

**Sports, Bodies and Subjects: Sports History as the Social and Cultural History of Modernity**

**Veranstalter:** Project „Sports, Bodies and Subjects: Sports History as the Social and Cultural History of Modernity“, Institut für Asien- und Afrikawissenschaften, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin; „IGK Work and Human Lifecycle in Global History“, Berlin

**Datum, Ort:** 25.08.2011-27.08.2011, Berlin

**Bericht von:** Jan Dunzendorfer, Institut für Asien- und Afrikawissenschaften, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin; Jörn Esch, Institut für Geschichte, Carl von Ossietzky Universität Oldenburg

Until today, sports and work are considered to be antagonistic terms. The ideals of amateur sport and the daily routine of sport as a leisure time activity of the masses reinforced the understanding of sport as play and thus placed it in an antithetical relationship to the concept of work. When looking at sports more closely, however, it becomes obvious how deeply intertwined the notions of sports and work actually are. Referring to work and labour is absolutely essential if it comes to analysing sports as a cultural phenomenon. Whether focussing on professional sport, elaborating on class boundaries, concentrating on bodywork or analysing the organizational structures of the world of sports, ideas and concepts of labour and work are indispensable.

Organised by the project „Sports, Bodies and Subjects: Sports History as the Social and Cultural History of Modernity“ (funded by the German Research Foundation) and the IGK Work and Human Lifecycle in Global History, the conference aimed at exploring the wider dimensions of sports history through the unique perspective of the categories of work and labour.

Within the scope of his keynote lecture, ALF LÜDTKE discussed the images of bodies in relation to images of work throughout the 20th century. He began his talk with a comparison of two descriptions: the first one depicting a daily work routine at a plant floor, the second one a serious rowing training. Lüdtké employed historical accounts to show how closely connected both – allegedly separated

– worlds were in terms of the metaphors used to describe them. Factory workers used figures borrowed from the field of sports to describe their actions and vice versa. Lüdtké stressed the importance of such ethnographic accounts. Rather than defining what sports might be, the historian should find out what people were actually doing when exercising; how they moved their bodies and how their bodies moved them. He showed a variety of pictures taken from the world of industrial work to explain the change of the ideal body from a lean slim muscular man to the stout strong heavyweight to men with beer bellies, indicating „Eigensinn“ and joyful life of work and play. Lüdtké stressed the fact that contemporary body images reflected ideals of work and effort.

KATRIN BROMBER of the Center of Modern Oriental Studies in Berlin, Germany opened the first panel entitled professionalization. Her talk was concerned with bodybuilding (an umbrella term for boxing, wrestling and weightlifting) in Ethiopia from the 1950s onwards. Bromber focussed on the biography of Girma Chäru, a bodybuilder who succeeded as „the nation’s first“ physical education teacher. Her intention was to shed light on the relation between sports and labour using an example of someone who did not become an internationally successful athlete. Following Chäru’s quite unique career, Bromber showed the many obstacles a bodybuilder had to overcome, how Chäru became a rather well-known TV physical education teacher, and how his biography was linked to the emergence of sports in Ethiopian factories. She highlighted how bodybuilding persevered in Ethiopia despite the fact that it was quite constantly held in low esteem.

JAN DUNZENDORFER of Humboldt-University Berlin, Germany dedicated his talk to the emergence of modern boxing in Accra, Ghana in the 1920s and 1930s. Dunzendorfer concluded that professional boxing in Accra paved the way for boxing as a sport in all of its variants in Gold Coast (now Ghana). This was due to its entertainment and commercial appeal, which overshadowed the recreation and pedagogic logic often underpinning amateur sport. Touching on the aspects of urbanisation, masculinity

---

and social class, Dunzendorfer showed how boxing appeared to be a highly differentiated business within the leisure sector. Ideas of work and labour structured the business, an argument Dunzendorfer validated through showing the boxing world's inner institutions such as the boxing board of control or the boxers' union.

The second and the third panel which were entitled Bodywork I&II approached terms of labour in a different way. The focus was turned away from an institutional perspective and to the work on the body itself.

PIRKKO MARKULA of the University of Alberta in Edmonton, Canada made this section's first presentation. Providing examples from several practices and yoga in particular, Markula elaborated how Foucault's theory of the self could be successfully applied to an analytical approach in sports history. Markula separated two spheres of the production of a self, referring to the technologies of domination and technologies of the self. She elaborated on the external mode of forming a self by describing Foucault's principles of panoptism and normalisation, illustrating these with examples taken from a yoga magazine, how it addresses the reader and how it suggested the reader should try particular poses. Markula also employed this example to show how yoga actually consisted in an active, intentional technology of the self.

YOTAM HOTAM of the University of Haifa, Israel, gave a talk on wandering Jews in Palestine. He highlighted the fact that wandering in the context of the migration to Israel is to be seen as a form of appropriating land in its diverse distinctness, conveying meanings from colonisation to indigenisation. Thus, Hotam labelled wandering as reorientation, both as a practice of taking in possession and becoming local. In addition to this, Hotam stated that Jewish wandering with its reference to the biblical wandering in the wilderness was a movement through space and time. He showed how wandering as a religious practice was inextricably linked to the idea of moving seriously to achieve a goal. Hotam stressed that wandering was not only considered a quasi-religious practice, but also a work for the nation.

CHRISTIAN ORBAN of the University of

Erfurt, Germany, reflected on the issue of practice as an analytical tool. After a well-informed discussion of several different theoretical conceptions of practice, he elaborated his thoughts using the example of a particular group in the practice of Track and Field in the USA of the 1930s and 1950s, i.e. African American Women from the Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. He focused on the athletes' training practices as a particular form of work, namely craft, which he considered a form of skilful learning in order to produce particularly able human beings. By doing so, Orban brought up a further term to be tested for its analytical validity.

PATRICIA VERTINSKY of the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada was this day's last speaker. Her talk provided insights into the Women's League of Health and Beauty and their dance classes in 1930s Britain. It showed how the varying policies of the 1930s as well as the league's different leadership— first Mollie Bagot Stack, later her daughter Prunella Stack — was reflected in the concepts of the league's physical education. While Mollie Bagot Stack's concepts of bodywork focussed on the healthy and beautiful individual, which she accomplished by adding yoga postures and breathing exercises to the league's dance classes, the thrust changed when Prunella Stack took over the Women's League's stewardship in the mid-1930s. With her, the main emphasis shifted from the individual to the mass, which ultimately was considered an attempt to make everyone move as one body. The principle of the Women's League moved from individual bodywork to the efficient working body of the nation.

The papers to be presented the next day were all concerned with football. MATTHEW TAYLOR of the De Montfort University in Leicester, UK, gave the first talk. Taylor brought trade unionism in British sports from the 1920s to the 1930s on the agenda by using the examples of football and boxing in Great Britain. Thus, he put the focus of attention on the institutions of sport. Taylor approached the issue from two perspectives: He showed how the sportsmen themselves were depicted as workers in pictures and press-articles. Moreover, he presented the

athletes' self-images as highly qualified, professional workers. Taylor elaborated on the rather precarious status of professional boxers compared to the footballers' quite well-off status. In addition to that, he pointed out how specific actors such as managers and trainers became important factors in the respective sportive spheres. Taylor concluded with an appeal for upcoming historical investigations of the field of professional sports: analysing the experiences of those who were paid for being sportsmen had to focus on the fact that it was labour and, thus, has to take into account the relationships between the professional, the employer(s), the trade unions and the state.

PETER ALEGI of Michigan State University, USA was the day's second speaker. His talk aimed to give a synoptic overview on the history of African football throughout almost the entire 20th century. He showcased a variety of snippets on the relation between African football and work, starting with a photograph of a football game in Cape Coast's harbour (Ghana) taking place at the beginning of the 20th century, showing fishermen watching and playing the game at their workplace. Alegi argued that African sportsmen did not play according to the colonisers' rules and emphasized how important the style of play was for both players and fans. He highlighted that football was the practice of an „intermediate-class“ (not lower social strata as one might suspect) and that women's football in African countries needed to be investigated since this was a totally unknown chapter in sports history. He concluded with remarks on a particular development quite a few African countries underwent due to the internationalisation of football: They became a reservoir for cheap talent for the European football market resulting in the creating of African football migrant labourers forming a precarious and exploited social group.

Finally, the two ethnographers TAMAR RAPOPORT and EFRAT DVORAH NOY of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel talked about the Hapoel Katamon, Jerusalem's football club. They focused on the culture of fandom, taking gender into account. Rappoport and Noy approached their field through participant observation tech-

niques and auto-ethnographic practice. They stressed the fact that becoming a football fan was a learning process they then connected to a particular form of work as elaborated by Loic Wacquant with regards to becoming a boxer.

The final discussion made clear that approaching sport and sports history through terms of work and labour did not only require a differentiated conceptualisation of sports, but also sharpened concepts of work and labour. The lack of a distinctive terminology concerning the categories of work and labour, that sometimes appeared quite blurred, made it not always easy to grasp the topics of sports and remained the main point of criticism.

However, the conference showed that sports and work could not be reduced to the antagonisms of play and work or leisure and labour, but that both concepts were deeply entangled with each other. Moreover, several presentations gave an impression of the multifarious possibilities that were available to connect sports and sports history to the world of work and labour.

Therefore it is necessary to pay much more attention to images of work and labour when writing sport history, not least to point out that sports should not be seen as an isolated phenomenon on the margins of an analysis of society but as embedded into daily social life referring to work life and reacting upon it, even if in the end sports is not all work.

#### **Conference Overview:**

##### *Address of Welcome and Introduction*

Andreas Eckert, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany

##### *Keynote*

Alf Lüdtke, Universität Erfurt, Germany  
People Working – Bodies at Work: Toil, Play, and 'Eigensinn' in 20th Century Industry and Sports

##### *Panel 1 – Professionalization*

Chair: Jürgen Martschukat, Universität Erfurt, Germany

Katrin Bromber, Zentrum Moderner Orient Berlin, Germany

Workout Progress: Bodybuilding as Career in Ethiopia (1950-1980)

---

Jan Dunzendorfer, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany  
Boxing is Coming to Town: Professional Boxing and Showbiz in Accra, WA

*Panel 2 – Bodywork I*

Chair: Kirsten Heinsohn, Universität Hamburg, Germany

Pirkko Markula, University of Alberta, Canada

Bodywork: Working the Body, Working the Self

Yotam Hotam, University of Haifa, Israel  
Ex Oriente Lux: Body-Building, Sport, and Identity – Wandering Jews in Palestine

*Panel 3 – Bodywork II*

Chair: Stefanie Schüler-Springorum, Technische Universität Berlin, Germany

Christian Orban, Universität Erfurt, Germany  
„We’re Talking about Practice.“ Meditations on Track and Field as (Cultural) Work

Patricia Vertinsky, University of British Columbia, Canada

The Politics of Choreography: The Women’s League of Health and Beauty in 1930’s Britain

*Panel 4.1 – Labor, Leisure, Football*

Chair: Olaf Stieglitz, Universität Erfurt, Germany

Matthew Taylor, De Montfort University Leicester, United Kingdom  
Work, Labour Relations and Trade Unionism in British Sport, c.1920s – c.1950s

Peter Alegi, Michigan State University, USA  
Labor of Love? Sport and Social Change in Africa, 1920 – 2010

*Panel 4.2– Labor, Leisure, Football*

Chair: Olaf Stieglitz, Universität Erfurt, Germany

Tamar Rapoport & Efrat Dvorah Noy, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel  
Constructing an Alternative Home in a Fragmented City: The Case of „Ha’Poel Katamon Jerusalem“ (HKJ) Football Club

Final Discussion

Tagungsbericht *Sports, Bodies and Subjects: Sports History as the Social and Cultural History of Modernity*. 25.08.2011-27.08.2011, Berlin, in: H-Soz-u-Kult 19.04.2012.