

Violence, Discipline, and Leisure: Sport in Penal and Internment Camps

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Sport and leisure in penal and internment camps in the 20th century was the topic of a conference at the University of Bonn, which took place in Bonn from September 23 to 25, 2015. It was organized by Dittmar Dahlmann (Bonn), Anke Hilbrenner (Bonn / Bremen) and Gregor Feindt (Mainz), the Society of the History of Migration, and the Cologne-Bonn Center for Central and Eastern Europe (CCCEE) and made possible through the financial support of the Fritz Thyssen Stiftung.

Prisoner-of-war camps in World War I and World War II, Nazi concentration camps and Soviet Gulag camps, Displaced Persons camps, camps for expellees in Germany after World War II and Northern Irish internment camps were explored by international scholars in an opening keynote address, four panels, and a closing roundtable. Papers and discussions revolved around themes such as violence and leisure, discipline and identity, memory, the history of the body and also broader topics such as sports and politics, as well as the methodologies of comparative / transnational history of sports and the history of penal and internment camps. The conference also included a discussion with a panel of former inmates of a Gulag on their sport experiences during their time in the camp.

After welcoming remarks from the conveners, the conference began with a keynote address by ALAN KRAMER (Dublin). Kramer's talk provided an insightful overview of the history of penal and internment camps in the twentieth century, looking in particular at early British concentration camps in South Africa in 1900, Nazi concentration camps and the Soviet Gulag camps. Kramer stressed that when we look at the history of such camps in the twentieth century we find processes of transnational learning in a new age of mass communication, but he also pointed

out differences between the camps under different regimes and in different periods. For the Gulag and Nazi concentration camps in particular, he emphasized their transformability, both in function and discourse. His stimulating remarks established a fruitful comparative background for the discussions during the next two days of the conference.

The first full day of the conference focused, in particular, on the topics of leisure, discipline and violence in various POW camps and in Soviet and Nazi camps. Panel I, under the title „Leisure and Discipline,“ looked at sport in POW camps, and was subdivided into two sections, on POW camps prior to and during the First World War and during the Second World. The section on the First World War was opened by FLORIS VAN DER MERVE (Stellenbosch), who presented a paper about sport in British POW and concentration camps during the Anglo-Boer-War (1899–1902). Physical exercise in these camps was encouraged by the authorities in order to counteract the stresses of captivity and, as van der Merwe's paper demonstrated, British sports and games, such as soccer, tennis and cricket, were the most popular. The introduction of these sports in the camps, van der Merwe contended, laid the foundation for the present-day predominance of British sports in South Africa.

The second paper, by PANIKOS PANAYI (Leicester), explored sport, leisure and work in British military and civilian internment camps in the period 1914 to 1919. Panayi pointed out that work was the most important form of physical activity for German internees in British camps, far superseding the importance of sports. He further argued that sport in British internment camps must be seen against the larger background of other leisure activities, including reading, educational activities, music and theater, especially as these also helped internees to build up the sense of community and health necessary to do sports. The paper concluded by discussing everyday sports activities in several camps, activities which included gymnastics, athletics, cricket, golf, tennis, boxing and football. Panayi also stressed the importance of distinguishing between military and civilian prisoners, and argued that, while the former were

predominantly occupied with work, for the latter, sports and leisure became their very *raison d'être*. Yet both groups, Panayi suggested, probably saw some health benefits from their physical activity.

CHRISTOPH JAHR (Berlin) continued the discussion about sports in internment camps during the First World War. In his paper, he focused in particular on the sports activities of internees in civilian camps in Germany. Jahr showed that sports in the camps should not be understood as a mere form of repression, but, by contrast, have also to be seen as an outlet for self-expression for the internees. Indeed, sport in the camps sometimes also reflected and even reinforced social, national, and ethnic tensions between the different communities of internees. But Jahr was careful to argue that such points do not diminish the importance of sports for the camp authorities. Preventing, permitting, or even promoting camp sport was, for example, an important tool in the „diplomatic war“ between the belligerent nations.

The second part of Panel I moved on to World War II. DITTMAR DAHLMANN and DORIANE GOMET (Rennes) each presented papers dealing with sport in POW camps. Dahlmann examined the sporting activities of German POWs interned in Great Britain, and the ramifications of this in the post-war period. He particularly focused on German POWs playing soccer. He showed how, in some cases, playing football was a route to integration for German POWs, some of whom even remained in Britain after the war. As a case study, he discussed the career of Bert Trautmann, a.k.a. „Traut the Kraut“, a former POW, who went on keep goal with a broken neck for Manchester City in the 1956 FA Cup Final. It is interesting that this exploit is today quite well-remembered in Britain, but little known in Germany. Doriane Gomet, whose paper brought this first panel to a close, looked at the physical practices of French POWs during the Second World War. Importantly, her study added two new categories to the analytical discourse of the conference. In the first place, she highlighted the importance of class, as her paper distinguished between POWs who were officers, and those who were regular soldiers. The second cate-

gory she brought to the fore was that of space. Using sources such as maps and camp plans, her paper looked in detail at the sporting infrastructure of the POW camps, and how this was laid out.

Panel II took as its theme the „Condensed Violence“ of the Nazi concentration camps and the Soviet Union's GULags. FELICITAS FISCHER VON WEIKERSTHAL (Heidelberg) looked at *Fizkul'tura* and sports in Soviet Labor Camps, examining in particular the period of the 1920s and 1930s. For both guards and inmates in these camps, sports activities such as football, volleyball, gymnastics, swimming and ice-skating, were intended to promote physical health and to provide diversion. Similarly to the point made by van der Merwe and Jahn, Fischer von Weikersthal argued that sport in penal camps was not merely a form of repression. Instead, in the GULag, sport was part of a leisure and reeducation program, which also had the propagandistic intent of creating exemplars of the Soviet Union's „New Man.“

The other two papers of Panel II dealt with the role of sports in Nazi concentration camps. KIM WÜNSCHMANN (Brighton) looked at participation in sports by Jews in early concentration camps in Germany. Wünschmann differentiated between three functions sports could fulfill in camps. Sports could be a form of abuse, an act of resistance or a playful pastime that offered interactions outside (the expected) frameworks of violence. She demonstrated how sport came to construct race, gender and the body in the early concentration camps, showing in particular how sport gave guards opportunities for forms of abuse that re-affirmed stereotypes of weak Jewish bodies and undermined Jewish masculinity while confirming the guards' own masculinity. At the same time, however, Wünschmann also looked at how physical activities could create non-violent interactions between prisoners and guards that seemed to transgress hierarchies of power. Her case study of „Schinkenklöpfen“ showed how this particular activity exemplified such ambiguities, as well as highlighting the ambiguities between the very categories of sport, games, and mere physical activity.

The next paper, from VERONIKA SPRING-

MANN (Oldenburg), also focused on such ambiguities around sports in Nazi concentration camps. In contrast to Wünschmann, Springmann looked at concentration camps during the war. Springmann's analysis revealed that sport functioned, on the one hand, to discipline prisoners, but on the other hand also afforded prisoners positive opportunities. She looked in particular at soccer, especially in Mauthausen and Auschwitz. She pointed out how difficult conditions were for soccer players, who had to struggle to acquire boots or even balls (Springmann mentioned the use of balls improvised out of paper in Mauthausen). Yet, despite these adversities, football became established in the camps – with apparently up to ten teams in Auschwitz, for example. Overall, Springmann showed how playing football was in itself an escape from the everyday, but also gave some inmates access to better food and improved prison conditions as the games gained an audience, even among some guards. (Interestingly, some of Springmann's findings were echoed in the personal testimonies of one former GULag internee during the panel interview led that evening by MEINHARD STARK (Bonn / Berlin, Germany). This interviewee had played soccer while imprisoned in a GULag in the 1950s, and he talked of how he had even become a type of football star, which made his survival in the GULag somewhat easier.)

The last day of the conference began with a panel about sport in DP camps after the Second World War. The panel, entitled „Performing Identity: Camps for (Forced) Migrants“ consisted of two papers, presented by MATHIAS BEER (Tübingen) and MARCUS VELKE (Bonn / Marburg). Beer argued that sport could function as a means of integration for refugees and expellees into post-war German society. His paper looked in particular at the Schlotwiese DP camp in Stuttgart, and the soccer club „FC Batschka“, later „SV Rot“, which was founded there. He traced how this club was a place where a group of DPs, expellees from Yugoslavia, could retain a sense of community and identity. Beer stressed that this identity, however, as well as the various categories such as „DP“ and „refugee,“ was complex, as these Yugoslavs were ethnic Ger-

mans. As time passed in post-war Germany, the football club then enabled this community to integrate into a local identity, highlighting the potentialities of sport in the context of identity problems, even in complex sites like camps.

In his paper „Sports in DP Camps: Recreation, Nationalization, and Integration,“ Markus Velke mirrored Beer's problematization of such notions as „DP“ and „refugee“ and similarly highlighted how DP camps and residences were always tenuous sites, but also sites where sport could provide some stability. Velke's study of DP sports devoted some attention to Jewish DP soccer leagues, but primarily focused on Estonian DP sport in Germany, an understudied topic. He showed how the Estonian DPs worked to create sports leagues and structures that provided stability throughout their widely dispersed DP community. Alluding to the role of sport in the Estonian national awakening in the late 19th century and interwar periods, he argued that wrestling in particular, for both men and women, was an important locus for asserting Estonian national identity in exile, even as Estonia itself was being absorbed into the Soviet Union.

The final panel of the conference looked at sports in internment camps for political prisoners. Here, DIETER REINISCH (Florence) discussed aspects of his research into the internment of both IRA and militant loyalist prisoners during the Northern Irish Troubles. Reinisch has conducted interviews with former internees, and on that basis explored their memories of sporting experiences in the camps, some of which he relayed in his presentation, thus offering a description of at least part of everyday life in Belfast's H-Blocks. He suggested that talking about these experiences offered these former prisoners a unique coping mechanism. Precisely because their time in prison was regarded by them an integral part of their political activity, and furthermore governed by military structures, they were not allowed to discuss most aspects of their time in prison. As sporting activity was, however, considered non-political, these experiences can be shared with outsiders.

The conference concluded with a roundtable discussion between MANFRED

ZELLER (Bremen), RICHARD MILLS (Norwich), Alan Kramer, ANKE HILBRENNER (Bonn / Bremen) and GREGOR FEINDT (Mainz). This conversation approached sport in camps using ideas such as modernity, bodies, performances and the question of memory as framework. The discussion addressed themes that had been (comparatively) absent earlier, most notably a discussion of the role (or lack thereof) of women's sports in camps, but was particularly useful in highlighting themes that recurred in the conference's different studies of sports in camps, such as identity formation, militarization, the problem of too-rosy representations of camp sports (including nostalgia in testimonies), and the bivalent function of sport as enforcing discipline or permitting a form of escape.

Conference Overview:

Keynote Address

Alan Kramer (Dublin, Ireland): „The World of Camps. A Protean Institution of War and Peace“

Panel I, part I: „Leisure and Discipline: Prisoner of War Camps I“

Floris van der Merwe (Stellenbosch, South Africa): „Sport in Concentration and Prisoner-of-War Camps during the Anglo-Boer War (1899–1902)“

Panikos Panayi (Leicester, UK): „Sport, Leisure and Work in Military and Civilian Internment Camps in Britain, 1914–1919“

Christoph Jahr (Berlin, Germany): „Sport in Internment and Prisoner of War Camps in Germany during World War I“

Panel I, part II: „Leisure and Discipline: Prisoner of War Camps II“

Dittmar Dahlmann (Bonn, Germany): „Sport in British Prisoner of War Camps during and after World War II“

Doriane Gomet (Rennes, France): „To Control the Bodies or to Divert Themselves? Physical Practices of the French POWs (officers, soldiers) during World War II“

Panel II: „Condensed Violence – Nazi Concentration Camps and GULag“

Felicitas Fischer von Weikersthal (Heidelberg,

Germany): „Fiszkul'tura and Reeducation in Soviet Labor Camps“

Kim Wünschmann (Brighton, UK): „‘Judenexerzieren’: The Role of ‘Sport’ for Construction of Race, Body and Gender in the Early Concentration Camps 1933–1934“

Veronika Springmann (Oldenburg, Germany): „‘He liked us, because we were good athletes, good workers’ – Productive Bodies in Nazi Concentration Camps“

Discussant: Anke Hilbrenner (Bonn / Bremen, Germany)

Evening Event: Conversation with contemporary witnesses about their memories of sport in the GULag, moderated by Meinhard Stark (Bonn / Berlin, Germany)

Panel III „Performing Identity: Camps for (forced) migrants“

Matthias Beer (Tübingen, Germany): „Sport as an Agency of Integration: Expellees Camps in Germany after World War II“

Marcus Velke (Bonn / Marburg, Germany): „Sports in DP Camps: Recreation, Nationalization, and Integration“

Discussant: Richard Mills (Norwich, UK)

Panel IV: „Self-Organization: Internment of Political Prisoners“

Dieter Reinisch (Florence, Italy): „Memories of Sport in Northern Irish Internment Camps“

Discussant: Gregor Feindt (Mainz, Germany)

Round Table: „Perspectives on Sports in the ‘Age of Extremes’“

Discussants: Manfred Zeller (Bremen, Germany), Alan Kramer (Dublin, Ireland), Richard Mills (Norwich, UK), Anke Hilbrenner (Bremen / Bonn, Germany) and Gregor Feindt (Mainz, Germany)

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