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In memory of Doug Foster

Contents

Chapter 2

Geopolitics, identity, and horse sports in Finland

Pauliina Raento

This chapter explores the relationship between sporting bodies, subjectivity, and the nation by tracing how geopolitics and nation-building have steered horse sports and identity in Finland. The examination highlights interdependency between identity and boundaries by relating horse sports to Finnish national, urban–rural, and socio-economic class affiliations in changing international contexts. The case study thus sheds light on a society's ideological framework within which certain sports evolve and shows how time- and place-sensitive attention to human identity politics about animal sports can expand insight in sports research.

Finland illustrates the interplay between geopolitics, identity, and horse sports well due to the prominent role of the horse in the country's socio-economic and military history, regional development, and the strong identity-political turns in Finnish geopolitics. The relationship between the state, horses, and the sports system is historically intimate, and even before independence from the Russian Empire in 1917, sports served Finnish nation builders as a source of pride (Raento 2006: 620–2; Tervo 2003). Not surprisingly, then, public figures have been a common sight at racetracks and are involved in the equine economy and the politics surrounding trotter racing and wagering. Hobby groups in parliament include an equine society with high-profile trotter racing and charity activities. The chair of board of the national trotting and breeding association Suomen Hippos is a center-conservative member of parliament. An influential figure in Finland's national independence process and, later, president and marshal, Gustav Mannerheim (1867–1951), was a cavalryman, horse trader, and keen recreational rider. Finns, in many ways then, have been, and are, led by horsemen.

Adding to the intimacy between the state, horses, and sports is the historical importance of the Finnhorse as an export resource and an agricultural and a military asset, the quality of which was tested by racing. The Finnhorse is an all-purpose coldblood horse breed, for which a national studbook was created in 1907 during the heat of nation-building and resistance against imperial Russia. The studbook marked the nation's

boundaries by defining the Finnhorse as a purebred horse which originates only from Finland. The strategic importance of the breed for national defense and food production became outdated after World War II, but the Finnhorse still carries powerful identity-political meaning and symbolic value (e.g., Schuurman and Nyman 2014).

Statistics reveal the role of horses today in this country of 5.5 million people. About 170,000 Finns are regular leisure riders, and the number of enthusiasts grows – especially in the urban south where most horses and people live. Riding clubs have 50,000 members and the number of riding stables and schools exceeds 1,000. Some 7,600 riding horses are licensed to compete and over 500 national or regional competitions are organized each year in the Olympic sports dressage, show jumping, and eventing (Raento 2015; SRL 2015). Trotter racing, with 200,000 active followers and accounting for 670,000 visits to the tracks in 2015, is the second most popular spectator sport in the country. Of the 74,200 horses in Finland in 2015, 34 percent were Standardbred trotters, 26 percent were Finnhorses (most of which are bred for trotting), another 26 percent were warmblood riding horses, and 14 percent were ponies, some of which serve as trotters. Turnover from wagering (€230 million in 2015), prize money (€17 million), and the number of posts (5,000) and licensed trotters (6,900) make Finland a medium-size trotter-racing country in Europe, where France, Sweden, and Italy lead the way (Suomen Hippos 2016; UET 2016).

These numbers hide complex affiliations, sport-specific lifestyles and values, and identity-political and socio-cultural tension with long historical roots. All this is embodied in the type and breed of sports horses, which, in addition to the sport itself, are molded by economic and geopolitical circumstances, human ideologies, and fashion and image. The Finnish case shows clearly how wars and their aftermath steer the fate of particular breeds and sports. Individual horse sports and their structures also relate to strong affiliations which sustain particular sports cultures and underscore the interdependent and contested nature of identities and boundaries.

This discussion contributes to the political study of sports, nation, and identity from the perspective of political geography (see Bale 2003; Koch 2013; Tervo 2003). By focusing on animal sports, this chapter reaches beyond the emphasis on the politics of national human team sports and mega-events (e.g., Dichter and Johns 2014), bridging sports studies with the study of animal geographies and the human–animal relationship (Hobson 2007; Urbanik 2012). It expands the focus on the gallop racing industry in the study of animal sports structures and introduces geopolitics to the discussion (Cassidy 2002, 2007; McManus *et al.* 2013; Raento and Härmälä 2014). Building on the Finnish-language popular horse sports literature, which describes the history of a particular sport, organization, or venue (Erola 2010; Jalkanen and Saarinen 1986; Mahlamäki 2003; Vasara 1987), this examination also draws on a long-term personal interest and varied involvement in trotter racing, gambling and wagering, equine education, and their research (Karekallas *et al.* 2014; Raento 2015; Raento and Härmälä 2014; for an anthropological ethnography in the gallop-racing industry, see Cassidy 2002, 2007).

Socio-economic exclusivity

Riding in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Finland was a military sport and fashionable among upper-class urbanites and land-owning gentry in the south. These people introduced foreign novelties to Finland, as they had close economic, cultural, and political-ideological connections to Central and Western Europe. For this Western-minded, national-independence-oriented, and mostly Swedish-speaking elite, riding was one way to confirm their modern outlook and sophistication. Imports of thoroughbreds and warmblood riding horses from Britain, Germany, the Benelux, and Sweden fostered these bonds and image in a context where Finland was an aspiring nation keen on demonstrating its worth to more mature nations (see Karekallas *et al.* 2014: 35; Raento 2006: 604–5, 2015).

At home, riding was important for political networking and community building. The first riding clubs were created in southern cities, mostly in the capital city Helsinki, and the elite used their power to build sports facilities. In a poor country, major funding was channeled to urban stables, manèges, and racetracks. Helsinki received a gallop track and Olympic-level riding facilities where presidents, professors, and bankers were a common sight (see photographs in Erola 2010; Jalkanen and Saarinen 1986; Vasara 1987). The scene was ideologically and identity-politically homogeneous, as the property- and land-owning elite had united behind the government-supporting White troops against the revolutionary Reds in the 1918 Civil War. Ideological Whiteness meant strong patriotic, Lutheran, right-wing nationalist, and even fascist tendencies, and supported the close association between civilian elite riders and cavalry officers in the 1920s and the 1930s. Not surprisingly, then, the military sport eventing (a combination of dressage, show jumping, and endurance) was popular in this era. Personal networks, shared outlook, and the search for international legitimacy also go a long way toward explaining the state, the young society, and the Finnish national sports system evolved together and why international success in any sport evoked national pride (see Koch 2013).

Riders, however, were relatively "isolated" and held a "particular" position in the emerging sports system (Vasara 1987: 163). The Equestrian Federation of Finland (SRL) was founded as early as in 1920, but it focused on promoting competitive sports and cultivating international

contacts. The urban, wealthy, and Swedish-speaking profile of the riders contributed to the social distance in a country where most people were poor, rural Finnish-speakers. This contrast gave riding an "aristocratic" image and annoyed those who instead prioritized physical education of the masses in the name of national defense. As Finnish-speaking nationalism grew stronger and the fitness of the majority population gained ground as an ideal of the sports system, riding was denied the status of a "proper sport" with funding from public sources (Vasara 1987: 158–63). It is common that advocates of individual sports and their competitive and hobby branches wrestle over status and support (McManus *et al.* 2013: 59–72). In the case of Finnish riding sports, socio-cultural, linguistic, and urban–rural affiliations fueled this contest in an ideologically divided country.

The Finnish sports elites, however, largely agreed about geopolitics by acknowledging the importance of national defense, international prestige, and visibility. Riding was important to the young nation because of its military and competitive emphases, and one Finnish officer was sent to ride in the Antwerp Olympics in 1920. SRL's prompt joining in the international equestrian federation (FEI) in 1923 was deemed of utmost importance, and riders raised funds for the construction of the 1940 (1952) summer Olympic stadium in Helsinki (Vasara 1987: 163). Both the pragmatic and propagandistic motives of these efforts helped reduce the social distance between SRL and the other national sports federations.

Socio-economic exclusivity and the limited size of the riding elite, however, were evident in club membership. In the 1930s – a decade of structural and international progress in Finnish riding sports – membership reached an all-time high of just over 1,000 individuals (Vasara 1987: 177). Although riding was now promoted to the masses in the name of national defense, "class hygiene" was maintained through certain rules and practices. The most important model was English riding sports, so gallop and steeplechase racing and leisurely fox hunting were popular in upper-class Helsinki. The so-called gentlemen's rule limited the selection of horses, competitions, and club membership available to petty and police officers (Figure 2.1), and it was even claimed that lower-rank riders would wear out the best horses (these, invariably, were warmblood or thoroughbred sports horses that represented a tiny fracture of the equine population, which mostly consisted of Finnhorses in agricultural labor). Women, however, were equal competitors, as long as they were of the same social category (Erola 2010; Vasara 1987: 81), and some upper-class women from land-owning families were also central in the creation of the Finnish warmblood riding horse, the FWB (Jalkanen 1984). Domestic breeding, too, was to support national defense, for it would ensure the availability of good-quality riding horses for officers in the case of a crisis – after all, these image-conscious officers could not ride just *any thing* (Ojala 2007: 19–22).

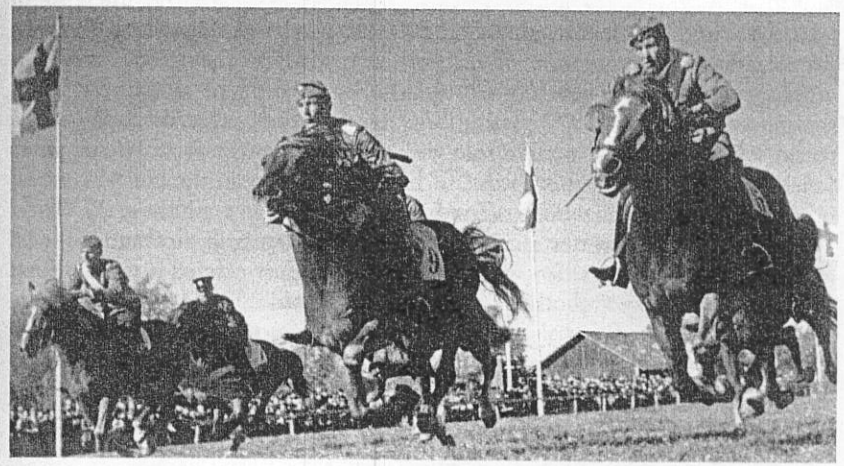

Figure 2.1 Petty and police officers on Finnhorses in a 1,200-meter steeplechase race at the Tali race track in Helsinki in the 1930s (source: Aili and Eino Nevalainen Collection at the Equestrian Sports Museum of Finland, courtesy of Juha Erola).

A world apart

In the meantime, trotter racing – one of the first competitive sports in Finland – developed in its own, predominantly rural, Finnish-speaking realm, which was isolated from European trends. The first record of organized trotting in Finland is from the southwestern city of Turku, where horsemen from the surrounding region tested the quality of their horses by racing them on river ice in 1817. A fast runner was prestigious and served transportation in a sparsely settled country. A good horse also generated income through prizes, covering fees, and foals. Indeed, for a long time, the purpose of racing was to support breeding, which motivated the autonomous state's involvement in trotting since the mid-1800s. In order to improve the quality of horses and promote their appropriate care, the autonomous senate launched "state races" in 1865 and funded their prizes. These popular races guarded the national interest by improving the speed, size, and treatment of horses and by reducing the interest in selling the most valuable individuals abroad (Mahlamäki 2003: 11–17).

An unwanted side effect, however, was cross-breeding: the local horse was mixed with Central European and Russian warmbloods in order to improve racing speed. The senate therefore excluded from state races those horses that had not been accepted to the newly founded Finnhorse studbook as purebreds. This reduced the value of racing as a competitive sport and the shifting emphasis on breeding toward the draft-horse type because of

motorized transportation created an enduring divide in the interests of sportsmen and breeders (Mahlamäki 2003; Raento and Härmälä 2014). The organization and regulation of trotting progressed in the 1920s, however, with the creation of new events and the legalization of totalizator (pari-mutuel wagering) in 1927. Sensational record times were reached on the track. Meanwhile, the state's role diminished, because prizes in its races failed to match the declining value of Finnish currency in the late 1920s and because several organizations offered opportunities to race horses. By World War II, competitive trotter racing in Finland was largely in the hands of local and regional organizers, for whom the popular sport offered a way to fund the equine economy and other activities (Mahlamäki 2003: 44).

In many ways, the evolution of Finnish trotting deviated from developments in such leading racing countries as the USA, France, Germany, and the other Nordic countries (Mahlamäki 2003: 22–3). By and large, Finnish trotting still lacked modern facilities, and many races were run on lake or sea ice or local roads. The only breed used for racing was the Finnhorse and all trainers were amateurs. Rules, regulations, and tote games were modeled on those in Germany, Denmark, and Sweden, but competing abroad was difficult. After a few trials it was clear that the Finnhorse was much faster than the Swedish and Norwegian coldbloods, but slower than the warmblood racer. Therefore the Finnhorse faced either restrictions on participation or a clear disadvantage (Mahlamäki 2003: 21). For these reasons trotting in Finland was primarily "a hobby for the rural population" (Mahlamäki 2003: 23) and urban working-class wagerers, who also liked gallop races.

The impact of war

World War II and the following decades transformed Finnish national identity, geopolitical status, and horse sports. The war erased ideological and identity-political boundaries by damaging everyone. It destroyed infrastructure and killed animal and human athletes in two conflicts against the Soviet Union (1939–40 and 1941–44) and, in the end, against the former ally Germany (1944–45). During the war years, "riding survived only in Helsinki and in the front during trench warfare," where officers organized competitions (Vasara 1987: 327). Small-scale trotter races were organized locally in rural areas. A brief revival of horse sports during the peace of 1940–41 suffered from transportation problems and from the rationing of fodder, which made it difficult to keep horses in the required condition. The ceding of Finland's second-largest city, Vyborg, to the Soviets and the evacuation of 420,000 people from the surrounding Karelia region meant giving up a thriving sports center, but spread know-how and quality animals within the remaining territory. The war also advanced sports betting, as sports organizations were allowed to create their own betting monopoly company in 1940 (see Karekallas *et al.* 2014; Matilainen 2010).

New technologies, industrialization, and urbanization began to reduce the total number of horses in the country from an all-time high of 409,000 in 1950 to a mere 35,000 by the early 1980s. Cavalry and draft animals were old technology. The end of rural paramilitary mounted troops following the Moscow Armistice of 1944 severed the thin contact riding sports had with the countryside. Riding also suffered from the unmounting of the Finnish cavalry and the closure of the army's own breeding program, which limited the availability of high-quality riding horses (Vasara 1987: 414–15). National reconciliation and geopolitical circumstances changed the atmosphere in domestic politics and strengthened the ideological Left. Emphasis on equal opportunity and hard work fueled suspicion about the perceived elitism of horseback riding and the leisure class, the image of which was now severely out of fashion.

Riding thus lost strength during the 15 years following the war and started to transform into a fully civilian sport. Emphasis shifted from adult to junior riders and the proportion of women among leisure riders grew. The socio-economic profile remained largely intact, but many new juniors spoke Finnish and the sports had begun to spread across the country. The national equestrian federation SRL was in economic ruin, which, together with general transportation difficulties after the war, complicated the organization of competitions. On the other hand, the economic trouble fostered contacts between clubs and encouraged SRL to collaborate with other national sports federations (Vasara 1987: 328–434). The international equestrian federation FEI also abolished the gentlemen's rule from international competitions, which made them more accessible to Finnish competitors – who themselves had erased this class and rank restriction right after the war in the new context of national unity fostered by the war experience (Vasara 1987: 339). One significant victim of the postwar situation was gallop racing in Helsinki (and, gradually, in Finland), which never recovered from the war and its aftermath, despite its popularity among the public (Erola 2010).

Embodying the nation

In the context of Finland's new, delicate relationship with the victorious Soviet Union, sports built trust and self-esteem. This approach also suited the new superpower, which had begun to test its athletic might against the West. From the mid-1950s onward the annual "Friendship Races" in trotting made horses embodiments of the nation (Koch 2013) and contributed to the politicization of sports in the Cold War era (Dichter and Johns 2014). The equine assets of state propaganda fostered an amicable relationship between the wartime enemies, but made it clear that the Soviet warmblood racers were faster than their Finnhorse counterparts. These races nevertheless qualify as a prime example of "sports diplomacy" on the

animal front, not least because they were massive media events and the exchange sought to promote bilateral trade between the two countries. The states confirmed their interest by the joint appearance of Finland's Secretary of State Johannes Virolainen and the Soviet Ambassador Viktor Lebedev in the audience of the first tour in 1955 (Mahlamäki 2003: 99).

The appearance of the Orlov breed and other Russian racers on Finnish tracks led to a "warmblood fever" (Mahlamäki 2003: 113), which split the Finnish horsemen into two camps in an ideologically charged dispute over the right of warmblood trotters to compete in Finland. Those who wanted to open Finnish borders, tracks, and racing business to foreign imports flagged for higher-quality competitive sports, increased wagering and media visibility, and better economic sustainability of trotting and trotter breeding. These business and international arguments were countered by stressing national identity and values, particularity of the Finnhorse, and the threat of cross-breeding the "national" purebred horse with foreign (ideologically undesirable eastern) blood. Indicative of the social distance between racing and riding – and, perhaps, the relative acceptability of Western influences – was that few fears had been expressed over cross-breeding of the Finnhorse with warmblood riding horses (Mahlamäki 2003: 114; Ojala 2007: 19–22).

The debate echoed the old division between sportsmen and breeders. The boundary also ran between city and country – and modernity (perceived progress) and tradition (stagnation) – as the most vocal promoters of warmblood trotting were in Helsinki and the opponents centered in the rural western and central parts of the country. As the conflict spilled from the equine media to national headlines, it evolved from an internal matter among the horsemen to reflect identity-political boundaries and related turmoil in Finnish society in the context of urbanization, industrialization, and opening up to the West (Mahlamäki 2003: 116–19). Again, innovation and tradition collided, fueling "a debate that almost all sports and activities have to address ... on a continual basis" (McManus *et al.* 2013: 73).

Geopolitics and bilateral trade interests played a key role in the resolution of the matter in favor of warmblood racing. The Soviets knew that President Urho Kekkonen (in office 1956–82) was a prominent sportsman and sports politician whose roots were in the countryside and in the center-conservative rural party. When the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev gave two pregnant Orlov mares as a gift to Kekkonen in 1957, trotter racing rose to international limelight and put pressure on the Finns to begin exchanging horses for cows like the Soviets wanted. The two foals' name-giving ceremony at the Ypäjä state stud was a high-profile media event, and when the Soviets added an Orlov stallion to the President's stable, during his visit to their country, the long monopoly of Finnhorses in Finnish trotter racing was about to end. In a speech at the national trotting

organization in 1958, Kekkonen expressed his opinion that "the success of trotter racing, like that of other sports, requires international competitive activity. Therefore we, too, should perhaps consider the changing of rules so that warmblood horses owned by Finns could also compete in our country" (cited in Saranpää 2012: 48).

The first race arranged exclusively for Finnish-owned warmblood trotters was run in 1960, and their first national championships a year later. During the 1960s, more than half of the imported warmblood racers came from the Soviet Union. Most of them, however, were Russian trotters rather than Orlovs, which were already an outdated breed in trotting. By 1968, 610 warmblood trotters had been licensed to compete in Finland, and 230 foals had been born (Mahlamäki 2003: 125). The numbers were still minuscule compared to the Finnhorse population (which now stood around 100,000), but their impact on both Finnish trotting and breeding was critical. The transition also turned Finnhorse breeding toward the light racer and all-purpose sports horse types, which had developed in the shadow of draft performance requirements determined by field and forest. The change was now unavoidable, as the draft horse was outdated, and the warmblood trotter was a superior performer on the track. The transition also began to create professions in the training, driving, breeding, care, and trade of trotters.

In a society that was more united ideologically and culturally than it had been before the war, trotting offered opportunities for social mobility. As individual skill and merit increasingly determined one's socio-economic status in Finnish society, a good trotter and training expertise were tickets to visibility, peer respect, leadership, and international contacts. This mattered because many trotter-racing people still came from modest rural backgrounds.

From East to West in a new sports culture

Urbanization, the nascent Nordic welfare state, and transition toward a service-based economy contributed to a structural change in Finnish work life, affording people more leisure time and disposable income. By the 1970s, increased international contacts and cooperation transmitted influential ideals about citizens' health and participation. These developments resulted in a new, popular sports and physical education culture in Finland. The Finnish national sports organizations continued to be ideologically, socially, and structurally divided between Left and Right because of the legacy of the 1918 Civil War, but the state's renewed interest in both competitive sports and the physical education of the masses began to mend this polarization into "Red working-class" and "White bourgeois" sports federations. The state's active role meant subsidies and attention to infrastructure, which, together with novel private funding interests, led to vigorous

construction of both riding and racing facilities across the country. Regulation of sports and wagering progressed and both fields began to play a more prominent role in socio-political considerations and policies concerning Finnish political and cultural life.

Most importantly, competitive sports were one geopolitically acceptable way to cherish Western connections, and riders' competition experience and training contacts gradually expanded from the Nordic and Olympic realms (Vasara 1987: 510). An example of the new thinking and organizational collaboration was the development of riding for the disabled (RFD), from the first experiments in the early 1970s to participation in international RFD competitions by the end of the decade – with joint support from the Rehabilitation Foundation and SRL (Vasara 1987: 567–8). The expansion in international activity and selection of sports in the following decades directed attention to the equine population and put pressure on both imports and domestic breeding. The development of skills gained significant support from the formal inclusion of SRL's riding college at Ypäjä (founded in 1972) in the state-subsidized national sports college network in 1986.

Finnish warmblood trotting operators also turned to the West earlier and more openly than most of the nation's leaders, who were blamed in the West in the 1970s and 1980s for Finlandization, or letting the Soviets influence their decision-making. By the 1970s, it was clear that the Russian racer was a poor match for the French and, especially, the American Standardbred trotter. The emphasis in imports turned to these breeds, first from Denmark and Sweden and then directly from the USA (Mahlamäki 2003: 22). Standardbred bloodlines soon became dominant in the Finnish warmblood trotting business. The capital needed for the imports came from wealthy entrepreneurs and landowners who had a Western outlook and contact networks along with the language and business skills needed for the exchange.

The transition from East to West and the subsequent growth of domestic warmblood trotter breeding were visible in the racing program sheets from the late 1970s and, especially, the 1980s onward, as Russian bloodlines and foreign-born competitors gradually disappeared from sight. Success of Finnish horses, trainers, and drivers in European top competitions made media headlines and provoked public celebrations of national excellence. These developments commercialized and politicized Finnish horse sports further – and brought them closer to mainstream society.

The number of riders was on the rise, too, and the trend toward the predominance of Finnish-speaking young women in riding sports grew stronger. By the mid-1980s, active riders numbered 20,000 and riding was a popular hobby nationwide, even if over three-quarters of riders were urbanites and a quarter of all still resided in metropolitan Helsinki. Riding was now a "proper sport," and its relative position among the most

popular leisure sports strengthened rapidly (Vasara 1987: 435, 448, 572). The growth, however, renewed internal tensions between leisure riding and competitive sports, as their advocates competed with one another over money and influence.

Following the end of the Cold War and the Soviet Union at the turn of the 1990s, and Finland joining the European Union in 1995, the borders to the West were wide open. This encouraged the international mobility of Finnish riders, drivers, trainers, and their horses. Riders headed primarily to Central Europe and many opted for a professional career in riding. Trainers of trotters favored neighboring Sweden, where purse money and economic sustainability of racing and breeding were better than in Finland. Wagering was in turmoil in the context of an economic depression in Finland (1991–94) and the development of online technologies, which were about to upheave the global gambling and wagering industries. The effects in Finland included the rapid expansion of human sports betting products since 1993, and the legalization of off-track horse betting in 1995. Revenue from wagering was generally on the rise, but its management and allocation split opinions. The tracks were in trouble as attendance began to drop from the 1.5 million annual visits reached in the years preceding off-track betting (Karekallas *et al.* 2014; Mahlamäki 2003: 304–35).

By the end of the millennium, Finnish horse sports were international and dependent on global trends. The selection of sports under SRL had expanded to include combined driving, Western riding, and equestrian vaulting, and monté (also known as trot monté, trotter racing under saddle) was about to increase the number of young female drivers in trotting. The activities were more professional, commodified, and business-oriented – and individualistic, like the rest of society. These processes supported standardization, goal-orientedness, and quality, but also worked toward fragmenting identities and practices. As traditionalist defenders of national, regional, and local interests resisted the developments in trotting, the scene was also increasingly politicized and polarized. In riding and other horse sports, too, new fragmentation was on its way.

Division and unity in the 2000s

Two boundary-related global phenomena have significantly shaped Finnish horse sports in the new millennium. They relate to postmodern consumption practices and neoliberalism and are, to some extent, interconnected. One phenomenon is the globalization of the gambling industry and related progress of online wagering. This new operative environment and cut-throat worldwide market competition over gamblers' money has challenged Finland's national gambling monopoly, borders, and sense of sovereignty. The structural and regulatory responses at the national level

include the founding of Fintoto Limited as a subsidiary of the trotting and breeding association in 2001, the fast development of online wagering services by this company in the 2000s, the transfer of all available horse games to Fintoto in 2012 (Raento and Härmälä 2014), and the rewriting of national gambling legislation in defense of the monopoly within the European Union (2001, 2010–12; and 2015–17). The global market change and the national response are ideologically controversial, not least because the fortification of the Finnish national gambling monopoly counters the predominant European trend toward liberalization and limits competitive product development, but simultaneously protects the domestic market.

In this setting, Fintoto competes with international online betting companies which cannot operate in Finland, but which Finnish gamblers can legally access online. Domestic competition comes from other forms of gambling and, more generally, from other sports and entertainment (Karekallas *et al.* 2014). This matters because horse sports, and the equine economy as a whole, depend on wagering revenue, which is earmarked for "the promotion of horse breeding and equestrian sports," prizes, expenses, and state subsidies of the equine economy (Lotteries Act 2001, §17), as is generally typical of the horse industry (McManus *et al.* 2013: 59–78). Predictably, the downturn of revenue since the general recession in 2008 has caused turmoil in Finnish trotting because views differ on how to generate revenue, how it should be allocated, and whose interests racing should serve.

These disagreements follow the old identity-political boundaries between regionally and nationally oriented rural traditionalists and the more international and urban business outlook (Mahlamäki 2003: 116). The setting has, however, become increasingly complex since the 2000s as postmodern consumer culture, internationalization, the rise of new horse sports and professions, and related lifestyles and values have diversified identities and blurred their boundaries (Raento and Härmälä 2014: 144). Individual sports also differ increasingly in their gender profiles, which are imbalanced internally; riding, for example, is now the number one leisure sport among Finnish females, but men are disproportionately represented in competitions (Raento 2015; SRL 2015; see Butler and Charles 2012). Lack of money and insecurity about future prospects complicate things further, and no simple solution is in sight as the costs of racing (and all horse keeping) are up, numbers of covering and foaling are down, and the gambling monopoly faces yet another restructuring in a difficult market situation. The structures, decision-making practices, and management of Finnish horse sports organizations have also proven to be outdated and are having a hard time responding to the change.

On the other hand, there is evidence of a new kind of community building around horse sports in Finland today. Fans gather around particular sports and breeds, and horse people are active defending their economic

and cultural interests in Finnish society. One example is the recent promotion of trotting through open mass syndication (group funding and ownership) of young racers under the loose umbrella of the "Trotting League," formed by ten racetracks and SRL in 2013–14 for the duration of about three years (see www.raviliiga.fi). The activities organized around each syndicated horse (Figure 2.2), combined with racing events promoted to the several thousand first-time racehorse owners, have created media visibility, eased access to the specialized sport, and overcome some of the socio-cultural distance between trotting and other horse sports, as well as between horse people and other Finns.

The Trotting League courts the thrill- and emotion-seeking postmodern, individualistic, but conservative consumers who wish to push their personal boundaries in a safe, leisurely manner. They are willing to try new things and spend quite generously on (perceived) authenticity, personalized service, and unique products, but balance their individualism with a desire to belong and share their stories with others. The campaign has successfully engaged "feelings, emotions, imaginations, and knowledge" (McIntosh and Prentice 1999: 607), narrating an image of excitement, novelty, entertainment, and speed. Purchasing one share (of the 700–800 shares per horse) was designed to be convenient, carefree, and tailor-made in a sense

Figure 2.2 The Equestrian Federation of Finland SRL crosses boundaries within horse sports by participating in the Trotting League. New racehorse owners pose with their young Finnhorse trotter, his trainer, and the SRL league coordinator (source: Viivi Huuskonen/SHKL).

that the new owner could choose from well-known trainers, multiple locations, and two breeds. This mass syndication concept is a prime example of "the experience economy" (Pine and Gilmore 1999), a global postmodern business trend which generates value by commodifying experiences and which now shapes Finnish horse sports and related consumer behaviors and identities.

The Finnhorse reflects place-specific tensions generated by the two global trends because its utility and image as a sports horse continue to split opinions and the breed carries a historical and identity-political charge. Some Finns see the breed as peripheral, old-fashioned, and clumsy, whereas others cherish its suitability for all competitive horse sports and find the "national" and "traditional" image to be empowering rather than negative. The popularity of the Finnhorse as a riding horse is growing, and its expanding use for purposes such as riding therapy connect to more general processes in postmodern society. Riding or racing a Finnhorse can thus embody a territorial bond, a sense of place, a lifestyle choice, and resistance to globalization, neoliberal standardization, and loss of biodiversity (see Koch 2015; Schuurman and Nyman 2014). The Finnhorse also has its own sense of time. The slowly maturing breed starts its competition career older than the Standardbred (but can also continue it longer), and trots about ten seconds slower per kilometer. Training and racing a coldblood, therefore, requires patience and builds on broader motives than speed and immediate cost efficiency, central in the global horseracing industry (Cassidy 2002, 2007; McManus *et al.* 2013). That some urban Finnhorse trotter owners explicitly appreciate the breed's "local" origin(ality) and time span as motives for their choice exemplifies the new blurring of identity-political boundaries and affiliations in Finnish trotting (Raento and Härmälä 2014).

The Finnhorse makes an equine contribution to national culture and image by participating in all horse sports, by bridging equine themes with broader socio-political and identity-related issues in Finnish society, and by profiling Finland as a horse (sports) country (see Hobson 2007). For example, the Finnhorse co-produces one of the country's largest popular gatherings: about 50,000 tickets are sold each year to the crown of the Finnish racing calendar in which the breed's best 12 stallions and 12 mares trot in a two-day contest for prestigious titles and sizeable purses in front of nationwide media audiences (see www.kuninkuusravit.fi). This event brands the Finnhorse as a territorial icon which embodies affect for a particular nation's endurance, adaptability, and originality (Schuurman and Nyman 2014). Both the event (organized since 1924) and the branding campaign (designed in the late 2000s) exploit narration and nostalgia, two key constituents of postmodernism, and thus illustrate "consuming cultural heritage" (McIntosh and Prentice 1999). In so doing, the brand harnesses everyday nationalism in defense of the "national" breed – and

simultaneously promotes it as a modern all-purpose sports horse in the neoliberal contexts of globalization.

One clever move in the promotion of the Finnhorse has been to bring Finnish Presidents back into horse business, which was thoroughly transformed by President Kekkonen's horse ownership and participation in racing. Instead of being exotic geopolitically and trade-politcally motivated gifts from a foreign country, the Finnhorse mares owned by presidents Tarja Halonen (in office 2000–12) and Sauli Niinistö (since 2012) were given to them by the Equine College at Ypäjä, a former state stud which houses an internationally acknowledged equine school with a fine sports competition record of its own (see www.hevosopisto.fi). The two mares are of celebrated descent bred at the state stud, and their public appearances attract positive attention. Politicians and other defenders of Finnish national peculiarity have thus been eager to vocalize their support for the Finnhorse, stress the importance of the equine economy and horse sports in Finnish society, and show up in those major events where Finnhorses play a prominent role, stimulating desired media visibility for "our own" breed and horse sports.

Conclusion

This chapter has demonstrated how the evolution of Finnish horse sports has depended on geopolitical transitions at multiple scales, and how the space- and time-sensitive concepts of identity and boundary offer one way to understand the process. The Finnish case study shows that horses as sporting bodies, and the activities and structures around them, are important constituents of territorial and place-specific human subjectivity. Human identities shape the fate of these animals as breeds deemed suitable for particular purposes and as sentient individuals, not least because of the related human power contests over image, money, and influence. Human needs and changing circumstances also affect the physical shape of the equine bodies through utility- and fashion-motivated breeding. But, as any horse sport event shows, the equines themselves are crucial co-producers of these structures and stories and their subjectivity, too, merits attention. These intersections encourage further exploration into the place of animals in the political study of sports and to the connections between (broadly defined) geopolitics, animals, and the animal sports business. Students of geopolitics and political geography might find some of the discussion in animal geography about agency, subjectivity, and biopolitics to be of interest. Controversial boundary management issues of the global sports horse industry – such as equine biosecurity and the global trade of sentient beings, their semen, and embryos – could also expand the horizons of political geographers.

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