

## MIND THE GAP. THE ROLE OF SUPPRESSION, PURGES, AND REJECTION IN SPORTS HISTORY AND SPORTS HISTORIOGRAPHY. AN INTRODUCTION

Arnd KRÜGER

Georg-August-Universität Göttingen (Alemania)

Forgetting is often considered a problem of old age. It is seen as a sign of weakness, of individual frailty. Whoever uses oral history is fully aware of the problem that even an eyewitness for certain events at a certain period will have forgotten a lot or may even falsely remember something that took place in a different context. This is perfectly normal, although sometimes the historian might think that the person does not want to be remembered.<sup>1</sup> As one can see in the aftermath of dictatorial government not all forgetting really means forgetting. Often the eyewitness just prefers to keep silent to avoid being drawn into a case he or she has to be careful to talk about.<sup>2</sup> Apart from such individual cases of forgetting there are the collective ones. In recent times the renaming of streets, the topping of monuments, and the restitution of artifacts from museums gathered there in colonial times to their original owners or their heirs have led to considerable discussions about the blind spots in one's own history.<sup>3</sup>

Remembering is the opposite of forgetting. Sports historiography thrives on traditions. Which are real and which are invented? Ever since the work of Hobsbawm and Ranger<sup>4</sup> on invented traditions these have also been discussed in sports. Most of these traditions have evolved in the latter parts of the nineteenth century, thus they tend to perpetuate and legitimize hierarchical institutions. A closer look at the *International Olympic Committee* or FIFA seems to emphasize this notion. In our current age of electronic mass communication *Jubilees* and other dates which suit visualisation have become a centre for memories.<sup>5</sup>

While a theory of memory is evolving<sup>6</sup>, a theory of forgetting is yet in its infancy. The oldest systematisation seems to have come from Augustinus (354-430) who analysed in his *Confessiones* (X, 16) four kinds of forgetting: *oblivio*, the action of currently forgetting but which can be remembered again; *oblitum*, the thing or event that was thus forgotten but can be remembered again; the event or thing that was so completely forgotten that you cannot even remember that you have forgotten it; remembering that you have forgotten such an event or thing.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Robert Perks and Alistair Thomson, *The Oral History Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed (London: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>2</sup> Luisa Passerini, "Memories between Silence and Oblivion", in *Contested Pasts. The Politics of Memory*, eds. Katherine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (London: Routledge, 2003), 238-54.

<sup>3</sup> Franziska Boehme, "Normative Expectations and the Colonial Past: Apologies and Art Restitution to Former Colonies in France and Germany", *Global Studies Quarterly* 2 (2022): 1-12.

<sup>4</sup> Hobsbawm, Eric and Terrence Ranger, eds., *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

<sup>5</sup> Franziska Boehme, "Normative Expectations and the Colonial Past: Apologies and Art Restitution to Former Colonies in France and Germany", *Global Studies Quarterly* 2 (2022): 1-12.

<sup>6</sup> Rossington, Michael and Anne Whitehead, eds., *Theories of Memory. A Reader* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2007).

<sup>7</sup> Kevin G. Grove, *Augustine on Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

We will, however, look at collective forgetting in the context of this special edition of the *Materiales*. Any history and historiography are bound to have gaps, blind spaces which are not yet well researched. Not everything is always of equal importance. But there are also areas which are vacant for other reasons. If you assume “all swans are white”, you may not have looked far enough. The same problem you have in sports historiography: If you only read the material in your own language, you may not have looked at the results published in another.<sup>8</sup> The chapter by Jörg Schenk in our volume here is a good example: Very few sports historians can read Bulgarian and German. In Germany it was known that the important sports leader Carl Diem did a number of things in Bulgaria in the Nazi period, but not even his four-volume biography is capable of going into detail.<sup>9</sup>

Connerton (2008) list seven kinds of systematic forgetting which we can take as the basis for the gaps in sports historiography and the small attempt to close some in the current volume.<sup>10</sup>

(1) From ancient time onward *damnatio memoriae* was a severe punishment, purging everything that remembers that person, e. g. the GDR purged all records of athletes that fled the country. Winners write history, the stories of the losers are seldom told. In our world with ever present mass media, it does not take a government to purge the memory of a person that had previously been cherished as a star. In our volume the story of Johann Mühlegg is told who changed nationality to compete for Spain, became a symbol for easy integration into his new homeland – was caught for doping and purged from memory. In our volume the chapter by Juan Antonio Simón Sanjurjo breaks the silence and closes this gap.

(2) *Prescriptive forgetting* is included in any statute of limitation. The IOC and the World Anti-Doping Agency have ruled that you should not be persecuted for a doping violation if the case against you has not started within eight years. This prescriptive forgetting has resulted in records by proven doping cheats of the former German Democratic Republic are kept on the record books, as their cases could not be opened within the prescribed eight years.<sup>11</sup> Such rules of ordered forgetting are often part of a peace treaty at the end of wars. The first of such rules seems to have taken place already 403 BC. At the end of the war between Athens and Sparta it was decreed that neither side should remember the atrocities of the war nor blame those that have not taken sides with either warring fraction.<sup>12</sup> An additional temple was constructed on the Acropolis to honour *Lethe*, the goddess of forgetting.<sup>13</sup> This way, the decree to forget was put under divine protection.<sup>14</sup>

(3) *Forgetting that is constitutive in the formation of a new identity* takes place often when one political system is ended and a new one started as in Germany 1945 or in the GDR 1989/90. The same took of course also place in sports. Many (West) German sports administrators and coaches played a similar role in Nazi Germany.<sup>15</sup> The young generation, however, demands answers to shape their own future and avoid the errors of their fathers (and sometimes mothers).<sup>16</sup>

(4) *Structural amnesia*: There is the general tendency to celebrate those traditions which seem important at the time of the celebration. Archival material is only collected for the elements which seem important to the person who collects. From genealogical studies it is known that patrilinear information is collected more frequently in patriarchal societies, while in matriarchal societies

<sup>8</sup> Karl R. Popper, *The logic of scientific discovery* (London: Hutchinson., 1959)

<sup>9</sup> Frank Becker, *Den Sport gestalten: Carl Diems Leben (1882-1962)*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. 4 vols. (Duisburg: Universitätsverlag Rhein-Ruhr, 2019).

<sup>10</sup> Paul Connerton, “Seven Types of Forgetting”, *Memory Studies* 1 (2008): 59-71.

<sup>11</sup> Brigitte Berendonk, *Doping: von der Forschung zum Betrug* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1992).

<sup>12</sup> Jochen Bleicken, *Die athenische Demokratie*, 4<sup>th</sup> ed. (Paderborn: Schöningh, 1995).

<sup>13</sup> Harald Weinrich, *Lethe - Kunst und Kritik des Vergessens* (München: Beck, 2005).

<sup>14</sup> Christian Meier, “Erinnern - Verdrängen - Vergessen“, *Merkur* 570-571 (1996): 937-52.

<sup>15</sup> Arnd Krüger, *Sport und Politik. Vom Turmwater Jahn zum Staatsamateur* (Hannover: Fackelträger, 1975).

<sup>16</sup> Krawatzek, Félix and Nina Frieß, eds., *Youth and memory in Europe: defining the past, shaping the future* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1992).

matrilinear material.<sup>17</sup> Not checking the facts of the content if the information comes from a person or institution of authority is also a problem of structural amnesia.

The largest number of chapters falls into this category in our volume. For a long time, the historiography of women's sports followed the reasoning of Christian Morgenstern: "And thus in his considered view | what did not suit could not be true."<sup>18</sup> It is said, only the strong could survive cruel *La Carrera Panamericana* motor Rallye across Mexico but Jacqueline Evans was as strong as any of the men as Alejandro Avendaño convincingly showed in his chapter. Bruna Rafaela Esporta Fernandes, Edivaldo Gois Junior and Evelise Amgarten Quitzau take us to Brazilian women's football in the 1990s when the machismo world was strong and serious records of women's football scarce.

In a time when homosexuality was legally prohibited, and women's football frowned upon in Franco Spain to research lesbian women footballers is difficult indeed and has to rely heavily on oral history. Dolors Ribalta Alcalde did exactly that. When Jim Riordan and I tried to get a chapter for our book on sport and international politics on homosexuality and sport twenty-five years ago we were unable to find male or female authors as they were afraid to be identified with the subject.<sup>19</sup> A similar problem was encountered by Gil Gonçalves, Andreia Fontenete Louro and Daniel Freire Santos when researching clandestine activities of a Portuguese football club at the time of the dictatorship. If what you are doing is secret to begin with, one has to rely heavily on oral sources and must be extremely careful. As the counterculture won, activities that were ambiguous at the time might turn into acts of resistance later on.

Etienne Penard dealing with Jewish communist workers' sport in France has also to overcome several obstacles. Many of the Jewish workers in Paris spoke and wrote *Yiddish*, a German dialect which was the main means of communication of the Jewish population in Eastern Europe. It is difficult enough to find sources for workers sports<sup>20</sup>, but if you must also master Yiddish that makes it quite a challenge. What makes it even harder is the fact that Yiddish is primarily written in the Hebrew alphabet. As the Zionist Maccabi movement eventually survived, it guarded, of course, primarily material referring to its own tradition – and not of Jewish socialist workers sports.

My own chapter on the 1914 IOC Congress can also be placed in this category: Coubertin is part of the identity of the Olympic Movement, so everything he did and wrote is cherished as part of the foundation myth. Yet Coubertin, just like any other human being, was not only perfect. Here he lost a vote on something that was really important to him, so he manipulated the *official* memory of the 1914 congress. It was, however, a time when the IOC was no longer acting in a small circle of friends but was fully public, transparent, and internationalized. The newspaper accounts – though more difficult to research than the official IOC Minutes – tell a different story from what Coubertin wanted us to believe.

(5) *Forgetting as annulment*: To make structural amnesia even worse, archives have to condense from time to time their holdings for lack of space. Very often sports are considered less important than straight forward political actions, so sports related archivalia that might have been kept in the first place are sorted out and destroyed. Although by now web based archival systems are possible and could avoid such annulment, often sports related material is still not preserved.<sup>21</sup>

(6) *Forgetting as planned obsolescence*: Mobile phones, computers even washing machines have an ever-shorter halftime life. Science produces a huge amount of information which is difficult to follow up. The citation index is measuring how often a paper is quoted in other journals in the first two

<sup>17</sup> Myrian Sepulveda Santos, "Memory and Narrative in Social Theory: The contributions of Jacques Derrida and Walter Benjamin", *Time & Society* 10 (2001): 163-89.

<sup>18</sup> "Also schloß er messerschaft, | dass nicht ist, was nicht sein darf." Christian Morgenstern (2013), "*Palström*". *Sämtliche Gedichte* (Stuttgart: Urachhaus, 2013).

<sup>19</sup> Arnd Krüger, "The homosexual and homoerotic in sports", in *The International Politics of Sport in the Twentieth Century*, eds. James Riordan and Arnd Krüger (London: Routledge 1999), 191-216.

<sup>20</sup> Krüger, Arnd and James Riordan, eds., *The Story of Worker Sport* (Champaign, IL: Human Kinetics, 1994).

<sup>21</sup> Julie M. Still, ed., *Creating Web-Accessible Databases. Case Studies for Libraries, Museums, and other Nonprofits* (Medford, NJ: Information Today, 2001).

years after publication.<sup>22</sup> Older papers are often disregarded unless they are a First for something new. Older sports records are kept, but you want to beat the current record. Coaching methods have to be new. Older methods are often disregarded, although they might contain elements which still serve.<sup>23</sup>

(7) *Forgetting as humiliated silence*: Recent history has seen many wars, concentration camps, war crimes, and unjustified cruelty and torture. The current war in the Ukraine is but one recent example. Collaboration with war criminals has led to the situation that it takes some time before the population is ready and willing to face such a horrible past. Apart from some early texts in 1945/46 it took until 1966 before the first research was published on Nazi sports.<sup>24</sup> Sport historiography in the GDR was a lot faster as they could claim to be the heirs of the people who had suffered exile or extinction.<sup>25</sup> As West Germany staged the 1972 summer Olympics, much of the research about the Nazi Games of 1936 was only printed after the 1972 Games, as the sports organisers wanted to avoid Berlins shadow over Munich.<sup>26</sup> Only 28 years after the end of the world war, an endless stream of publication on Nazi sports has made, this the best researched era in German sports history. There is, of course, the risk that *forgetting as humiliated silence will turn into structural amnesia*, as many records were destroyed from 1945 onward.

There are obviously much more gaps in the historiography of sports. Just as the London Underground keeps reminding you to mind the gap on most stations all the time since 1969, so this volume is supposed to remind you that you should be aware of the gaps in sports historiography, try to find the reasons for it – and help bridging or closing them.

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<sup>22</sup> Edward Winter, “Sport and Exercise Science: Just how new Is new?”, *Journal of Sports Sciences* 12 (2008): 1247-48.

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<sup>25</sup> Lothar Skorning, *Kürzer Abriss der Geschichte der Körperkultur in Deutschland seit 1800* (Berlin: Sportverlag, 1952).

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