money has proven to be the root of all evil seen in the relationship between capitalism and sports, which is sustained through the media. Capitalism uses the media to create fans, hence prospective consumers (Lowes 9). Advertisements or sport news in both visual media and print media are used solely to promote the interests of team owners, equipment and apparel manufacturers, and civic boosters, which is why that there is little room for news that does not promote the sport industry, such as sportive failure (Lowes 21, 99). Hence, there is a need for success, especially for the sponsors: "If they [the athletes] don't win Ortolan [the sponsor] doesn't sell" (1.2.20). Here, televised sponsoring functions as the major means to promote such "vested interests" as it allows "the sponsor national and sometimes international reach, without becoming directly involved in television." (Crump 75; Ford and Ford 52). Hence, in the light of the play's discussions, what Paul Rutherford said specifically about the 1980s and 1990s Canadian media can be applied to the British media and sponsoring as well:

> Sport is sold as an entertainment product. Yet insofar as sport is a commodity, it is not the actual content of the sports pages being sold – rather it is the audience for that content, the sport fan. ... And it is the relentless pursuit of a primarily male readership that is responsible for the profound commercial sports bias of the daily press. (qtd. in Lowes 14)

In *Golden Girls*, Hilary Davenport functions as the mediator among the sportspersons, the sponsor, and the media, which initiates the selling of sports to the masses. These masses, on the other hand, are "spectators who refuse to be participants" (Certeau 18). The product-consumer relationship is sustained through the exchange of money with simulated participation in creating proximity between the non-participant consumer and the participant sportsperson. Therefore, the passive end consumers are triggered to buy activity, that is, sports or rather the

product with which sports are indentified with, through the media. Yet, this system can only function if only the athletes are successful in the first place and thus appeal to the eye of the consumer to trigger the chain of consumerism. Here, Hillary gives much importance to sportive success and perceives the athletes as "products" that should not have "flops" so that Ortolan can "sell shampoo" named "Golden Girls" without having fears to reach the end consumer (1.3.20, 1.3.23, 1.3.24). The image of healthy hair, probably intended for a fair-haired white female audience, is associated with success and physical appearance that can be bought just like the sportswomen do in the advertisement. The end consumers are reached with the sportswomen in which procedure these are used "[a]s a sort of identifying process" since they represent the "national team" with which the nation, the audience, the customers, can identify themselves with and "have pride in" (1.5.30). As Hall maintains, "identification is constructed on the back of a recognition of some common or shared characteristics with another person or group, or with an ideal, and with the natural closure of solidarity and allegiance established on this foundation." (Hall, "Who Needs 'Identity'" 2). Hence, identification creates a similarity between at least two entities, in our case, the sportswomen and the consumers. Identification triggers consumer behaviour, and the possession of the product, which financially supports the national team, appears to the end consumer as a nationalist response that would, what Žižek termed in another context, "contribute to the proper functioning of [his/her] Nation-State" ("Multiculturalism" 41). This identification, however, posits merely a simulation of the reality of sportive success that is "[m]ore real than the real" (Baudrillard 81), which "presents itself only via its incomplete-failed symbolization" (Žižek, "Introduction" 21), that is, through the product. The product is an amalgam of material chemicals and discursive images of female beauty and success, which shadow the real toil and sacrifices beneath sportive success in the 1980s as depicted in the play. Thereby, "reality forever appears [for the passive consumer] only in the form of 'possession'; it is fragmented and hidden in an exchange of pleasures or of consumer goods." (Certeau 23). Once the "identification" process is fulfilled, the masses will "buy stuff because" they will be pleased with the fact that the athletes, "use it" (1.8.60; Hall, "Who Needs 'Identity'" 2), so that they can feel themselves as successful as these sportspersons. Consequently, Page maintains that sports in the 1980s are supported by sponsors, or rather misused, in order to trigger buyer response and not for the sake of sports.

Furthermore, the creation of the media "images" functions as the very means to sustain this process of selling (Hall, "Encoding, Decoding" 511, 515). Nevertheless, these images have to fit into the patterns of the white-dominated society reflected in the white-dominated media, which, however, leads to "the reproduction of racism" (Dijk 10). In the play, Sue, the "blonde white athlete" as it is indicated in the cast, gradually replaces Anna, the Golden Girl, and becomes a signifier that substitutes all other, especially coloured, sportswomen in the play. Hillary says, "[t] here's an identification process certainly. People remember the ad. It's been popular. Sue Kinder's quite a star" (2.1.63, my italics). On the side of the team, Dorcas, the "black athlete," is the first who becomes aware of such "discrimination" (2.1.68):

> DORCAS. I've seen the ad. It's all Sue Kinder and the Golden Girl. All we are is little black dots. She signs the cheques, she gets what she wants. And what she [Hilary] wants is four Sue Kinder clones. Since she can't have that, two black, two white is the obvious compromise. (2.1.68)

Dorcas's self-contempt is not, however, a sporadic angry response to the discrimination she faces after Sue Kinder's successful shampoo advertisement, but can be rather traced back to her "school" years where she remembers she has been called, hence indoctrinated, as "a stupid black" girl (Althusser 136; Page 1.5.29). At first glance, deep-rooted racism on the bases of the sports and capitalist markets seems to contradict with the Zeitgeist of the 1980s which saw the emergence of multiculturalism and the acknowledgement of ethnic diversity in public and private life. Yet, the inclusion of usually othered black women in the national team identified with whiteness, reflects the paradox of British multiculturalism as "a disavowed, inverted, self-referential form of racism" that "'respects' the Other's identity" only to assert "one's own superiority" (Žižek, "Multiculturalism" 44). Thus, racial discrimination is disguised in tokenism that is sustained here through the media image of the national team that seems to assert equality on the surface.

However, a white person may also perceive his/her inclusion in the discourse as a requirement rather than a personal achievement. Thus, he/she might see himself/herself excluded from the main discourse based on superiority. Hence, identification, the element of inclusion, becomes for such a person a problematic issue, which results in the Hegelian notion of the negation of the negation (Hegel 49). Here, white superiority is negated with an inferiority complex created in the apparent superior part of this dialectic, which only affirms the discrimination as a

functional mode for domination or repression where the supposedly superior part may be discarded as well. This paradoxical negation can be observed in Pauline who feels an inferiority complex because of her superiority. As Pauline states, "[h]e[Laces] fancies me and Madame [Hillary] wants as many white runners as possible. That's the only reason I'm in. I know I'm no good" (2.3.92). Hence, racial discrimination affects both the supposedly superior and inferior race; which can be seen as an ironic pun on the sportive spectacle, the race, the latter of which should be the actual foreground.

Moreover, the role of the media becomes crucial in sustaining such racial discrimination that is used as a vehicle that guarantees to reach the end consumer. As Dijk argues the "dominant media in various degrees have always perpetuated stereotypes and prejudices about minority groups" (11), which stereotyping is closely related with the profile of the end consumer and identification of it with the athlete, hence the product. Thus, as Chris Brasher has indicated, there is a need for the creation of "megastars out of a few while the rest, from lesser internationals to club athletes, count as little more than a chorus line" (qtd. in Crump 56). As the end consumer is supposed to be white, a functional white megastar is created, that is, Sue Kinder. Therefore, the existence of black athletes, though important for tokenism, is also perceived as a problematic issue. This can be seen especially in the case when Hillary is shocked to hear that Janet, the athletic prodigy, is a black and not white person as she had assumed:

> HILLARY. Is that [Janet] her?
> LACES. Yes.
> HILLARY. She's black.
> LACES. Sorry?
> HILLARY. You didn't say she wasn't white. I sort of assumed –
> LACES. Does it matter?
> HILARY. Is she special? (1.5.34-5)

Rather than referring to her by her name, Hillary objectifies Janet with the pronoun "that," which is indicative of the play's objectification of athletes in general and the non-white sportspersons in particular. One year earlier than the production of the play, a likewise controversy "arose in Britain in 1984 when the South African middle and long distance runner, Zola Budd was granted UK citizenship only two weeks after being flown to Britain by the *Daily Mail*" (Crump 74), which similar to Janet's condition centred on the ethnic origin of the athlete and the assumption that white athletes were left outside the team. Yet, since Janet has proven to be

"special" with her athletic skills, she is taken into the team after the quasi-allowance of Hilary. This is rooted in the interwoven material relationship between sponsorship and team management simplified in Laces's terms as, "You don't bite the hand that feeds you" (1.5.35). Therefore, economic necessities are shown to force team management in its decisions, which could be considered as "the will to truth," that is, the need for inclusion into the "discourse" (Foucault 151) of sports. Consequently, there is an involute relationship among capitalism, media and sports in the 1980s, where capitalism uses the media to misuse sports and create fans that would adhere not only to the athletes, with whom they are made to identify themselves with and through which they seem, in Hall's terms, "independent and strong," but also to the products they use, as the extension of a kind of Žižekian "fetishism" (Hall, "Cultural Studies" 33; Žižek, "Introduction" 20).

However, on the side of the sportspersons, the adherence to success by external factors, like the media, puts a heavy pressure on their shoulders. In a different context, Mike Bull, a pole-vaulter, remarked in 1974 "[t]here are so many pressures now in international athletics that even in Britain the good loser is no longer accepted as a good sportsman" (qtd. in Crump 55). The idea of failure puts a heavy psychological burden on the sportspersons. For instance, sportswomen may feel alienated from the outer reality as in the case of Dorcas who is caught in "watching the video" of "the moment when SUE overtakes her" in the relay (1.4.25). Through constant repetition, the short-term memory of the moment of failure is pushed towards the long-term memory which creates an idée fixe. Since Dorcas is caught in the idea of failure, she does not respond to Mike's, her boyfriend's, words for a long time (1.4.25). Besides, her hostile attitudes towards the video tape, which she "wipes," and towards Sue, whom she throws "a bucket of water," exemplify the mental condition of sportswomen in the 1980s where they are solely conditioned by the media and the sponsors to be successful. Furthermore, Dorcas sees her racial difference as a decisive factor in her failure, seen in her dialogue with Mike when she once again defines herself as "a stupid black" woman (1.4.29). She cannot cope with the idea that "[n]o one [can win] all the time" (1.4.25, 1.4.28), since sportspersons feel themselves obliged to win according to requirements of the sportive discourse based solely on success.

Likewise, sportswomen are posited into a dilemma to choose between their personal and their professional lives, which can be seen, especially, in the case of Muriel who is a married athlete. Particularly, Muriel comes late to the training

because she "had to wait for the cake" she prepared for "George's birthday" for the following day "to be cold enough to put in the tin" (1.6.39). What could be excused for a person of another profession seems a deficiency in the sportswoman, since her personal life affects her sportive success. Therefore, Vivien asks Muriel to choose between her personal life and her professional life epitomised in the following male figures: "George or Ortolan." (1.6.39). The patriarchal discourse of the heteronormative personal and financial relationships in *Golden Girls* creates divided loyalties and a guilty conscience in sportswomen who, in fact, run their personal and public lives through multitasking. Consequently, the idea of sportive success that marginalises personal life or the external world that is not connected with sports can be named as factors that put psychological pressures on sportspersons in the play.

Nevertheless, one of the ways to cope with these pressures is the use of illegal drugs to improve performance. As Verroken indicated, after the 1960s, pharmaceutical companies developed "more selective and less toxic drugs" which attracted many athletes as "a means of enhancing performance beyond anything that they could achieve by hard work and rigorous training" (19-20). Just like the end consumers buy products as a substitute for beauty, success and health, the use of drugs can be seen as a substitute used by sportspersons who can no longer cope with the pressure of success. Nonetheless, after the death of the British cyclist, Tommy Simpson, in 1967 during the Tour de France due to the use of amphetamine, methylamphetamine and cognac, the use of drugs in sports became a questionable issue (Verroken 19). In the play, Tom Billbow says, "[t]here are champions who are confined to wheelchairs. They didn't realise if they took too much their bones would go." (1.5.30-1).

However, as it can be understood from the play, the British athletes perceive drugs still as a solution for "performance enhancement," which is prompted by the "unfair advantage" the East German team has got by using doping (1.8.50; Verroken 40).[2] Nevertheless, it must be stated that this "advantage" will turn in the long term into a disadvantage. As Mottram indicates, once a drug is taken, it interacts with a receptor, that is, mostly a cell membrane, and triggers a biochemical transformation that has eventually a biological effect (3). Hence, it is

[2] Here, it must be noted that the play refers to East Germany prior the German Reunification and its shift, experienced in many ex-Communist countries, to "apolitical consumerism" (Žižek, "Multiculturalism" 35), which could be observed in the British society at that time.

important to consider that drugs produce "toxic side effects" (Mottram 5). The most common side effects of performance enhancing drugs, especially of androgenic anabolic steroids (AAS) that have been banned since 1974, is the androgenisation of athletes (Verroken 23, 32-3). The deleterious effects of anabolic steroids, especially in females, are "[h]air loss, acne, voice deepening (irreversible), increased facial hair, enlarged clitoris (irreversible), increased libido, menstrual irregularities, increased aggression, decreased body fat, increased appetite, decreased breast size" (Arnheim and Prentice 392). Furthermore, the abuse "[m]ay lead to liver tumors and cancer, heart disease, hypertension, central nervous system dysfunction, and irreversible changes to the reproductive and endocrine systems" (Arnheim and Prentice 392). This can be seen particularly in the case of East German athletes on and off the stage. According to Tuffs, the "[c]ontinuous doping from a young age and for a very long time, mainly with anabolic drugs, ruined their health. Doping was often done without the athlete's consent or knowledge. East German trainers and doctors merely followed the socialist party's instructions" (1544). Appealing to the audience's knowledge of AAS in the 1980s, Page foregrounds the damage suffered by athletes who willingly or unwillingly damage their health for their material sustenance or for their nation's expectations. Thereby, Page raises the question at what cost success can be achieved in the competitive sports market in the 1980s. Maybe the only character who is concerned with the side effects of drugs is Muriel, which can be traced back to her anxieties about her personal life with George, her husband. Muriel does not want to continue her sportive career "forever" (2.2.86). All in all, she, like many sportswomen, has to think on her life after she retires from active sports. Therefore, she says, "I want to win here and then [have healthy] children" (2.2.86). Although her words indicate that she has given into the dualistic pattern to choose between personal and public life, Muriel's awareness about the importance of health voices Page's concern that sportive success should not cost the health of sportspersons.

Nevertheless, the dramatic irony that is created with Vivien's "cheating" on the team with a "placebo" – "a substance or procedure which a patient accepts as a medicine or therapy but which actually has no specific therapeutic for this condition" – makes the whole business of cheating by means of drugs very ironic (1.8.50; "placebo"). The use of placebos in the world of sports has been seen as a functional means to enhance performance by creating a double-blindness "where neither the tester nor the individuals being tested are aware of whether they are taking the drug or the placebo" (Verroken 20). Since most of the drugs are

prohibited and are not safe, like "pharmacologists" who search for "loopholes … in the regulations that would allow athletes to design their own doping substances" (Verroken 26), Vivien creates her own drug with "sugar and cornstarch" (1.8.50). Besides, the name of the pseudo-drug, hydromel, which means literally "[a] liquor consisting of a mixture of honey and water," heightens the irony, as it posits the athletes into the position of chariot horses of Roman times to which hydromel was given "to improve" their "performance" ("hydromel"; Clarke and Moss 100). The dramatic irony that is created with the blindness of the team management and the team about the reality of the placebo, leads to the major situational irony at the end of the play where Dorcas procures "real" drugs and makes the team disqualified (2.5.103-5). Consequently, the commercialisation of sports puts pressure on sportspersons to meet the identifiable standards of consumer needs for a kind of voyeur success. The need to surpass limits through exhaustive exercise at the cost of health and personal life is worsened by health-risking use of (il)legal drugs to meet the needs of the consumers to buy and identify with sportive success.

In conclusion, *Golden Girls* depicts the interwoven relationship among capitalism, media and sports in the 1980s, which has commodified sports, reduced it as a manipulative means for capital enterprise, and put heavy pressures on the athletes. With the use of irony, Page criticises in a light tone the results of the transformation of sports from amateurism to professionalism where no "fucking rules" count any more, as Dorcas has put empathetically (!) towards the end of the play (2.6.106). Dorcas's slang expression should be seen as a cry against the sportive discourse of the 1980s. Sports seems to have abandoned its roots, that is, fair play, and transformed a sportsperson to a dishonest, success oriented athlete. Therefore, *Golden Girls* points out that sportspersons, regardless of their sex or race, should not be used as a means to satisfy the pockets of capital entrepreneurship or as a means for the national pride of non-sportive masses watching passively rather than participating actively in sports. Thus, Page provides new insights to the reader/audience and activates their intellect to think about the politics of sports and their passive position as end consumers, which, on the other hand, could cleanse the politics of sports from the vested interests of capitalists which disregard the human factor with their racial and materialist stance towards sports. Nevertheless, since a return to amateurism seems not possible, the best way to challenge the 1980s discourse seems to write against it, just as Page does.

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