

WS 05

Sport, mobility and (the end of) negotiations of belonging

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Organisiert von / organized by:

Dominik Schieder (Universität Siegen)

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Sport offers anthropologists a to date little explored lens to ponder societal (trans-) formations in the Global South and beyond. Its analytical value becomes particularly evident, if we take into consideration how sport intersects with the triangular – i.e. spatial, temporal and socio-cultural – dimensions of human mobility. Understood in such a broad and encompassing way, the sport-mobility-nexus can connote various phenomena, ranging from societal integration, labor migration, life course dynamics (e.g. aging and health) and identity constructions (e.g. youth and lifestyle sports), to emerging middle class-related body practices. What these diverse phenomena have in common is that they demand social actors to most often negotiate multiple ways of belonging (e.g. citizenship, class, ethnicity, family, gender or professionalism) within one single arena. In this context, sport is frequently praised for its potential, such as to ease immigrant inclusion, to offer escape routes from poverty for athletes originating in the Global South and, more generally, to facilitate upward economic mobility.

Yet, social negotiations within the sport-mobility-arena equally reveal how intersecting ways of belonging are conflict-laden or potentially irreconcilable, leading in extreme cases to the termination of social negotiations. While, for example, transnationally-mobile athletes from the Global South are required to navigate conflicting norms and values related to kin expectations and modern sport professionalism and consequently develop strategies to control or circumvent communal obligations, new leisure time activities among a rising African middle class fuel renegotiations of social distinction and potentially lead to a suspension of communication and interaction between people of various social spheres. Similarly, the recent case of Mesut Özil's resignation from the German national football team has revealed how different perceptions of national belonging and societal integration may become non-negotiable altogether.

Drawing inspiration from these examples, we invite ethnographically-driven papers which investigate the practices and discourses underlying negotiations of particular modes of social belonging and the potential closure of these negotiations, in order to scrutinize the opportunities and restrictions intrinsic to sport-related mobility.

Vortragende / Speakers:

Andre Thiemann (Central European University)

Football, return migration, and transversal rebellion

Serbian politics is surprisingly strongly embedded in football voluntarism – an indigenous civil society organization since Yugoslav socialism. My case study follows a politician who, born in the village, had studied in Belgrade veterinary medicine, and played for 20 years in the first team (travelling often 200km per game). Upon graduation he settled in the municipal centre nearby but opened his veterinary station in the village. He and other fathers revived the Youth section of the club so that their sons “become people”. Mladen then ran on the ticket of a liberal party as “village deputy” for municipal parliament. Rising in power, the vet-politician soon navigated the double pull of politics – representation and governing. During a common work action at the football pitch

modelled on socialist shock-work, disenfranchised rural club members levelled corruption allegations against the vet and his allies from the village council. I follow the bantering, teasing, and the reactions of the vet and other officials to distinguish four modes of dealing with the frailty of authority embedded in village football: resign, conform, work in self-interest, and rebel transversally.

Stephanie Schütze (FU Berlin) und
Julia Haß (FU Berlin)

Negotiating belonging in Bolivian and Peruvian migrant amateur football leagues in Rio de Janeiro and in São Paulo

In Brazilian metropolises São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, migrant amateur football leagues are spaces that play an essential role in the integration of migrants from Andean countries. The migrants are mostly young Bolivian and Peruvian men and women from low social strata, who migrate to Brazil to escape from poverty and to improve their prospects of living. For many of them a regular football practice represents an instrument of survival in their difficult daily routine in Brazil. Therefore, the migrant teams and leagues become important spaces of support and belonging. However, membership of a migrant team or a league does not happen automatically. Gender, national and regional origin as well as social networks work as factors of in- or exclusion of players. Besides, in order to organize football leagues, migrants have to negotiate with local authorities about the use of urban sport infrastructures. Insecurities in life of migrants as well as always-changing political and social landscapes demand constant negotiations of belonging in the context of migrant amateur football leagues.

Raphael Schapira (The Graduate Institute Geneva)

Training the “good citizen”: embodying belonging in Brazilian jiu-jitsu

In contemporary Brazil, the line between being a citizen or an enemy fighter is discursively drawn by separating the population into “good citizens” and “villains”. For the recently elected Bolsonaro government, the “good citizen” is supposed to be protected by the state security apparatus while the “villain” has lost his right to living. During my fieldwork in a Brazilian jiu-jitsu club in the northern periphery of Rio de Janeiro, I found that the general racial and social connotation of the “good citizen” as the white middle-class male does not fit neatly with the local understanding of the “good citizen”. Instead of being someone superior, for this group, the “good citizen” is just someone who has been given the opportunity to become something else than a drug trafficker by becoming part of a martial arts family. Taking the example of this Brazilian jiu-jitsu group, I will analyze how the group comes to embody specific ethics through martial arts practice. Paying close attention to the bodily practices and rituals I aim to understand how in times of heightened law and order politics in urban Brazil social belonging and closure is produced given the Other’s spatial and social closeness.

Anne Kukuczka (Universität Bayreuth)

Body pump, Yoga, mountain climbing or pilgrimage?

Classed and embodied belonging in a Tibetan fitness studio and beyond

In this paper I examine urban Tibetan women’s engagement in various forms of sport in Lhasa, Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR)/China. Envisioned as a future elite at the nation’s periphery, my research participants are highly educated women who were socialized for years in Chinese megacities before becoming government workers and public servants in Tibet. I explore their bodily

practices in a commercial high-end gym and outdoors in mountains usually associated with Buddhist practice while paying particular attention to perceptions of sport, leisure time and the healthy body, which I argue reflect aspirations for cosmopolitan and upper middle-class lifestyles.

Tarminder Kaur (University of the Free State, Bloemfontein)

Steeplechase: an obstacle (of) race in South African athletics

The steeplechase is an obstacle race in athletics. Each 400 meters lap includes four hurdles and a water-jump. For the athletics initiative that informs this paper, steeplechase has come to have a symbolic relevance. Fit2Run, a non-profit company (NPC), is run by a small group of volunteers who train children and youth in track and field, cross-country and road running. Not only the Fit2Run athletes hold regional and national records in the race of steeplechase, the everyday off-the-athletics-track lives of the athletes and of the NPC are constantly dealing with many challenges. Using collaborative ethnography, I present the story of the Fit2Run in conversation with the athletics coach: Norman Ontong. Arguing that steeplechase is among the toughest athletics event, Norman credits success of his athletes to the tough circumstances they come from. Reflecting on the legacies of social architecture of apartheid sports, I examine these linkages between 'toughness' and obstacles on and off the athletics track. My analysis attends to how those "so-called-coloureds" in apartheid's racial categorisation negotiate their identity as coloured athletes in post-apartheid South Africa.