

**JIM CHERRINGTON AND JACK BLACK (EDS.)** *SPORT AND PHYSICAL ACTIVITY IN CATASTROPHIC ENVIRONMENTS*. ABINGDON: ROUTLEDGE 2023. 320 P. ISBN: 9781032125411

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Sport does not traditionally fall within the classic research themes of the social sciences, having only received academic attention in relatively recent years. However, sport holds significant research potential as it can be considered a ritual and, consequently, a cultural construction in which the values, practices, and identities produced by the individuals who participate emerge (Archetti 1998). But sport is not only a reflection of the society that practices it: it is also a dynamic arena where identities, values, and power structures are shaped and contested, as well demonstrated in *Sport and physical activity in catastrophic environments*, edited by Jim Cherrington and Jack Black.

This book contains 13 chapters that integrate insights from politics, philosophy, anthropology, sociology, geography, and psychology, to explore the complex relationship between sport, physical activity, and catastrophes — conceptualised here as ‘the end of the world’. The authors argue that this ‘end’ is not a single distant possibility, but rather a multifaceted reality already unfolding globally. They explore this phenomenon through four distinct ‘end’ categories, each corresponding to a different part of the book.

The end of capitalism opens the book, and the focus is on how sport and physical activity can both challenge and reinforce capitalist structures, particularly within post-colonial contexts. For instance, Chapter 1 by Critchley presents a skateboarding project in Kingston, Jamaica, as a space for resisting and reimagining capitalist structures, offering insights into the limitations and obstacles of sport community-commoning as a form of post-capitalist practice. Similarly, Chapter 3 by Giles et al. examines the complex and often contradictory relationships between Indigenous communities in Canada and the extractive industries that operate in the area. This chapter discusses how these industries fund sports and recreational programmes to craft the image of being ‘good neighbours’, while calling for a deeper understanding of these dynamics to prevent the perpetuation of colonial practices.

The second part of the book, the end of the social, focuses on how major crises, particularly the recent COVID-19 pandemic, have affected social norms and structures in relation to sport and physical activity. This part has a dual nature. On one hand, it highlights how sport has served as a fertile ground for fostering resilience and political engagement. A notable example is the Wubble, a controlled environment created during the pandemic for the 2020 women NBA season, where players leveraged their visibility to pursue activist goals, particularly in relation to the Black Lives Matter movement (Chapter 6, Munro-Cook). On the other hand, Begović (Chapter 7) illustrates how sports (and athletes) in Montenegro have

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been heavily utilised to promote political agendas, being reduced to mere tools for political gain.

The third section of the book delves into the theme of the end of nature caused by the Anthropocene, and how sport can both mirror and influence its impact. In Chapter 8, Cherrington challenges the stereotype of mountain bikers as environmental vandals, arguing instead that mountain biking and trail building can foster a deeper connection with nature, and that this engagement may help individuals better understand and confront environmental destruction. A positive impact on the environment can also be achieved more indirectly, as Amann and Doidge discuss in Chapter 10. They explore how football fans, often viewed as passive consumers of the sport, can become active agents by leveraging their collective power to advocate for environmental sustainability, both within the sport and beyond.

The final part of the book addresses what the authors define as the end of morality. Here, the attention turns to the moral and ethical challenges that emerge in the context of sport and physical activity, particularly in situations where conventional moral frameworks are eroded or questioned by catastrophic events. Sport itself can be a breeding ground for these challenges, as demonstrated by Gibson in Chapter 11. Practices and institutions within sports — whether through sports science research used for military purposes (e.g., enhancing snipers' efficiency) or in competitive environments where performance is the sole focus — can lead to significant harm, including the dehumanisation of athletes. In the concluding chapter, Ravizza examines how sport can serve as a means of rehabilitation and social inclusion for former child soldiers in Africa. Often marginalised due to actions committed during conflicts, these children can find in sport a valuable tool to reconnect with society. Additionally, sport provides a constructive platform for them to develop essential skills, such as non-violent conflict resolution.

Overall, this book moves beyond the conventional views of sport and physical activity as a panacea, and offers instead a balanced critique that acknowledges both their benefits and drawbacks. It highlights ways in which sport and physical activity can foster positive outcomes such as social inclusion, resilience, and environmental awareness — whether through skatepark spaces used for community activities, former child soldiers in Africa engaging in sport as a means of rehabilitation, or football fans' potential in mobilising for climate action. At the same time, the book critically examines how sport and physical activity can reinforce colonial power dynamics, as seen in sport-for-development programmes in Cameroon, or be co-opted for political purposes, such as promoting government agendas in Montenegro. Future editions could include other sports and physical activities not considered here that have the potential to play a significant role in challenging environments (e.g., martial arts). While the volume presents unique perspectives and valuable insights, it does face some challenges typical of edited collections, such as varying chapter quality. Nevertheless, it is a valuable read for those interested in how sport and physical activity not only reflect but also shape the complex and often catastrophic environments in which they occur, giving us hope and helping us navigate 'the end of the world'.

## Bibliography

Archetti, Eduardo P. 1998. The meaning of sport in anthropology: a view from Latin America, *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean studies* 65, 91–103.

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