Petr Roubal

Spartakiads

The Politics of Physical Culture in Communist Czechoslovakia

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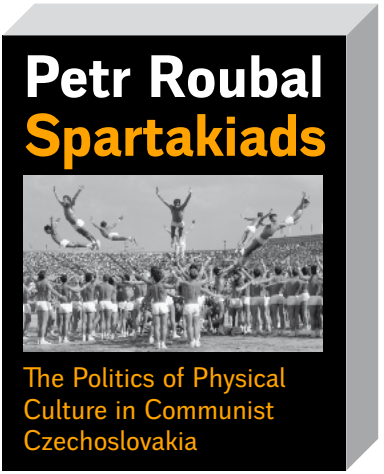

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PREFACE

The concrete structure of the largest stadium in the world sits on a hill in Prague. Every five years from 1955 to 1985, two hundred thousand spectators, including prominent guests such as Tristan Tzara, Fernand Leger, Raul Castro, and Juan Antonio Samaranch, would watch from the stands an enormous mass spectacle unrivaled in magnitude the world over. The actors in this theater were gymnasts whose synchronized movements were meant to create the new language of a new society and provide an answer to the fundamental question of state socialism: What is a socialist people and what is their will?

All six of these spectacles known as "Spartakiads" took up only a few days over the course of the forty years of communist reign, yet we can hardly overstate their significance. Spartakiads were the most important communist ritual that best captured and literally embodied the new regime's ambition to create a new person and new society – the objective here was nothing less than the embodiment of communism. In 1955, renowned Czech poet Vítězslav Nezval celebrated Spartakiads as a prefiguration of the future communist society: "If a thousand people can on a single command, / a thousand, upon a thousand people, who don't know each other,/ don't know each others' names, don't know, didn't know each other, / if they can on a single command create a garden patch, / there's no reason, sister, there's no reason, brother, / there's no reason to despair, my friend, my comrade, / over that which gave us our most challenging tomorrow."[1] The vast funding that the party and state administration was willing to spend on this venture (between a half billion and one billion Czechoslovak crowns of that period for a single Spartakiad) attests to the importance that they attributed to

1 Nezval, Vítězslav: "Sborový zpěv". *Nový život*, 1955, vol. 7, n. 9, pp. 893–896.

it. Spartakiads were also ambitious art projects bringing together, in a real *Gesamtkunstwerk* spirit, a broad range of artistic spheres: from music and choreography, to film and architecture, to design and literature (along with the aforementioned poet Nezval, other renowned figures taking part in Spartakiad projects included painter and illustrator Karel Svolinský, architect Jiří Kroha, dancer Milča Mayerová, writers Ota Pavel and Arnošt Lustig, and cinematographer Jan Špáta).

Spartakiads impacted society's everyday life in a way that no other political ritual, such as elections (voting dates were actually postponed due to Spartakiads) or May Day parades, could compare. Throughout the school year leading up to a Spartakiad performance, a million participants from the ages of twenty months to eighty years would train several times a week, and in Prague schools the school year would end early to accommodate Spartakiads. Scarce goods could be bought in Prague when Spartakiads were being held, though such goods would then understandably be even more difficult to find elsewhere and at other times. Spartakiads rhythmically arranged the lives of many Czechoslovaks, as attested to by the writer Ladislav Fuks who viewed Spartakiads as "milestones of sorts" people who "counted their own lives in terms of Spartakiad years, […] wondering if they'd live to see the next Spartakiad or even the one after that."[2] People were humming Spartakiad musical hits such as *Poupata* (Buds) for years after the event had ended. They dreamed about Spartakiads, many friendships and romances began at Spartakiads, and even more than one life was conceived there (though not to the extent that the urban myth claimed) and, though rarely, people died there.[3]

It is not the aim of this study to cover all themes opened by the Spartakiads. Instead, four fundamental questions will be examined: Where did Spartakiads as a cultural and political phenomenon

2 Fuks, Ladislav: "O spartakiádě trochu jinak". *Rudé právo*, vol. 60, 2. 7. 1980, p. 5.
3 Dryje, František: "Sen o spartakiádě, 26. 8. 80". *Analogon*, 1996, vol. 8, n. 16, p. 44.

emerge from? What was their core message, or what was being said through Spartakiads? How were their logistics organized? How did the public react to the Spartakiads? The answers to these questions form the individual chapters of this book with the exception of the second question, whose response requires two separate chapters since Spartakiads symbolized one thing for people in the 1950s and something else for people after the Prague Spring of 1968.

The predecessors of Spartakiads, the German *Turnfests* followed by the Sokol *Slets* (in Czech a *sokol* is a falcon and a *slet* is a gathering of falcons), played a crucial role in depicting the imagined community of the German or Czech nation, understood as organic communities (*Volk*). The image of aligned rows of thousands of gymnasts, which we first encounter in German cities in the 1860s, was to compensate for the lack of uniform and deeply rooted national institutions. The further development of mass gymnastic performances, which soon became one of the primary means of political representation regardless of national or political borders, supports the notion that the human body is an ideological variable.[4] Thomas Garrigue Masaryk, who later became the first Czechoslovak president, scoffed at members of the Czech Sokol community for their flag-waving Slavism that he felt slavishly imitated the German Turners. That they did so under the leadership of "Sudeten" Germans Miroslav Tyrš and Jindřich Fügner was yet another point of ridicule. Yet the imitation did not end there. In the hopes of forging "synchronized Slavism" the Czech Sokols spread Turner gymnastics to other Slavic countries. Towards the close of the 19th century, social democrats also seized upon synchronized exercises: instead of the collective body of the nation, its participants displayed class solidarity. Following split in the workers' sports movement, communist participants also embodied the revolutionary aspirations of the proletariat at the first Spartakiad in 1921. The image of the synchronized movement

4 Hoberman, John M.: *Sport and Political Ideology.* University of Texas, Austin 1984, p. 53.

of male (and since the early 20th century also female) bodies evoked several fundamental political themes that were crucial for both nationalist and leftist movements: the subordination of individual will to collectivity, the aestheticizing of discipline (if it is beautiful, it must also be good), collective will, commitment to defense, faith in the rationalization of society and progress (for instance, the communists adopted Tyrš's motto: "Forward! Not one step back! (*Kupředu, zpátky ni krok!*)."

The synchronized movements of the participants represented a visual political strategy by which a mass of human bodies creates the image of the nation's or people's single collective political body. The Turner and Sokol adherents certainly were not the first to make use of this impressive metaphor. The title page for Hobbes's *Leviathan* published in 1651 shows a crowned sovereign, whose body consists of a dense mass of individuals of both sexes, towering over the landscape. Having directly contributed to the creation of this image, Hobbes visualized here his social contract theory.[5] The individuals depicted are renouncing the right to live their solitary, miserable, nasty, cruel and short lives in an everyone-for-themselves war, and are forming a single collective political body of the state – a Leviathan. Since the mid-17th century when this political metaphor first appeared, the theme of the transformation of a mass of individuals into a single symbolic body has been incorporated into the repertoire of modern political regimes with a gradual shift in emphasis from the concept of the state to the concept of the nation and people. Spartakiad's representation of the communist proletariat was part of this tradition, but also significantly changed it. The communist "working people", that is to say, had the Janus face of an "obedient sovereign": The people were understandably the highest authority in a people's democracy ("all power belongs to the people"), but

5 Cf. Bredekamp, Horst: *Thomas Hobbes Der Leviathan. Das Urbild des modernen Staates und seine Gegenbilder. 1651–2001.* Akademie Verlag, Berlin 2003.

the decision of to whom, when and why was that of the communist party adhering to Marxist laws of historical development.[6] This theory held that the people themselves are not capable of thinking and acting; the people only know (as in the popular phrase "our people know well") and they express what is on their mind through publicly articulated consent with the party's policies. The image of a perfectly disciplined mass of Spartakiad participants, apparently not taking orders from anyone, managed to capture this antithetical nature of the communist people as an "obedient sovereign" much better than other political rituals. *Obrana lidu*, the daily of the Czechoslovak army, wrote that this was how Spartakiads were to demonstrate that the people of Czechoslovakia "stand unwaveringly behind the Communist Party, behind their National Front government, that they enjoy carrying out their bold and elaborate plans."[7]

The means by which Spartakiads embodied the working people radically changed over the course of communist rule. The first Spartakiad in 1955 presented in its various mass gymnastic pieces the people as a perfect mechanism composed of distinct social and professional groups with a clearly defined task. Participants assumed the symbolic form of workers, farmers or proletarian intelligentsia and only together did they provide a complete testimony about the socialist people. All easily interchangeable symbolic elements formed distinctly defined components of the total mechanism "in our enormous socialist workshop."[8] The symbolism of the mechanism was explicitly developed by the most successful performance of the first Spartakiad entitled *A New Shift Begins*, at the end of which the participants formed with their bodies the image of several huge turning cogwheels. In contrast to previous Sokol practices, the body and its movements were also subordinate to this mechanical logic.

6 Fidelius, Petr: *Řeč komunistické moci*. Triáda, Prague 1998. The people thus resemble the fish from Emir Kusturica's film *Arizona Dream*: The people don't think, the people know.

7 "Krása i zbraň". *Obrana lidu*, vol. 14, 2. 7. 1955, p. 1.

8 "Květiny bílé po cestě…". *Rudé právo*, vol. 35, 3. 7. 1955, p. 2.

The participants' bodies were materials for the creation of various words and symbols; their movement was then intended to depict a wide range of work activities.

In contrast to this, later Spartakiads, especially the three that fell within the "normalization" period, i.e. the consolidation period that followed the Soviet led intervention against the Prague Spring in 1968 and lasted till 1989, largely returned to the Sokol representation of the people as an organism.[9] The symbolic elements were no longer mechanically arranged one after another, but the symbolism of the individual compositions – a happy childhood, the beauty of a woman's body, male courage – together created a firm and self-enveloped "organic" whole. If the symbol of the first Spartakiad consisted of a gear made up of the participants' bodies, the Spartakiads during the normalization period were best encapsulated by parents (mothers) performing mass gymnastic routines with three- to six-year-old children that referred to the "unchanging" world of the nature and family. The mass choreography was also altered: instead of symbols and letters, the participants used their bodies to create simple abstract compositions of regular geometrical formations (one of the creators of the cancelled 1990 Spartakiad even suggested using Piet Mondrian's abstract paintings for the choreography).[10]

These changes did not merely lead to a simple return to the Sokol tradition; the creators and sponsors of normalization Spartakiads also attempted to find the lowest common denominator between the ruling power and the public at large and to eliminate all disruptive elements (e.g. the traditional Soviet flag disappeared from Spartakiads during normalization). It essentially consisted of a strange

9 For a general discussion of the term "normalization" in Eastern Europe see Fulbrook, Mary. "The Concept of "Normalisation" and the GDR in Comparative Perspective." In: Mary Fulbrook (ed.): *Power and Society in the GDR, 1961–1979. The "Normalisation of Rule"?* Berghahn Books, New York, Oxford 2009.

10 Belšan, Pavel: "Choreografie a funkce náčiní, nářadí a režijních prostředků ve skladbách ČSS". In: *Sborník ze semináře FTVS UK Praha k problematice hromadných vystoupení Československé spartakiády.* Metasport, Ostrava 1986, p. 56.

type of dialogue in which the side holding all the power tried to find symbols and meanings acceptable for the ritual's consumers. The prevailing view among scholars is that the communist rituals gradually became stale and turned into tedious duty. As explored in the fourth chapter, the Spartakiads' development instead went in the opposite direction, becoming an effective and consensual ritual. Yet their success also raises the question of whether they could still be considered a *communist* ritual.

Considering the scale and complexity of the Spartakiads, another question that arises is how such a spectacle could have been organized by the notoriously inefficient communist bureaucracy. The explanation is not overly complex: despite the assurance of the journal *Literární noviny* that Spartakiads were "not merely an altered form of the Sokol Slets," they were in fact just that.[11] In terms of organization, the Slets and Spartakiads shared a continuity that might even be considered smooth. Spartakiads were held at the Sokol Slet stadium built in 1926 and which more or less remained unchanged from the time of the final Sokol Slet until the 1970s. They followed up on the Sokol routines of simple physical exercises and the organizational network of Sokol clubs. Most importantly much of their success is owed to the professional expertise of former Sokol officials and authors of the mass gymnastic routines for the Slets, whose agenda gradually took over the specialized discourse on mass gymnastics. These individuals saw in state socialism the chance to implement the old slogan "Every Czech a Sokol!" (*Co Čech, to sokol*) through funding and political support that the new regime provided, while another part of the same Sokol subculture was serving long prison terms or seeking a new identity abroad in exile. Though the Communist Party gained a political ritual that legitimized their totalitarian ambitions, it came at the price that it provided or directly created a considerable autonomous space for former Sokol members to decide not

11 Frýd, Norbert: "Jsme bohatší". *Literární noviny,* 1955, vol. 4, n. 28, p. 1.

only highly specialized matters, but also those of a conceptual nature. In addition to the involvement of former Sokol members, the almost absurd generosity of state institutions was responsible for the success of Spartakiads, which became part of the "moral economy" of state socialism, a kind of symbolic exchange of gifts between the Party and the people, whereby less lofty aspects such as financial calculations were disregarded. As the authors Ota Pavel and Arnošt Lustig wrote in 1965, the Spartakiad was "a gift to the republic to commemorate its twentieth anniversary and also a gift by the republic to all of its children."[12]

The general public's reaction to Spartakiads was characterized by a broad pallet of attitudes – from open resistance of those trying to prevent Spartakiads or ridiculing them (e.g., the famous animated filmmaker Jan Švankmajer combined Spartakiad photographs with illustrations from the books of the Marquis de Sade) to enthusiastic acceptance mainly by former Sokol members and their descendents. The most common reaction by far was the attempt to "use" Spartakiads to consume everything that the regime offered in its efforts to organize a successful ritual. Perhaps we could best describe this approach in employing the term *Eigensinn*, or obstinate willfulness, which describes a tactic of the oppressed. Such people tolerate the strategy of the ruling power to the extent that is necessary, but also pursue their own objectives as far as the ruling power allows.[13] Though the party was able, with the help of Sokol specialists, to

12 Lustig, Arnošt – Ota, Pavel: "Úvod, k němuž jsme nechtěli hledat název". In: Vladimír Dobrovodský (ed.): *III. celostátní spartakiáda 1965*. Sportovní a turistické nakladatelství, Prague 1966, unpagin.

13 Alf Lüdtke came up with this term and originally used it to describe the power relations in Prussia in the first half of the 19th century, though he also applied it in his later works to Nazism and communism.. See Lüdtke, Alf: "The Role of State Violence in the Period of Transition to Industrial Capitalism. The Example of Prussia from 1815 to 1848". *Social History*, 1979, vol. 4, n. 2, pp. 175–221; Lüdtke, Alf: *Eigen-Sinn. Fabrikalltag, Arbeitererfahrungen und Politik vom Kaiserreich bis in den Faschismus*. Ergebnisse, Hamburg 1993; Lüdtke, Alf: "'… den Menschen vergessen'? – oder: Das Maß der Sicherheit. Arbeiterverhalten der 1950er Jahre im Blick von MfS, SED, FDGB und staatlichen Leitungen". In: Alf Lüdtke – Peter Becker (eds.): *Akten, Eingaben,*

create a picture of a perfectly "legible and obedient" mass on the field of Strahov Stadium, outside the stadium gates it could only helplessly watch as society appropriated Spartakiads and adapted them to its needs.

In this light, the Spartakiad example backs the theories of Malte Rolf, Karen Petrone and other scholars on Soviet rituals. In their view, Soviet rituals were usually not just boring ceremonies that viewers merely had to endure, but instead resembled folk celebrations or even, as Malte Rolf characterized them, *a rausch* or "a collective frenzy."[14] Soviet society integrated them into its everyday life; the rituals gave structure to the collective memory, experience and expectations along similar lines. There thus occurred a kind of self-sovietization, i.e. an adaptation to the new Soviet worldview with its specific perception of time and space. Society could understand the rituals as meaningful, could actively take part in them and remember and look forward to them, but this did not at all mean that it also assumed the official standards of behavior or the official discourse. Instead, these regime-organized rituals formed a frame that society filled with its own festivity, often based on traditional, religious models. Yet these various forms of adaptation, appropriation and hybridization of a socialistic ritual did not at all weaken, but strengthened them. Their adaptation to society's needs ensured that these official cultural practices penetrated the people's lives.[15]

Nevertheless, Spartakiads occupy a somewhat specific place in terms of society's involvement in socialist rituals. On the one hand it may seem that they created a very insignificant space for

Schaufenster – Die DDR und ihre Texte. Erkundungen zu Herrschaft und Alltag. Akademie Verlag, Berlin 1997, pp. 189–222.

14 Rolf, Malte: *Das sowjetische Massenfest*. Hamburger Edition, Hamburg 2006, p. 243; See also Klimó, Árpád – Rolf, Malte: "Rausch und Diktatur". *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft*, 2003, vol. 51, n. 10, pp. 877–895.

15 Binns, Christopher A. P.: "The Changing Face of Power. Revolution and Accommodation in the Development of the Soviet Ceremonial System I., II.". *Man (New Series)*, 1979, vol. 14, n. 4, pp. 585–606; 1980, vol. 15, n. 1, pp. 170–187.

negotiations and non-conformist views. Each gymnast had his precisely defined space and predefined task; his movement could be analyzed and even retroactively corrected. It was a case of either performing the task or failing to: the participant either stood on his mark and performed correctly or he didn't. In fact, the opposite was true. Spartakiads required extensive preparations of relatively stable social groups with their own social dynamics, including rehearsals in Prague that would last several days. Unlike the May Day parades, there was much space outside the performance itself for autonomous forms of celebrations. It could even be said that, more than a hybridization of a ritual, what occurred was a carnival-like inversion of values, as Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin refers to it.[16] The conduct of participants before and after the actual performance could be described as anything but the picture-perfect discipline that the participants' bodies displayed during the mass gymnastic routines. In contrast to other socialist rituals, we also find a certain difference in terms of content. The symbolism of the Spartakiads focused much more than, say, the May Day parades on the human body with its semantic ambivalence and multivalence, which (along with the Sokol connotations) allowed the participants to interpret the ritual how they wished. Spartakiad symbolism enabled the involvement of many people who would have otherwise rejected the communist ritual. Yet this kind of inclusive ritual was the very objective of the political powers.

It should be pointed out here that this study is not a comparison of the Czechoslovak Spartakiad within the broader context of the ritual practices of Eastern Bloc countries. We would find throughout the Eastern Bloc a very similar picture of the synchronization of gymnasts and their use as a specific political medium. From a comparative perspective, perhaps the most interesting would be the Soviet, East German, and Yugoslavia mass-gymnastic performances

16 Bakhtin, Mikhail M.: *Rabelais and His World*. Indiana UP, Bloomington 1984.

which, like Spartakiads, made use of the fact that, unlike other symbols such as flags and emblems, the human body could much better represent the trans-national, or in the case of East Germany, the "semi-national" collective.

In Soviet Moscow, mass gymnastic displays already began appearing in the 1920s as part of the program of a broad range of parades on Red Square. During a short intermission of a procession or directly while they were marching, athletes would use their bodies to create various words or symbols, or would present the individual types of sports in a creative manner, as attested to by the superb photographs of Alexander Rodchenko.[17]

These performances, significantly influenced by the strong Russian and Soviet tradition of circus acrobatics, largely appeared in Soviet stadiums only after the Second World War and mainly as opening and final ceremonies of the All-Union sporting events. It was also here shortly after the war that a specific genre of mass choreography in the form of "living signs" composed of spectators in the stands was conceived. As described by Mikhail D. Segal, a leading theoretician of Soviet athletic rituals, this practice originally developed as a reaction to the specific practical problem that spectators in a stadium, unlike those in the stands on Red Square, dressed arbitrarily according to their own taste, thereby "disturbing the overall color composition."[18] There was then just a small step from the attempt at having spectators wear the same color to having them form words and symbols. Organizers of the East German mass gymnastic performances in Leipzig, which otherwise followed up on the tradition of the Turnfests, copied and even improved this

17 Cf. Lavrentiev, Aleksandr Nikolajevich: *Alexander Rodchenko. Fotografii*. Planeta, Moscow 1987.
18 Segal, Mikhail D.: *Fizkulturnoie prazdniki i zrelishcha*. Fizkul'tura i sport, Moscow 1977, pp. 20–21; See Edelman, Robert: *Serious fun. A history of spectator sports in the USSR*. Oxford University Press, New York 1993. We come across simple messages spelled out by the spectators' bodies even earlier in stadiums of fascist Italy and Nazi Germany.

Soviet practice in a newly built stadium with a capacity of 100,000 people.[19]

Following several weeks of practice, twelve thousand spectators-cum-participants in the eastern stands of Leipzig Stadium used different colored paper signs to create rapidly changing words and symbols. Of all the Eastern Bloc rituals, the Leipzig Turnfests most resembled in character the Czechoslovak Spartakiads. Yet the Leipzig mass gymnastic festivals did not play such an important role in the East German political system, which is clear from the fact that they were held in Leipzig and irregularly. East Germany's world-class sports in particular and its major international success assumed the role there of "embodying" the national community.

Yugoslavian mass gymnastic performances were linked to the strong Sokol tradition in the individual republics. The most important events were held at the Yugoslavian People's Army Stadium as part of the annual celebrations of Youth Day (*Dan mladosti*) on May 25th, which also celebrated the birthday of Josip Broz Tito.[20] The cult of youth was directly wedded here with the cult of the leader, even after Tito's death. A celebration of the leader, even if dead, as the primary motif of Youth Day, represents the main difference when compared to the Czechoslovak Spartakiads, whose objective was to present the people as the highest authority and were implicitly defined against the cult of the leader.

Although this book does not have overly extensive theoretical ambitions, it is not completely void of theory. It has been rather heavily inspired by Clifford Geertz's understanding of rituals as elaborate discussions on the nature of power, which makes this power

19 Rodekamp, Volker (ed.): *Sport: Schau. Deutsche Turnfeste 1860–2002*. Stadtgeschichtliches Museum Leipzig, Leipzig 2002; Johnson, Molly Wilkinson: *Training Socialist Citizens. Sports and the State in East Germany*. Brill Academic Publishers, Leiden 2008.

20 Grigorov, Dimitar: "'Druže Tito, mi ti se kunemo.' Ritual and Political Power in Yugoslavia. Tito's Birthday Celebrations (1945–1987)". In: Joaquim Carvalho (ed.): *Religion, Ritual and Mythology. Aspects of Identity Formation in Europe*. Pisa University Press, Pisa 2006, pp. 275–292.

tangible and effective.[21] In this light, ritual does not merely serve as a political tool rendering ideological principles accessible to the masses, possibly covering the contradiction between ideology and social reality, but also creates its own autonomous political realm. This independence of the ritual from the political power leads to the perceived effect in which, as Geertz described it, the ritual does not serve the political power, but the power serves the ritual.[22] The symbolism of the ritual can be viewed as a text whose comprehension does not depend on a revelation of the hidden intentions of the ritual's sponsors. It is enough just to read it, or possibly translate or decipher it. Just as we do not need to see into the head of the ritual's sponsors, it is also not imperative for us to know what took place in the private worlds of individuals for the sake of creating legitimacy: what is important is the display (in this case it is physical) of consent in the public sphere. This book also draws on cultural anthropology's view of the human body as a key symbol that, owing to its symmetry and multivocality, can be a metaphor for the entire political community.[23] Ownership of the body itself is part of the very foundation of liberal political theory and forms the individual's autonomy that Canetti poetically expressed by comparing it to a windmill keeping everyone else at bay.[24] Mass gymnastic performances deliberately and explicitly attack the autonomy of an individual's body, creating an aesthetic and political shock through this denial of corporeality.

21 Geertz, Clifford: *Negara. The Theatre State in Nineteenth-Century Bali*. Princeton University Press, Princeton 1983, p. 102 and 124. See Bell, Catherine: *Ritual. Perspectives and Dimensions*. Oxford University Press, Oxford 2009, p. 129.

22 Geertz, C.: *Negara*, p. 13. In his analysis of the symbolic policy of the later Roman Empire, which he explicitly compares to the practices of state socialism, Paul Veyne similarly opposes a functionalist understanding of rituals when he writes that the emperors "did not provide *euergesiai* in order to gain and maintain power, but because they had it." Veyne, Paul: *Bread and Circuses. Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism*. Penguin Books, London 1992, p. 261.

23 Douglas, Mary: *Purity and Danger. An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo*. Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1978; Turner, Victor W.: *The Forest of Symbols. Aspects of Ndembu Ritual*. Cornell University Press, Ithaca 1967.

24 Canetti, Elias: *Crowds and Power*. The Viking Press, New York 1962, p. 17.

Finally, it should be noted that this study does not perceive the communist regime as totalitarian. Should this term appear here, it is describing the notion of some historical players rather than social reality. The dystopian visions of Hannah Arendt's totalitarianism aptly characterize the ambitions of communist leaders (at least for the first half of the 1950s) who undoubtedly wanted to achieve total control over society, or at least create such an impression (e.g., through the image of perfectly aligned rows of Spartakiad participants). The concept of totalitarianism as a description of social reality is inapplicable, as several decades of revisionist historiography of state socialism has already shown.[25] Society under communism may have been "communist," but it certainly remained a society in the sense that it continued to be made up of a complex of contradictory social interests and groups, from which each created its own "communism," i.e. its own *modus vivendi* with the dictatorial power of the communist party, often at the expense of other social groups.

25 See for instance Fitzpatrick, Sheila (ed.): *Stalinism. New Directions.* Routledge, London 1999; Jarausch, Konrad (ed.): *Dictatorship as Experience. Toward a Socio-Cultural History of the GDR*. Berghahn Books, New York – Oxford 1999.

A Genealogy of the Spartakiads

The idea behind the communist mass gymnastic performances stems from 19th-century nationalist movements that aspired to forge the image of a perfect national community unified under a single will. Yet as a specific form of interaction between the human body and political power, their genealogy stretches back further, all the way to the disciplinary projects of (early) modern times whose objective was – as Michel Foucault describes them – the subordination of the body and its more efficient economic use. In addition to other physical displays such as working, hygiene, eating or sex, sports and physical exercises were also subordinated to this "political economy of the body." Two disciplinary techniques are essential for the genealogy of Spartakiads: political anatomy and social geometry. Foucault defines political anatomy as the way political power subjects the human body to a detailed inspection and manipulation, in which it is "examined, disassembled and reassembled" in order to gain the utmost control over it.[26] Society is then exposed to one other discipline that could be called "social geometry". This redraws traditional or random social bonds and replaces them with the regular distribution of bodies in a perfectly arranged grid. The disciplinary power, in Foucault's words, "manufactures" individuals: it "'trains' the moving, confused, useless multitudes of bodies and forces them into a multiplicity of individual elements – small separated cells, organic autonomies, of genetic identities and continuities, combinatory segments." Both techniques are instruments of power and science through which the body and society are studied as well as controlled. Visibility and a clear arrangement make up a key aspect of the disciplinary project: human bodies are exposed to the gaze of power, whether real or alleged, through which they become "perfectly legible".[27]

26 Foucault, Michel: *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*. Knopf Doubleday, New York, p. 170.
27 Ibid, p. 145.

Of all the disciplinary techniques of this early modern project, mass gymnastic exercises were derived more than anything else from military drills as refined over the centuries. These drills gradually created a specific understanding of the body as perfect parts of a killing machine. The methods applied in this death production predated American Frederick Taylor's "scientific management" by nearly three hundred years.[28] Control over human movement was achieved by reducing it to a few dozen acts that were precisely defined and described (or drawn) in military manuals. This political anatomy, through which the body and weapon were united, was supplemented by a social geometry in which a uniform time (using drumbeats) and a uniform space (the regular arrangement of bodies on the exercising grounds and ideally also on the battlefield) was created. The military manuals were usually a military secret, and as such were printed in very few copies: the exact movements had to be "inscribed" or, rather, "copied" directly into the bodies of the military recruits.[29]

As Ulrich Bröckling has shown, under absolute monarchy the battles were won by the militaries that managed to best maintain control over their troops. This is why military manuals focused such little attention on the accuracy of shooting and more on shortening the interval between salvos and the synchronization of shots so that it would sound as much as possible like a single shot (for instance, in his military manual from the early 17th century Johann Jacobi von Wallhausen did not list "aiming" among the 32 movements that a soldier should make between his individual shots).[30] After the first shot, the soldiers were anyway shrouded in thick smoke and they

28 Doorn, Jacques van: "Militärische und industrielle Organisation". In: Joachim Matthes (ed.): *Soziologie und Gesellschaft in den Niederlanden*. Neuwied, Berlin 1965, pp. 276–300.
29 In the case of Prussia, there also occurred a direct "physical" connection with the political center since the Prussian King Frederick William I and his son Frederick William II personally wrote the military manuals. Cf. Bröckling, Ulrich: *Disziplin. Soziologie und Geschichte militärischer Gehorsamsproduktion.* Wilhelm Fink Verlag, München 1997.
30 Wallhausen, Johann Jacobi von: *Kriegskunst zu Fuss*. Oppenheim 1615.

would lose sight of the enemy line. Of high importance was the visibility of their own troops dressed in colorful uniforms so that they resembled "ornate birds" and could be controlled.[31] The objective of military drills during early modern times was not so much the subjugation of the enemy as the subjugation of the body of a side's own troops. This was less about killing technology and more about getting-killed technology.

The affinity between the production of a healthy body in gymnastic exercises and the production of death in military drills was also noticed by Horkheimer and Adorno in their *Dialectics of Enlightenment*: "Those who extolled the body in Germany, the gymnasts and outdoor sports enthusiasts, always had an intimate affinity to killing, as nature lovers have to hunting. They see the body as a mobile mechanism, with its hinged links, the flesh upholstering the skeleton. They manipulate the body, actuating the limbs as if they were already severed. The Jewish tradition instills an aversion to measuring human beings with a yardstick, because the dead are measured – for the coffin."[32]

31 Frie, Ewald: "Militärische Massenrituale". In: Michael Krüger (ed.): *Der deutsche Sport auf dem Weg in die Moderne. Carl Diem und seine Zeit.* LIT, Berlin 2009, p. 64. Bröckling wrote that absolute monarchies waged war as a strategic game and relied on the fact that the generals on the other side would observe the same rules that – since they shared the same social-economic organization – they had to observe. If the military of absolute monarchies clashed with a different socio-economic organization and different "political technology of the body" such as in the Battle of Valmy, perfect control over the bodies of their own units was not enough to win.

32 Adorno, Theodor W. – Horkheimer, Max: *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophic Fragments*, edited by Gunzelin Shmid Noerr, translated by Edmund Jephcott. Stanford University Press, Stanford 2002, p. 216.

IDEOLOGY OF THE ORGANICISM AND BEGINNINGS OF THE MASS GYMNASTIC PERFORMANCES

The 19th-century nationalist gymnastic movements were the immediate predecessors of communist mass gymnastic performances in Central and Eastern Europe, a fact that the communist organizers never tired of stressing. They often arose as a reaction to a military defeat.[33] Military failures in the Napoleonic Wars led part of the Prussian elite to try to reform military and civilian institutions. The "nationally awakened" intelligentsia, which absorbed universalistic intellectual stimuli of the Enlightenment and French Revolution, including a new view of the "natural" human body and its movements, became involved in the reforms. It also assumed, as George Mosse pointed out, an enlightened theory of the people and the revolutionary practice of political rituals that were to "embody" this theory and provide tangible proof of a *volonté générale*.[34] Yet in the spirit of Romanticism it adapted these stimuli to the needs of a new national community (the *Volk*), i.e. a spiritual, rather than a political union based on, in the words of Isaiah Berlin, an "ideology of organicism."[35] In the absence of a united state and its institutions, national endeavors were aimed at creating the image of a united national organism – tending to its roots in the national past understood as the past of the "tribe" and not the past of institutions,

33 In addition to the Prussian or German Turner movement, this also applies for the competing Swedish Ling's gymnastic system that reacted to the loss of Finland, or for the Danish movement, which was a response to the later defeat to Prussia. Cf. Ljunggren, Jens: "The Masculine Road through Modernity. Ling Gymnastics and Male Socialization in Nineteenth-Century Sweden". In: James A. Mangan (ed.): *Making European Masculinities. Sport, Europe, Gender.* Routledge, London 2013, pp. 86–111; Eichberg, Henning: "Body culture and democratic nationalism. 'Popular gymnastics' in nineteenth-century Denmark". *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 1995, vol. 12, n. 2, pp. 108–124.

34 Mosse, George L.: *The Nationalisation of the Masses. Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany from the Napoleonic Wars through the Third Reich.* Cornell University Press, New York 1975, p. 2.

35 Berlin, Isaiah: *Der Nationalismus*. Hain, Bodenheim 1990.

overseeing its growth (not limited by state borders) and protecting it and immunizing it from "foreign" influences and from a seemingly endless line of national enemies.

The Prussian educator Friedrich Ludwig Jahn took up the strategically important task of democratizing gymnastics, which until then had been practiced almost exclusively only in aristocratic circles.[36] In terms of temperament – he was always disheveled and repeatedly expelled from his studies due to debts and acts of violence – Jahn was an unlikely founder of a movement that a few decades later was to produce images of perfect discipline.[37] The fruits of his intellectual labors were also undisciplined: his unsystematic and unoriginal writings, particularly the book entitled *Deutches Volkstum*, were filled with outbursts of hatred against all enemies of the German nation, such as Poles, French, priests, nobles and, above all, Jews. In Jahn's view, all of these people constituted a threat to the purity of the German people: "The purer the nation, the better; the more mixed, the worse […] Inferior nations and inferior languages must disappear or be exterminated."[38] Marriage to a foreigner was, in Jahn's eyes, "the mere copulation of animals" and a betrayal of one's country.[39] Elsewhere he states that the German people need a war to realize their own essence and that a wilderness zone guarded by

36 In terms of gymnastics development, the Turner exercises did not represent any significant innovation – they predominantly consisted of an adaptation of health-science and pedagogical experiments of so-called philanthropists, particularly of Gutsmuths. They did, however, transform exercising into a political tool meant to create an able-bodied national community and, at the time of the Napoleonic reign, enhance the morale and physical capabilities of German men.

37 Jahn had long, ungroomed hair, a beard down to his chest, and his relationship to cleanliness was such that his contemporaries, in viewing his muddy boots, asked "whether that was part of his normal appearance or if he had deliberately attempted to soil them as much as possible, just as others tried so hard to keep them tidy." Eisenberg, Christiane: "Charismatic National Leader Turnvater Jahn". *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 1996, vol. 13, n. 1, p. 22.

38 Quoted from Weber, Wolfgang – Black, Paula: "Muscular Anschluss. German Bodies and Austrian Imitators". In: James A. Mangan (ed.): *Superman supreme. Fascist body as political icon – global fascism.* Frank Cass, London 2000, p. 63.

39 Ueberhorst, Horst: *Friedrich Ludwig Jahn and His Time: 1778–1852.* Moos, Munich 1982, p. 114.

hungry wolves and bears needed to be created on the borders of the future unified Germany (which was to include, in addition to Austria, also Denmark and the Netherlands).[40] In his radicalism and charisma, Jahn attracted the awakening nationalist movement that was gaining particular momentum at German universities; he also had a considerable knack for acquiring funding from the Prussian throne for both himself and his supporters.[41]

Jahn began systematic "patriotic exercises" with Berlin students on specially prepared training grounds of the Prussian army outside the city walls in 1811. These events, which were soon attended by hundreds of students, became a popular spectacle for Berlin society and inspired the establishment of many other Turner clubs in Prussia and later in other German states as well. Turner exercises became a fixed part of the curriculum of Prussian schools; Jahn and many of his students held important posts in the school system and in other state institutions. Yet the rapid spreading of the Turner movement did not last long. After Turner member Karl L. Sand stabbed to death the conservative playwright August von Kotzebue (two years earlier at a gathering in Wartburg, Turner students had burned his writings), Turner clubs and later gymnastic exercises as such were banned. Jahn and many other trainers then spent a number of years in prison.[42]

After his release from prison, Jahn no longer wielded much influence on the Turner movement, which following the defeat of the revolution in 1848 was taken strongly in tow by the Prussian military. However, his legacy fundamentally formed in several regards the movement's further development. As a self-taught linguist, Jahn

40 Ibid.

41 Eisenberg, Ch.: "Charismatic National Leader".

42 In 1848, many radical-liberal Turners took part in the revolution and, following its defeat, emigrated to the USA where they played an important role in the development of sports and civic society. Cf. Ueberhorst, Horst: *Turner unterm Sternenbanner. Der Kampf der deutsch-amerikanischen Turner für Einheit, Freiheit und soziale Gerechtigkeit 1848 bis 1918*. Heinz Moos Verlag, Munich 1978.

created special German gymnastic terminology and even came up with the very term *turner*, derived from *torner* in the mistaken belief that it was an old Germanic word meaning "warrior." Jahn and his colleagues then formed from that root dozens of terms such as *Turnplatz*, *Turnverein*, *Turnlehrer* and *Turnerkreuz* (the symbol of the Turner movement consisted of four letters "F" arranged in a cross shape[43]). Turner members then created their own lingo, *Turnsprache*, whose perfection was the responsibility of a special group of experts, the *Turnkünstlerrat*. The compilation of new gymnastic terminology was motivated partly by linguistic purism, which had become an obsession for Jahn, and partly by an attempt to conceal the aristocratic, or courtly origin of many of the new favorite exercises, such as balancing or exercises on pommel horses. The original terminology also gave the impression of a new and exclusive society. The democratic addressing of a person with *Du* instead of *Sie*, the introduction of the informal greeting *Heil* and the simple uniform attire made of unbleached linen were all directed toward the same goal, i.e. the creation of a "horizontal community."

Jahn also founded the tradition of public gymnastic performances by Turner members, the *Turnfests*, even though these festivals hardly resembled the "classic" Turnfests of the latter third of the 19th century. One glaring difference was the complete absence of military drills, which Jahn greatly opposed (the French occupying forces at that time would not have appreciated it either).[44]

Jahn considered the festivals to be a "human necessity" where ideas materialized and were experienced.[45] Unlike the rowdy and chaotic festivals of student *Burschenschaft* fraternities, the Turnfests

43 The four "Fs" referred to Jahn's motto: *Frisch, fromm, fröhlich, frei*! (Healthily, devoutly, happily, freely!).
44 See for instance Elias, Norbert: *The Germans*. Polity Press, Cambridge 1994, p. 89.
45 Jahn, Friedrich Ludwig: *Deutsches Volkstum*. Niemann, Lübeck 1810, p. 337; quoted from Nolte, Claire E.: *The Sokol in the Czech Lands to 1914. Training for the Nation*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2002, p. 15.

were to be a meaningful ritual, "a means of unification that eliminates differences in faith, differences of geographic and class origin and creates a model of common German life."[46] Turnfests were also intended to present the new movement to the public, to gain political support for it and to convince at least part of the public to join the exercises. It was for this reason that Jahn devoted much attention to choosing the place to hold the festivals: they needed to be easily accessible and to provide the spectators with a good view of the exercise grounds. Yet perhaps Jahn's greatest legacy was his own myth as the founder or father of gymnastics (*Turnvater*), to whom almost all the German gymnastic movements and all political regimes turned for decades as a source of inspiration.

46 Jahn, Friedrich Ludwig: *Die Briefe Friedrich Ludwig Jahns*. Ed. Wolfgang Meyer. Verlag Paul Eberhardt, Leipzig 1913, p. 488–489; quoted from Nolte, C. E.: *The Sokol in the Czech Lands to 1914*, p. 15.

A PHYSICAL *SONDERWEG* AND THE POST-1848 TURNER MOVEMENT

The defeat of the liberal revolution of 1848 and the unification of Germany as orchestrated by "pre-modern" (east) Prussian elites sent German policy on a "special path" through modernity, for which the term *Sonderweg* came into use.[47] Setting out on a similarly special path – if we allow that a "normal path" exists – was the gymnastics movement. Gymnastics (the term "sport" was almost a slur) was not for one's individual benefit or enjoyment, but was intended to be a national duty, carried out with a clear, usually military purpose, collectively and without a competitive element. The liberal nationalistic radicalism of Jahn (he died in 1852) and his students faded away after 1848 and was replaced by loyalty to the Prussian ruling elite, by the militarization of the movement, support of imperial policy and conservative values. What had not changed was the ideological foundation that lay in the *Volk* concept. Yet towards the end of the 19th century, an emphasis placed on the organic unity of the national community paradoxically led to a permanent split in the gymnastics movement.

Turner gymnastics, which during the period of Jahn's influence were more of a competitive nature with an emphasis on individual performance, also underwent a transformation. The form of the Turner gymnastic practices, as we know it from later Turnfests, Sokol Slets and ultimately communist Spartakiads, was created by molding Jahn's gymnastics to the needs of physical education in schools. German trainer and teacher Adolph Spiess is mainly credited with this adaptation. In working with school children while in exile in Switzerland, Spiess realized that Jahn's system was not suited for this purpose since it required a special space, complex

47 See Kocka, Jürgen: "German History before Hitler. The Debate about the German 'Sonderweg'". *Journal of Contemporary History,* 1988, vol. 23, n. 1, pp. 3–16.

equipment and individual attention to the gymnasts. By eliminating the equipment and the more difficult exercises, Spiess came up with the *Freiübungen* (calisthenics) in the 1830s. These were exercises that did not require equipment and that could be carried out in any space, enabling an entire class to exercise as a collective with all the children making the same movements simultaneously. Spiess also introduced the *Ordnungsübungen* (marching exercises) by which participants were easily arranged, strict order was maintained and which, according to Spiess, was to resemble military discipline.[48] As a singing instructor, Spiess also strove to make the exercises rhythmic, and even composed simple scores for physical education. Pehr Henrik Ling's Swedish physical education system also took a similar route. Ling too made do without equipment, but went much further in regulating and controlling the participants' movements, with the precision of the exercises taking precedence over performance.[49]

Calisthenics were soon adopted by the Turner movement, primarily as a way to cope with the prohibition of exercising outdoors. Turners began to build richly adorned gymnasiums (*Turnhallen*) that held not only an importance for gymnastics, but also became the cultural and spiritual centers of the movement. One of the architects described them as "sanctuaries," in which a man "removes his hat and a woman holds her tongue."[50] Strict discipline needed to be ensured in the limited space of the gymnasiums to prevent collisions between the gymnasts. Moving into covered spaces meant that exercising no longer depended on the weather or time of day, and thus enabled the involvement of workers, who gradually outnumbered all other participants. Yet in democratizing the exercises, the attempt at achieving the participants' perfect discipline also intensified. Marching exercises were increasingly introduced along with

48 Nolte, C. E.: *The Sokol in the Czech Lands to 1914*, p. 16.
49 Ljunggren, J.: *The Masculine Road through Modernity.*
50 Mosse, G. L.: *The Nationalisation of the Masses*, quoted from Nolte, C. E.: *The Sokol in the Czech Lands to 1914*, p. 18.

the calisthenics, and in time it was difficult to distinguish Turner gymnastics from military drills.

The nature of the Turnfests, which continued to be the primary means of displaying the movement, also changed. Instead of focusing on displaying the exceptional performances of individuals, they now concentrated on the perfect discipline of the participants.[51] It is in the Turnfests of the early 1860s that we first come across the image of the synchronized movement of thousands of men, dressed in the same outfit, performing simple calisthenics to create, in the words of the organizers, a *tüchtige, kompakte Masse* (an efficient, compact mass).[52] The most important of these Germany-wide Turnfests, held in Leipzig in 1863 to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the defeat of Napoleon, saw the participation of some twenty thousand Turners, of which eight thousand performed the same calisthenics for tens of thousands of spectators. At the time the Turner movement had roughly 170,000 members and nearly two thousand clubs. After overcoming a crisis in the 1870s, Turnfests of a similar size were usually held in five year cycles in different German cities that vied for the chance to organize the event. In time, mass calisthenics became the festivals' main program at the expense of other parts of the program.[53] As the Turner movement rapidly expand-

51 For the Turnfests, see e.g. Krüger, Michael: "Turnfeste als politische Massenrituale des 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhunderts". In: Michael Krüger (ed.): *Der deutsche Sport auf dem Weg in die Moderne. Carl Diem und seine Zeit*. LIT, Berlin 2009, pp. 75–91; Rodekamp, V. (ed.): *Sport: Schau*; Düding, Dieter – Friedemann, Peter – Münch, Paul (eds.): *Öffentliche Festkultur. Politische Feste in Deutschland von der Aufklärung bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg*. Rowohlt Hamburg 1988; Neumann, Herbert: *Deutsche Turnfeste. Spiegelbild der deutschen Turnbewegung*. Limpert, Wiesbaden 1987; Pfister, Gertrud: "Militarismus in der kollektiven Symbolik der Deutschen Turnerschaft am Beispiel des Leipziger Turnfestes 1913". In: Heinrich Becker (ed.): *Sport im Spannungsfeld von Krieg und Frieden*. DVS, Clausthal-Zellerfeld 1985, pp. 64–79.
52 Quoted from Krüger, Michael: "Die Bedeutung der Deutschen Turnfeste des Reichsgründungsjahrzehnts für die kulturelle Nationsbildung in Deutschland". *Sozial- und Zeitgeschichte des Sports*, 1995, vol. 9, n. 1, p. 10. The first photographs of Turnfests come from the 1861 Berlin Turnfest; the first film footage from the 1908 Frankfurt Turnfest. See Rodekamp, V. (ed.): *Sport: Schau*.
53 Krüger, M.: "Turnfeste als politische Massenrituale des 19. und frühen 20. Jahrhunderts".

ed in the early 20th century, the number of Turnfest participants multiplied several times over. In 1913, in Leipzig (to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the Battle of Leipzig) over sixty thousand Turners took part in the exercises.

The exercises themselves at the Turnfests bore a broad range of meanings. The synchronized movement of the gymnasts from all the German states (*aller deutschen Stämme*) and their uniform dress evoked, above all, the image of a country united in the same movement. The effect of such exercises becomes apparent if, for instance, we take into account that soldiers of the German Imperial Army did not wear matching attire, since their uniforms represented the various German states.[54] Following the completion of Germany's political unification, the Turnfests expressed the desire for a broader "spiritual" unification of the entire German nation regardless of state borders. The active participation of Turner clubs from the Austrian and Czech lands was among the factors that served this purpose. The unified movement of gymnasts and their visual uniformity was also proof of the Turner aspiration to not only transcend state borders, but also social classes and political parties, and to represent the German nation in its entirety. Furthermore, Turnfests showed a Germany that was militarily strong and prepared to go beyond the mere *Realpolitik* of Otto von Bismarck. At the Leipzig Turnfest in 1913, where 17,000 Turners performed synchronized calisthenics, Ferdinand Goetz, a key figure of the Turner movement, declared: "We demonstrated that we are a united nation that is strong enough to dictate its laws to the world."[55]

Turnfests successfully managed the dual role of awakening national passions and controlling them, while expressing collective national

54 Frie, E.: "Militärische Massenrituale", p. 64.

55 Hartmann, Grit: "Drei Hepp-hepps und drei Hurras. Turnfeste in Leipzig 1863–1987". In: Grit Hartmann – Cornelia Jeske – Daniel Sturm (eds.): *Stadiongeschichten 1863–2012. Leipzig zwischen Turnfest, Traumarena und Olympia*. Forum Verlag, Leipzig 2002, p. 74.

sentiment and steering them in the right direction.[56] The geometrical crowds of the Turnfests implicitly referred to their alter ego, to the potential "other crowds" of revolutions and social turmoil that were lurking in the shadows. These festivals also represented a visual political utopia of sorts: they did not present Germany as it was, but how it could be if the Turner ideal was successful implemented. That the Turnfests communicated visually through the symbolism of the body and its movement played an important role, enabling them to overcome the limitations of other forms of national communication, such as the written word, and to evoke strong emotions not unlike a religious experience. The exercises for the Turner members, who not only envisaged their imaginary community, but also physically experienced it, was an even stronger experience. It is in this light that Henning Eichberg points out the connection of all three meanings of the word "movement" in these exercises: political movement, physical movement, and emotional movement.[57]

By performing their synchronized calisthenics at Turnfests, the Turners were not only demonstrating their Germanhood, they were demonstrating their masculinity. Women did not perform at Turnfests until right before the First World War at the Leipzig Turnfest in 1913.[58] As George Mosse and others have noticed, Turner exercises represented a kind of response to the basic dilemma of male identity of the second half of the 19th century.[59] The ideal man was to be passionate and disciplined, rational and spiritual, civilized and

56 Krüger, M.: "Die Bedeutung der Deutschen Turnfeste", p. 17.
57 Eichberg, Henning: *Bodily Democracy. Towards a Philosophy of Sport for All.* Routledge, London 2011. Turnfests served a number of practical functions necessary for the development of the entire movement. Of particular importance was that it cultivated the physical culture since it allowed for comparisons and unification of gymnastic practices of the many Turner clubs.
58 Pfister, Gertrud: "Frauen bei deutschen Turnfesten. Zum Wandel der Geschlechterordnung in der Turnbewegung". *Sportwissenschaft*, 2000, vol. 30, n. 2, pp. 156–179. Women's performances had appeared at previous Turnfests, but these always consisted of smaller groups generally made up of the clubs of the host city.
59 Mosse, George L.: *The Image of Man. The Creation of Modern Masculinity.* Oxford University Press, Oxford 1996, p. 6. See e.g. Ljunggren, J.: *The Masculine Road through Modernity*, p. 90.

primitive. He was to be the equal of the historical heroic models of the Teutonic warriors (the Vikings were the model for the Swedish gymnasts and the Hussites for the Sokols) and also a member of modern bourgeois society. Voluntary discipline, the cultivation of the body in precise accordance with the given rules and the synchronization of movement with other men creating the image of a single national body – all at least seemingly spanned the antithetical demands placed on male identity of the 19th century.[60]

However, Germany was not unified by the exercises of Turner men in matching uniforms, but by the brutal effectiveness of the Prussian military and political machine. The Turner movement (since 1868 under the umbrella of the *Deutsche Turnerschaft*) thus lost its primary *raison d'être*.[61] Beginning in the 1880s, the Turners also had to deal with new competition in the form of sports imported mainly from England that became, especially for the youth of the middle and upper classes, much more attractive than gymnastic exercises and military drills. In absolute terms, the Turner movement continued to grow. With more than one and a half million members – even though a considerable number of them belonged to the category of non-exercising members (*Maulturner*) – it was on the eve of the First World War the largest sports organization in the world and also a key part of German civic society. Nevertheless, the

60 Mosse placed the Turnerschaft among other exclusively male collectives (*Männerbunde*), in which the subliminal homoerotic is wedded with the desire for sexual purity. The ethos of masculinity is then a way how to transform this sexual tension into moral and political categories. See also Eisenberg, Ch.: "Charismatic National Leader", p. 22. Yet the virtue of the Turners probably did not deviate from that of the average male at that time. According to testimony of one participant of the 1908 Turnfest in Frankfurt, the "roads leading to the brothels were so full that you couldn't even safely walk down them. When one Turner left a brothel, three more would enter. They ultimately had to lock the door; many of the men remained standing in a line outside." Quoted from Krüger, Arnd: "There Goes This Art of Manliness. Naturism and Racial Hygiene in Germany". *Journal of Sport History*, 1991, vol. 18, n. 1, p. 155.

61 The fulfilment of one of the basic requirement of the Turners also altered the situation, i.e. the introduction of physical education at schools (for boys) in the early 1860s, which further undermined the exclusivity of the Turner movement.

relative importance of the Turners was on the decline. The Turners responded to the loss of their dominant position by embracing conservative and even chauvinistic values and upholding the cult of the emperor – support for Bismark's foreign policies and oppression aimed against the left in Germany.[62]

The shift toward the right led to the splintering of Germany's physical education movement along political, ethnic and gymnastic lines. At the end of the century their previous support for anti-socialist measures led to a separation of working-class Turners (*Arbeiterturnerbund*), who, though radically differing from nationalistic Turners in their political views, shared their larger right-wing rival's support for the ritualization and militarization of physical education as well as their opposition to sports. At the same time, there was dissension regarding newly introduced sports, and it created irreconcilable tension between sports, especially soccer, and gymnastics, which then accompanied physical education for decades in Central Europe.

Further splintering, this time along ethnic lines, paradoxically did not occur because the German Turners were overly chauvinistic, but because they were not chauvinistic enough. In 1887, the Austrian gymnastic clubs, based on the von Schönerer model, began introducing into their statutes the "Aryan paragraph" that was intended to ensure "purely German" exercises.[63] Gradually the entire organization of Austrian Turners (the so-called XV Region) was "aryanized" in this way. The opposition of the Germany-wide Turner organization, the *Deutsche Turnerschaft*, to this process, which in Goetze's view only led the Turners astray from their main task

62 Yet the relationships between the empire and the Turners were not entirely harmonious. The Turners continued to view themselves as the expression of the nation's will, existing above the state and its realpolitik. On the other hand, the ruling aristocratic elite looked upon the Turner movement, made up mainly of the lower and middle class, with scorn.

63 See Šinkovský, Roman: "Vývoj XV. turnerského kraje Deutschösterreich v letech 1886–1904. Přeměna liberálního tělocvičného svazu v antisemitskou organizaci". *Česká kinantropologie*, 2005, vol. 9, n. 1, pp. 101–110.

(i.e. the struggle "against the common enemy – the unified Slavs,")[64] and the dispute over what to do with clubs refusing the Aryan paragraph eventually led to the Austrian Turner organization becoming independent.

In response to this discrimination, but also under the influence of Zionism and of the *Muskeljudentum* idea, many Jewish gymnasts joined their own *Jüdische Turnerschaft*.[65] Its founders included prominent athletes such as Alfred Flatow, a repeat Olympic champion in gymnastics who later died at the Theresienstadt concentration camp.

64 Ibid, p. 107.

65 See e.g., Eisen, George: "Zionism, Nationalism and the Emergence of the Jüdische Turnerschaft". *Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook,* 1983, vol. 28, n. 1, pp. 247–262.