

**Moving Bodies at Historic Intersections - International Conference on Intersectionality Theory and/in the History of Bodies**

**Veranstalter:** PD Dr. Kirsten Heinsohn, Hamburg; Dr. Olaf Stieglitz, Erfurt

**Datum, Ort:** 11.11.2010–13.11.2010, Hamburg

**Bericht von:** Viola Rautenberg, Hamburg/Haifa

20 years after the term Intersectionality was coined by Kimberle Crenshaw its adoption in the humanities and social sciences is still an ongoing transatlantic success story. The concept that traveled from North America to Europe represents the interrelations and interlocking of various categories of difference and inequality (usually arranged around the triad race – class – gender). In doing so Intersectionality induced heated academic debates, informed a wide range of scholarly researches and stood at the focal point of many international and interdisciplinary conferences. In Germany the international conference „Moving bodies at Historic Intersections“ presented the most recent endeavor in this field. Organized by KIRSTEN HEINSOHN (Hamburg) and OLAF STIEGLITZ (Erfurt) on behalf of the DFG Research Project „Sportgeschichte als Kulturgeschichte der Moderne“ the conference aimed at addressing the issue of Intersectionality from the unique perspective of the history of sport and of the body. As Heinsohn stressed in her introductory remarks the conference aimed not so much at contributing theoretically to the ongoing discussion but rather to examine the usefulness of the concept for research on the history of sport, bodies and subjectivity.

In her keynote lecture INA KERNER (Berlin) provided an overview of current theoretical debates and standpoints on Intersectionality in the German context. Here she focused on what she termed the „what-question“ and the „how-question“ of Intersectionality, referring to its content on the one hand and its method on the other hand. Regarding the first aspect Kerner elaborated on the disputed criteria for the selection of the sets of differences that the researchers focus

on. Which categories of inequality are indispensable, which are the most important? Kerner suggested in her talk to leave this „what-question“ to the ongoing academic debates and decide in each case which categories could be relevant for the analysis. With respect to the „how-question“, pointing on how we should conceptualize what is happening when forms of inequality intersect, she interestingly outlined two central disputing camps, which are visible in contemporary scholarship. While scholars coming mainly from the humanities put the emphasis on language and categorical differentiations, those coming from the field of social sciences argued instead for a turn to the analysis of social structures. Kerner stated that recently several works proposed to go beyond these two options. In following these works she presented her own view in which – in using Michel Foucault’s analytics of power as a starting point – she suggested a three-dimensional account that heuristically differentiates an epistemic, an institutional and a personal dimension, and held that the three dimensions interrelate and can mutually reinforce and reproduce each other. Kerner elaborated on this using the intersection of racism and sexism. She concluded by claiming that the Intersectionality paradigm encourages complexity and creativity and discourages premature closure and might therefore lead towards new questions and research topics within feminist theory.

TAMAR EL OR (Jerusalem) opened the first panel „Jumping and Running Bodies2. The anthropologist demonstrated her work on Intersectionality while analyzing film material on a group of female runners of an Arab-Bedouin village in Israel. El Or’s unique presentation showed how she is integrating and connecting a wide range of intersections that are meaningful in the process of searching for the leading narrative of the women: gender, class, ethnicity, religion but also language, memory, and emotions. She elaborated further on questions of flexibility of patriarchy and religion and the special context of the Gender discussion in the Middle East.

The second speaker of this panel, CHRISTIAN ORBAN (Erfurt), addressed the issue of African-American female athletes in the

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first half of the 20th century in his talk. Orban examined the social relations between active and competitive sporting practices and various body-related intersectional categories such as black/white, female/feminine, respectable, and good citizen. Reflecting on the trope of jumping in 1930s and 40s America he argued that the embodied cultural practices could be regarded as important political tools in the intersectional process of African-American subject formation.

In the second panel, dedicated to „Intersections of Identities“, MELANIE HENNE (Erfurt) connected Jewish history and US history in her investigation of summer camps for Jewish girls organized by the Jewish Peoples Institute in Chicago in the years between 1920 and 1945. In doing so Henne focused on the intersection of youth, femininity and Jewishness to explore the Camps as a normalizing project directed at transforming Jewish girls into good American citizens. She pinpointed the significance of sporting practices as a decisive part in this training of good citizens.

JAN DUNZENDORFER (Berlin) presented his project dealing with boxing in Accra, Ghana, between the 1930s and 1960s. He portrayed the history of combat sport in Ghana while relating to issues of cultural and national identity and political conflicts. Within this context his work focused on the special role of the Ga group, living in and around Accra. Dunzendorfer argued that the ethnic identity of the Ga was underpinned by a gendered idea of a male combat art.

The third Panel „Intersectionality and Normalizing Bodies“ was opened by YOTAM HOTAM (Haifa). In focusing on nationalist Jewish sport activity and physical culture in Palestine in the 1930s he shed light on Zionist fantasies of the Orient and practices which were part of the restructuring of the Jewish body at the intersection of race, ethnicity and gender. His theoretical reflections aimed at presenting a more nuanced reading of these fantasies which point to the admixture of attraction and repulsion from the „Orient.“ This specific admixture was embedded according to him in the recreation of the Jewish body and masculinity through the sport activity.

OFER NUR (Tel Aviv) addressed a special chapter in the history of the Jewish youth

movement of the Shomer HaZair in Palestine. In his challenging talk he argued that the Jewish youth movement adopted for a short period of time the homoerotic „Männerbund“ theory which Hans Blüher generated in Germany before and after World War I. Elaborating on the aspect of Eros in male group bonding in the Kibbutz society Nur then analyzed how and why the Shomer HaZair embedded the „völkische“ and anti-feminist ideology of the anti-Semite Blüher in their world view.

KEVIN MUMFORD (Iowa) dedicated his talk to the controversy and public debate about the Moynihan Report. Leaked to the press in 1965, Daniel Patrick Moynihan's „Plan for Action: Report on the Negro Family“ claimed a family breakdown of the black family due to an increasing absence of the father and female-headed families that allegedly resulted in an imbalance of the sex roles. Mumford attempted to analyze the Moynihan controversy by elaborating on the aspects of the sexual innuendo in the report and the homophobia in the backlash against it.

In the last section „Amplifications“ GABRIELE DIETZE (Berlin) analyzed intersections of race, class, gender and sexuality in soccer. In using the German national team as a case in point she examined the meaning of attributes such as gender, ethnic heritage, skin color and masculinities that were needed to embody the nation over time and showed in what sense those attributes were subjected to historical change. Based on examples of touches, embraces and stripping in cheering rituals as well as locker room intimacy she argued that the heteronormative enterprise soccer is indeed a sexually highly charged game, „a queer game in a straight-jacket“.

The last lecture was delivered by HENRIETTE GUNKEL (Bayreuth/ Alice, South Africa) who investigated the gender trouble that was caused by the win of the South African athlete Caster Semenya in the world championship in Berlin in 2009. Gunkel reflected on the discourses that Semenya's win produced in South Africa and pinpointed the places of imagined racial differences and African subjectivity, of Apartheid, colonialism, non-normative bodies, sexuality and queerness. In Gunkel's reading the debates

about Semenya can be understood as a response to the racist images of African sexualities in the „West“ and therefore as a defense against the „Othering“ of African bodies and sexualities.

The looseness of Intersectionality enabled the conference to encompass a wide range of topics from different disciplines and to cover different times and regions in modern history. The discussions profited from the international character of the conference – with participants coming from Germany, Israel, South Africa and the US. This international character brought in various perspectives on the significance of the different categories in the respective discourses of the country. In this regard the use of the category of „race“ - which is used in the US as a term of critical analysis of the society but is almost a taboo in Germany after the Shoah - was discussed intensively. The 3-leveled concept that Kerner proposed at the opening of the conference as a methodological approach was addressed continuously throughout the conference. It therefore provided the members of the conference a unifying theoretical structure for their different works.

#### **Conference Overview:**

Welcome and Introduction: Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, Kirsten Heinsohn

Ina Kerner: Questions of Intersectionality: On Current Shifts and Debates in German Gender Studies

Chair: Kirsten Heinsohn

#### *Panel 1: Jumping and Running Bodies*

Chair: Jürgen Martschukat

Tamar Elor: „How far will they run?“ Gender, Religion, Nationality and Age on the Runway of Young Palestinian Women in Israel

Christian Orban: Running the Show & Jumping Jim and Jane Crow: Reflecting and Writing about African-American Women in Track and Field

#### **Panel 2: Intersections of Identities**

Chair: Andreas Eckert

Melanie Henne: Shaping Gendered Identities in Sporting Practices: Jewish Summer Camps

in Chicago, 1920-1945

Jan Dunzendorfer: „Boxing Ghana“: Combat Sports and the Intersection of Identities (1930s - 1960s)

#### **Panel 3: Intersectionality and Normalizing Bodies**

Chair: Stefanie Schüler-Springorum

Yotam Hotam: „Oriental beauty, courage and grace...“: Zionist Physical Education as an „Inverse Abjection“ of sports

Ofer Nur: Looking Back at Männerbund and Men in Groups Research: Eros or Team Spirit?

Kevin Mumford: Two Hot Fields, One Big Problem: Rethinking Black Masculinity in African-American and Queer Studies

#### **Panel 4: Amplifications**

Chair: Olaf Stieglitz

Gabriele Dietze: Intersections in the National Penalty Box. Race, Gender and Sexuality in Soccer

Henriette Gunkel: How Intersectional is National Gender? The „Case“ of Caster Semenya

Tagungsbericht *Moving Bodies at Historic Intersections - International Conference on Intersectionality Theory and/in the History of Bodies*. 11.11.2010–13.11.2010, Hamburg, in: H-Soz-Kult 18.01.2011.