

# INSA

INTERNATIONAL NETWORK  
OF SPORT ANTHROPOLOGY

DURHAM  
UNIVERSITY

18-19 APRIL 2024



# **(RE-)PLACING SPORT** ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES ON A GLOBAL PROBLEM

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# WELCOME!

It is our pleasure to welcome you to Durham and the first conference of the International Network of Sport Anthropology (INSA). What began in 2020 as a simple research group has now grown into a truly international network, with over 100 members from around the world. After years of meeting online, we are delighted to share this physical space with you, to meet, chat, share ideas, and develop the Anthropology of Sport. We are extremely glad you are here!

Many scholars across the social sciences are rightly critical about sport. Though it is frequently touted as a positive force around the world, much research has shown that sport is often incredibly problematic. But what does it mean to take on a social phenomenon that has become so central to human life? How can we as scholars address the increasingly hegemonic force of sport? We believe our speakers over the next couple of days offer answers that begin to address this problem. We have received many wonderful abstracts, that show off the breadth and quality of research across the anthropology of sport, while equally highlighting the strengths of our discipline's approach to sport. We hope you will enjoy listening to these papers as much as we have enjoyed reviewing them.

Beyond the intellectual heavy lifting, conferences are also times for networking, socialising, and conviviality. We hope the next couple of days will allow you to meet new colleagues, establish new partnerships, and forge new friendships. We encourage you to develop your connections and perhaps even start new projects. If you do, tell us, and we will support you as best we can!

Finally, we must issue a note of thanks, to those at Durham and beyond who have helped organise this conference. We are incredibly grateful to the Anthropology Department, who have provided access to teaching rooms, and contributed money that has supported catering and kept our registration costs low. We are thankful for the support of other INSA members, which has been invaluable in setting up this event. The names of all involved are printed at the back of this booklet. We couldn't have done it without you!

Ben Hildred & Sean Heath  
Directors,  
International Network of Sport Anthropology

# WHAT IS INSA?

Founded in 2020, INSA exists to support the ever-growing Anthropology of Sport. It connects scholars from all related backgrounds, providing a space to discuss ideas, gain feedback, and collaborate on publications. As anthropologists of sport are found in disparate places around the world, INSA facilitates research across institutions, providing support and critique not always available in our home departments.

INSA is intentionally ECR driven, with a view to nurture and develop the sub-field for the future. Senior scholars provide mentorship and guidance to the network, but key decisions are made by Early Career Researchers.

At the core of our activities is the Working Group, an ECR led group which meets fortnightly on zoom to discuss work in progress. We have hosted panels at various international conferences, and have already supported a range of publications, including special issues and a forthcoming book. As the network grows, we are looking to develop new activities and resources. Our aim is to establish a fully-fledged academic organization in the next five years, with its own peer-reviewed journal.

If you are interested in learning more about INSA and joining us, please visit: [www.sportanthro.org](http://www.sportanthro.org) or email [admin@sportanthro.org](mailto:admin@sportanthro.org)

## Activities & Resources:

- A fortnightly Working Group on Zoom (primarily for ECR)
- 2-3 panels organised at other conferences each year
  - Primarily for broadening the academic reach of INSA and increasing the visibility of the network.
- Space and assistance to develop publications with the aim to establish an academic peer-reviewed journal within 5 years.
- An annual INSA conference
- Online Seminar Series. Quarterly/Termly.
- In-person Workshops at affiliated universities, as appropriate, to foster collaboration between ECR & senior academics.

# CONFERENCE ABSTRACT

Modern sport is hegemonic. Games codified in Europe during the 19th Century are now central to social lives across the globe. These sports maintain their broad appeal, which hides their problematic aspects and often insidious nature. The modernist ideals of teamwork, meritocracy and fair play – though outwardly positive – have long restricted the worldview of sporting participants. With an excessive focus on individual excellence, sports limit the potential for wider systemic change. Sport is now at the vanguard of neoliberalism, and is often mobilised to maintain the status quo as much as to uplift and ‘develop’. Such critiques of sport are not new. Calls to ‘transform sport’ (Carter et al. 2018) or even ‘end’ its largest spectacle (Boykoff 2020) have been made across various platforms in recent years. At the International Network of Sport Anthropology, we recognise the need to challenge the hegemonic force of sport. We invite researchers from all related disciplines to consider how we might place sport more appropriately in context, seek to re-place it elsewhere, or indeed replace it altogether. We challenge researchers to consider more closely what sport is, including recognising that the very idea of ‘sport’ now permeates much of social life, affecting the ways definitions are formed. We hold that the perspectives anthropology and adjacent disciplines can bring to the study of sport is critical for critique in the present moment. We invite scholars to address the problem of hegemonic sport across the globe by joining us in (re-)placing it.

# DAY 1 - APRIL 18

08:00-09:00

## REGISTRATION

Dawson Building, Room D104

09:00-09:15

## WELCOME TALK

Ben Hildred & Sean Heath

09:15-10:30

## OPENING KEYNOTE

Dr. Thomas F. Carter

10:30-10:45

## COFFEE BREAK

Dawson Building, Room D104

10:45-12:15

## PANEL A - GENDER AND SPORT

Ellis Lanclus

Will Lloyd

Shamira Naidu-Young

12:15-13:45

## LUNCH

Dawson Building, Room D104

Walking tour along the river

13:45-15:30

## PANEL B - EPISTEMOLOGY AND NEW WAYS OF THINKING

Francesco Fanoli

Guus Heijnen

Léo Argouarc'h

Chuluunbat Purvee

15:30-15:45

## COFFEE BREAK

Dawson Building, Room D104

15:45-17:30

## PANEL C - METHOD

Hans Hognestad

Joseph Powell

Henrike Neuhaus & Cintia Schwamberger

Marit Hiemstra

# DAY 2 - APRIL 19

08:00-09:00

## REGISTRATION

Dawson Building, Room D104

09:00-10:45

## PANEL D - MEDIATING "SPORT"

De-Valera N.Y.M. Botchway and Charles Prempeh

Dallas Taylor

Hubert Gąsienica - Mracielnik

10:45-11:00

## COFFEE BREAK

Dawson Building, Room D104

11:00-12:45

## PANEL E - SPORTS MIGRATION

José Hildo de Oliveira Filho

Michael Crawley & Leo Hopkinson

Emy Lindberg

12:45-14:00

## LUNCH

Dawson Building, Room D104

14:00-15:45

## PANEL F - INEQUALITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURES

Goran Pavel Santek

John Eade

De-Valera N.Y.M. Botchway and Charles Prempeh

15:30-15:45

## COFFEE BREAK

Dawson Building, Room D104

16:00-17:30

## CLOSING PLENARY ROUNDTABLE - (RE)DEFINING SPORT

Aarti Ratna

Francesco Fanoli

Chair: Sean Heath

Stacey Pope

Leo Hopkinson

17:30-17:45

## CLOSING REMARKS

Ben Hildred & Sean Heath

## KEYNOTE SPEAKER DR. THOMAS F. CARTER

Dr. Thomas F. Carter is a Reader in Anthropology at the University of Brighton. His research interests include the relationships between the individual and the state, the movement, migrations, and mobilities of various peoples, the politics of spectacle, and the dialectic relations of spatialized embodiment. He was a co-author on the seminal *Anthropology of Sport* (U California Press). His latest book *On Running and Becoming Human* (Palgrave Macmillan 2018) explores questions regarding the importance of movement towards being and becoming through the interlocutions of mind, body, and environment.



Dr. Carter's life, education, and career has taken him to various places around the world. Prior to coming to the University of Brighton, He was a Senior Lecturer at the University of Wales, Newport (now University of South Wales), Research Fellow in the School of Anthropological Studies at the Queen's University of Belfast, and Adjunct Professor at the Department of Sociology and Anthropology at St. Cloud State University (Minnesota) and Department of Anthropology at the University of New Mexico, Los Alamos.

His educational training consisted of both practical experience – as medical interpreter, cultural/educational liaison, contract researcher, and NGO worker and volunteer – and formal education. He earned his PhD and MA at the Department of Anthropology at the University of New Mexico (Albuquerque), where his doctoral research focused on the politics of Cuban identity articulated through the national sport of baseball. He was one of the first foreign scholars allowed into Cuba with the thawing of international relations between the US and Cuba in the 1990s and attended seminars at the Universidad de Habana during his 1990s fieldwork. His undergraduate education was completed at St. Cloud State University augmented through additional education at Universidad Laica Vicente Rocafuerte de Guayaquil (La LAICA) in Guayaquil, Ecuador.



## NOTES ON THE DIFFICULTY OF STUDYING SPORT (AND SOME THINGS I HAVE LEARNED ALONG THE WAY)

*Sport is both ubiquitous and oh so confounding. What would appear to be a straightforward and simple object to examine remains elusive and far more complex than what appears at first glance; even the ways in which sport appears throughout much of the social scientific enquiry about it over the past decades. Thus, in this keynote I will outline a few hard learned lessons as to why sport is so deceptive as an object of study. First, I will address the seeming ease that so many interdisciplinary academics have in investigating sport, identifying some assumptions and potential fallacies made before research even begins. Second, that excavation leads me to reconsider what this ontological object we call sport actually is. And third, I hope to provide an argument for the necessity of anthropological approaches to sport by providing some ideas on how we might more fruitfully develop our knowledge of sport.*

# ROUNDTABLE: (RE-)DEFINING SPORT

Despite its current marginality within the discipline, sport is one arena where anthropologists fervently discuss notions of change, scale, comparison, and transformation (Besnier et al. 2018). Sport is an increasingly charged arena where polarizing debates around ‘intersex/trans/cyborg identities’ (Hildred and Crawley 2023), colonialism and Indigenous knowledges (Forsyth et al. 2023), the politics of citizenship and religion (Rana 2022), and embodied sensory knowledges (Carter et al. 2022) play out. While many in sport studies have questioned individual tenets of sport’s definition, few have deconstructed what sport is, choosing instead to examine sport’s structures and functions within society or use sport as a lens through which to consider human social interaction. Other social science disciplines have discussed dismantling sport or changing sport from within. However, none to our knowledge have proposed the radical step of redefining what sport is from the ground up. Sport has grown beyond Guttman’s definition, becoming not only part of the global zeitgeist but a social institution in its own right, closer to religion than simple physical activity and entertainment. Re-imagining and truly transforming sport (Carter et al. 2018) requires the collective effort of a multiplicity of critical scholars. We believe an anthropological lens is uniquely positioned to undo the complex ideological positionalities invested in sport and provide cross-cultural and comparative insights towards re-shaping a meaningful definition of sport today. This roundtable offers an opportunity to think through sport, recreation, leisure, play, and games with anthropology, rather than sidelining sport as a frivolous endeavour in human becoming.

## ROUNDTABLE SPEAKERS

Dr. Aarti Ratna  
Northumbria University

Dr. Ratna is inspired by the politics and intellectual insights of women of colour. She uses their feminisms to challenge complex and transnational asymmetries of power and control in/through the contexts of sport, leisure, popular culture, and everyday life. She currently serves as an Associate Professor of Sociology at Northumbria University, UK.

Dr. Francesco Fanoli  
Independent Scholar

Dr. Fanoli holds a PhD in 'Anthropology and Historical-linguistic studies' from the University of Messina (Italy). Engaging in *l'amb* practices, he has conducted long-term fieldwork on Senegalese wrestling with punches in Dakar. His research interests focus on the anthropology of sport, embodiment and globalization.

Professor Stacey Pope  
Durham University

Professor Pope is a world leader in research on women football fans. She is currently examining men's responses to the increasing visibility of women in sport and issues of sexism and misogyny. She was an invited expert for the DCMS Committee and the Women and Equalities Committee, to discuss how football could be made more inclusive.

Dr. Leo Hopkinson  
Durham University

Dr. Hopkinson is an anthropologist of boxing, and sport more broadly. His research focuses on how athletes imagine and plan for the future in the context of unequal global sporting industries; the diverse forms that care takes in contexts of bodily breakdown and social strain; and the relationship between gender and sport.

*Chair:*  
Dr. Sean Heath  
KU Leuven

Dr. Heath is an MSCA Postdoctoral Fellow in environmental and sport anthropology. His research examines how athletes navigate the confluence of human and environmental wellbeing; the politics of bodily movement and sensory dimensions of sporting practices in water; and the environmental politics of human bodies playing outdoors.

# PANEL A: GENDER AND SPORT

**Shamira Naidu-Young**  
Durham University

## *Boxing for Self-Defence: Beyond Throwing Punches*

Boxing has traditionally been understood as a dangerous activity, with the perceived and actual dangers including pain, injury, long term health impacts and even death (Lennox, 2023), and these risks are often even more emphasised for women's boxing (Lafferty & McKay, 2004). However, within Boxgirls Kenya (BGK), a Community-Based Organisation in Nairobi, boxing is explicitly seen as a form of self-defence and a way for girls and young women to protect themselves from the various threats and harm that they encounter in their daily lives.

This paper will argue that the idea of 'boxing for self-defence', which is pivotal to how BGK conceptualise their work, goes beyond boxing to encompass ideas around discipline, using your voice, leadership and even entrepreneurship. The emphasis on such skills within sport for development has been critiqued by a number of scholars for employing neo-liberal logics that position girls and young women as agents of social change who are responsible for their own advancement and participation both in sport and society (Burnett, 2018; Hayhurst et al., 2018). However, despite such critiques, this paper will argue that these skills, alongside boxing are being deployed as a counterattack against the harsh realities of the daily lives of girls and young women in the slums of Nairobi. In addition, through framing boxing as self-defence, BGK are able to overcome resistance from parents and the community in regard to both gender norms and fears around the dangers of boxing, suggesting that such framing may also have pragmatic benefits.

**Eilis Lanclus**  
KU Leuven

## *Unravelling the gendered nature of endurance in ultra-trail running and walking*

This paper explores the gendered dynamics of ultra-trail running and walking and the gendered nature of endurance more broadly. While research on endurance activities have traditionally focused on the physical and mental feats of athletes, the nuanced gendered experiences within the world of ultra-trail running and walking remains underexplored. This paper aims to unravel the complexities surrounding gender roles, expectations, and inequalities within the context of ultra-trail running and walking, whilst also critically examining the concept of endurance from a gender perspective. Based on participant observation and in-depth interviews, the paper delves into the lived experiences of participants in ultra-trail running and walking events in Belgium. It examines how societal norms and expectations shape gendered narratives within these activities, influencing training, participation, and perceptions of achievement. Additionally, the research investigates the role of race organization and media representation in constructing and reinforcing gendered stereotypes within the ultra-trail running and walking community. This paper contributes to a broader understanding of the gendered nature of endurance, offering insights into how ultra-trail running and walking may challenge or reinforce traditional gender norms. By shedding light on the experiences of individuals who push the limits of physical, mental, and emotional endurance, this research aims to foster dialogue around representation and the transformative potential of ultra-endurance activities in reshaping gender dynamics within the sporting world.

# PANEL A: GENDER AND SPORT

**Will Lloyd**

Durham University

*'#gurkhaonthetrail': Masculinity, nationhood and mountain sport amongst Nepali trail runners*

How is being a Gurkha like being a trail runner?

In 2023 alone, nearly 20,000 men applied to only 204 vacancies with the British Army's Brigade of Gurkhas. During my fieldwork with Nepali trail runners I met several young men who had applied to the Gurkhas, been unsuccessful, and subsequently pursued trail running as an alternative life pathway.

In this article I will critically analyse the discourse of these young men I interviewed, including the parallels which they constructed between the life of a Gurkha soldier and that of a trail runner, placing these in historical context to understand why military migration and sport migration were perceived as similar by my informants.

I will use this analysis to speak to broader theoretical questions about the relations between militarism, sport, masculinity and nationhood, especially in the Global South.

# PANEL B: EPISTEMOLOGY AND NEW WAYS OF THINKING

**Francesco Fanoli**  
Independent Scholar

*Ìamb assemblages: Senegalese Wrestling' Training as a Changing Technology of Self-discipline.*

Starting from the 1990s, an increasing number of young Senegalese men submit to manifold regimes of discipline in order to become wrestling champions. At his highest intensity a wrestler's regime can involve three harsh daily training sessions, demanding lifestyle hygiene, minute "mystical" prescriptions, as well as the engagement in self-promotional strategies. Through this regime of life wrestlers embody fighting, competitive and entrepreneurial attitudes. This set of attitudes is widespread in sports' contexts globally, and tends to reproduce gender biases and a win-to-all costs disposition. Nevertheless, wrestling training is embedded in a fluid material and socio-cultural assemblages. Écuries – the sporting associations where collective training is performed – are changing apparatuses that shift from semi-total institutions guarded against "external" intrusion to spaces where children and neighbors are permitted to enter, and a playful attitude can emerge. Morning workouts at the beach and at the gym can be moments in which wrestlers display their strength, endurance and muscles but also have fun and build friendships with other performers. The relational networks of wrestlers can be the medium of exploitation and self-promotion, but also the hotbed of sharing, mutuality and solidarity. Social actors' meaningful practices are shaped by (and shape) different, and sometimes opposing, discourses. The result is a changing technology of the self, which intermingles self-entrepreneurism and mutuality, self-disciplining' and playful' attitudes, competition and cooperation, hierarchy and equality. What, in a comparative perspective, ìamb assemblages can teach us about the potentialities and dangers of sporting worlds in neoliberal times?

**Chuluunbat Purvee**  
National University of Mongolia

*Weaponizing of International Regulations of Doping in Mongolian Traditional Wrestling.*

My presentation is a follow-up and update of a joint paper with Gregory Delaplace titled "When the Picture Comes in: How to Win Mongolian Wrestling Tournaments". In our paper, we described a situation where a wrestler called Oyuunbold prepares mentally, spiritually, and physically, and how everything fell into place, his star ran, the picture came in and he became a champion and won the title of "Titan". However, since his win, the Mongolian National Wrestling Association which governs Mongolian national wrestling applied international WADA (World Anti-doping Agency) doping rules for "modern" sports to a "traditional" game, robbed him of his victory, banned him for 2 years from wrestling, and disgraced his coach who trained him. It did not stop there. Two years later Mongolian National Wrestling Association "caught" him doping again and banned him for 8 years, thus ending his wrestling career. That was such a hard blow to his father, that he ended up dying.

This application of seemingly unrelated doping rules to a "traditional" game is now threatening the "modern" sports teams of Mongolia competing in the Olympic Games and other international, continental, and world championships and Games because WADA is taking interest in these doping cases. I am arguing that doping tests are harming both the "traditional" game and the "modern" sport. Therefore, tests should not be applied to "traditional" games.

# PANEL B: EPISTEMOLOGY AND NEW WAYS OF THINKING

## Guus Heijnen

Amsterdam University of Applied Science

*New materialism and sport: a multidisciplinary approach*

Sustainability is one of the most pressing and general topics in today's (Western) society. How the world of sport is contributing to climate change and what that implies for the world of sport is stressed by e.g. Gammelsaeter & Loland (2022) and Goldblatt (2023). The perspective found in the work of Thomas Nail, is very much suited for the challenges of 21st century. In *Theory of the Earth* (2021) he presents his new materialist ontology in which the continuous flow of matter is the core principle. There is no such thing as a discrete object or fixed position, only metastable patterns of matter in motion. Building on this ontological position I am exploring the concept of bioregionalism and the sport experience in both conceptual and creative ways. In my presentation I'm going to elaborate on two projects that I've been working on:

- A film about three Dutch ecosystems in our bioregion and human sport activity:
  - forest, earth (as dominating element), trail runner, 2) wetland, wind (as dominating element) windsurfer and 3) coastal area, water (as dominant element) wave surfer.
- This documentary is released this summer. I will show a trailer (1-2 minutes).
- A draft paper that assesses the implications and possibilities of the above mentioned work of Thomas Nail for the current debate on sport and environment or 'nature' within sports philosophy (Breivik, 2021) (Loland, 1996) (Welters, 2018), sport management (McCullough, Orr, & Kellison, 2020) (Sartore-Baldwin & McCullough, 2018) and social science (Sparkes, 2018) (Thorpe, Brice, & Clark, 2021).

## Léo Argouarch

Université Lumière Lyon-II

*The self-managed body. How far-left political thought is used for the struggle against modern football.*

Over the last few years, a number of alternative practices to modern football have emerged, known in France as "football populaire". The premise is that the professional football club and its stadium are not places where modern football can be challenged. The response to this observation has often been to create new clubs, most of them self-managed, offering the opportunity for protagonists to express their democratic, feminist and sometimes even anti-racist and anti-fascist values. We compare two ethnographic studies carried out in two openly anti-fascist clubs in two different national contexts: the MFC 1871 in Paris and the Clapton CFC in London. The aim is to understand how a new moral economy (Fassin, 2009) is formed through the embodied self-management of participants. This corporeality can be seen in the differentiated commitments of participants within each club, making it possible to grasp the arrangements between values and the impact they have on the process of subjectivisation and politicisation of supporter-activists. It sheds light on the mechanisms used to establish a counter-hegemonic form of football that is played out at different levels, between local presence and a desire for internationalism. We propose to look back at the conflicts that arise between club participants in order to reflect on what they say about the alliance formed by these individuals following the identification of a problem: modern football – and the desire to resist its hegemony.

# PANEL C: METHOD

**Hans Hognestad**

University of South-Eastern Norway

*The limits of 'sportology' - Anthropological perspectives and the sociology of sport*

Sociology of Sport is an institutionalised and well-established sub-field within Sociology. This ties sociology of sport close to the broader field of sport sciences and also to its relevant field of sports practitioners. While 'sports anthropology' is not institutionalized in the same way as a sub-field, anthropological treatments of sport continue to differ from their sociological counterparts by virtue of their disciplinary underpinning. Viewed from a sociological perspective, the modernization and institutionalization of sport that exploded particularly in Britain during the nineteenth century reflected the impact of industrialization and urbanization upon existing games and athletic practices as well as the integration of these reworked forms into new ways of life in the Western world. The modern dimension of sport rendered it a problematic matter for investigation within classical anthropology, a discipline that initially positioned itself as the science of the non-modern and 'primitive'. Nevertheless, anthropologists conducting fieldwork in aboriginal communities and non-western societies continued to stumble across athletic competitions and pastimes that were, for want of a better term, acknowledged to be 'sport-like' in nature. In a contemporary context sociological and anthropological perspectives are difficult to separate, yet it is possible to see how parts of this disciplinary heritage prevail. In this presentation I intend to dwell on the differences and similarities between sociological and anthropological perspectives on sport and try to highlight what we may miss out on by narrowing our focus on sports – to sport.

**Marit Hiemstra**

Nottingham Trent University

*Communicating Consent in Guided Running - Initial findings from personal reflections of visually impaired and guide running*

'Consent' serves as the cornerstone for developing healthy and positive sporting. However, prior research in the field has insufficiently explored how athletes assert and maintain control over their actions, as well as how they navigate their emotional, mental, and physical autonomy in sporting engagements. Consent in sports involves a social interaction among athletes, embodying an interplay of social, historical, relational factors, and various senses. Verbal, emotive, and bodily expressions play a crucial role in this dynamic.

In this presentation, I will draw on preliminary insights derived from fieldnotes, including personal reflections on visually impaired and guide running. Utilising David Howes' methodological concepts of 'participant sensation,' I articulate my approach to investigating varying sensory experiences in ethnographic sports research. Additionally, I share initial findings, underscoring the significance of sensing in comprehending everyday communication, interactions, and relationships within cooperative sporting encounters. Furthermore, I would like to initiate a debate on sensory methodology, with the goal of gathering experiences, best practices, and innovative ideas.



# PANEL C: METHOD

## Henrike Neuhaus

Goldsmiths, University of London

## Cintia Schwamberger

UNSAM, CONICET Argentina

### *Red Belt, Black Tag: the trajectory of a youth's martial arts dream in urban Argentina*

The authors co-produced multimodal outputs while facilitating creative workshops in public secondary schools located in contexts of urban poverty of the Metropolitan Area of Buenos Aires. From a range of short films that reflect physical education, they selected one that describes the dream of setting up a taekwondo gym specialising in attending to practitioners with disabilities. Shedding light on the processes around the camera work, the film serves as a platform to discuss the political and institutional struggles of taekwondo's history in the Southern Cone and it describes social visions of possible futures linked to learning and teaching martial arts in Argentina. Following the hypothesis that martial arts practice allows the interlocutor with disabilities to interpellate and claim the power to challenge their bodily limits, the discussion examines the intersections of potencies of martial arts, disability and urban poverty as it produces effects and affections in the processes of inclusion/exclusion of young people with disabilities living in such contexts.

## Joseph Powell

University of Cambridge

### *'A Young Bruce Grobbelaar' : Interrogating Researcher/Participant Dynamics in an English Professional Football Coaches Bible Study Group*

Bible study groups form an integral part of the fabric of Christian communities the world over. Todd (2009) reports a 1994 estimate that one in ten American adults participate in one, whilst 2000 UK data describes 88% of respondent church leaders affirming the presence of a study group. These groups can be broad and open to all or limited and operated for specific groups and purposes. Since October 2023 I have been participating in a group which falls into the latter of these, a weekly Bible study session specifically for elite level UK football coaches. This research has seen me straddle disciplinary boundaries. As I have reflected elsewhere (Powell, 2023) my status as someone trained ostensibly as a theologian but methodologically grounded in anthropological ethnography has at times led me to a sense of being a 'disciplinary outsider'. It is perhaps in the present research context that I have felt most challenged by this dual identity. My primary quest here is to explore how elite football coaches utilise the Bible and Bible study sessions in their professional lives. This is however complicated by my own participation in the sessions, one from a wholly different professional background who is part of the research but not part of the data it desires. This complication is familiar to ethnographers, but less so to hermeneuticists. Building on the Anthropology-Theology dialogue (Webster, 2022), this paper will interrogate my role as both participant and researcher and ask how scholars might best manage this dynamic.

## PANEL D: MEDIATING “SPORT”

**De-Valera N.Y.M. Botchway**

University of Cape Coast

**Charles Prempeh**

Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology

*Where did Agoro Football Go?: Deconstructing the Hegemony of Eurocentric ‘Scientific’ Football in the History and Form of Ghanaian Football*

The impact of European cultural neoliberalism on Ghanaian football, specifically through the lens of the sport’s universalisation as “scientific football,” is explored in our paper. Using the windows of sports history, cultural studies and autoethnography, our paper delve into the transformation since the millennium, highlighting the imposition of a Eurocentric “scientific” style on Ghanaian football, which contributed to a continuous erosion of local content and originality in the country’s football. Termed “Agoro football”, the local style embodied a blend of improvisatory skills, spirituality, aesthetics, and sociogenic ethos, fostering success and admiration both locally and internationally. However, the introduction of European “scientific” football brought predictability, mechanisation, and reliance on European coaches and training resources. This shift disrupted the unique qualities of Agoro football, causing stagnation in Ghana’s football prowess. Our paper argues that the global spread of European ideals, including the imposition of scientific football, has hindered the maturation of Ghanaian football. This displacement has led to a decline in the country’s football capabilities, prompting stakeholders to grapple with the challenge of revitalising Ghanaian football and (re)placing it in its local originality amidst the dominance of European methodologies.

**Dallas Taylor**

NYU

*Analyzing the Role of Fans in Mega-Sport: Mediation and Mediatization*

This paper theorizes sporting fandom, its psychic appeal, and the inextricable role of the ‘fan’ in maintaining capitalist sporting hegemony. Anthropology has done well to critique organized mega-sport: rightly placed concerns of economic exploitation, environmental degradation, and forms of gender violence to name a few. The realm of fandom and its role in systems of sport has gone largely under-theorized in anthropology, with the bulk of work being shepherded by scholars in media studies or sociology. Based on ongoing ethnographic fieldwork of premier league fan clubs in New York City, this paper deploys semiotic methodology to analyze various forms of uptake, register formation, and figures of personhood that (in)form the social worlds of premier league fans. In doing so, this paper interrogates the implicit and explicit social orders of fandom, and the on- and offline chains of mediation that bring them to life. Borrowing the notion of mediatization from Asif Agha, we can analyze how these practices are both inextricable to the process of commodification, and how they exist beyond commodification. Bringing these mediatized moments into conversation with Marx’s notion of the “fetish”, this paper argues that both the obfuscation of these commodity relations and the mediated excesses that they afford are psychically integral to the staying power of globalized mega-sport.

## PANEL D: MEDIATING “SPORT”

**Hubert Gaşienica-Mracielnik**  
Jagiellonian University

*Between fair play and cunning: Considerations and problems in making capoeira a sports discipline*

In 2017, the “Red Bull Paranaue” capoeira championship took place. They were continued once again a year later and then disappeared from history. This was neither the first nor the last attempt to structure capoeira into a sporting form. Regardless of the iteration, the execution always seems to raise some doubts within the capoeira community. On the other hand, capoeira Masters often declare that the sporting face of capoeira is its future. The tension between sport and tradition has led to the creation of two styles of capoeira, Regional and Angola. While Regional was intended to be a modern and secularized version of capoeira, Angola emphasized tradition, religiosity, spirituality and mysticism. However, despite this division, the role of tradition and culture in capoeira Regional cannot be overestimated. Even though capoeira is called an Afro-Brazilian martial art, the practitioners themselves call it "jogo" (game). A game that, in Caillois's classic structure, would be incompatible, combining agon and ilinx, paideia and ludus. Ensuring a "good, nice game" (Jogo bonito) is as important as defeating the opponent. The rules of capoeira combat also constitute only a vague set of things that should be done and those that should not be done, but the transgressions of these rules, deception and cunning are part of the ethos of capoeiristas (rogue ethos - malandragem). Can this type of ambiguous ethos coexist within the concept of sport? Can capoeira become a sports discipline? Is it possible to preserve elements of intangible heritage within the category of sports?

# PANEL E: SPORTING MIGRATIONS

**Emy Lindberg**

Uppsala University

*The times of football migration: from Ghana to Sweden*

On the basis of ethnographic fieldwork conducted in Ghana and Sweden between 2017-2019, this paper looks at football migration from a temporal perspective, focusing on the preparations for the migration journey and the stages of arrival and initial acclimatization. Drawing on the temporal turn in migration studies in combination with anthropological and sociological perspectives on time, the paper argues that controlling and mastering time is crucial for footballers and the people investing in them. Guided by an understanding that the postcolonial condition, alongside a racialized global order, intimately informs, enables, and statutes football migration between Ghana and Sweden, the paper looks at institutional, capitalist and athletic times and how they intersect and clash at the initial stages of an international football career. The Ghanaian footballers are a flexible workforce on the move. Their strong, youthful bodies provide capital in an economic system built on investments, transfers, and fast cash. Different nation-states and supranational institutions like the FIFA wrestle for control over the footballing migrant body by erecting temporal borders. At the same time, those working with the players and the players themselves try to navigate past these borders by manipulating time. The production, and maintenance of a youthful body is essential to the successful career. The way time is managed has consequences for my interlocutors, both in the short term and in the long run. Time is a scarce resource, and the stakes involved are high.

**José Hildo de Oliveira Filho**

Charles University in Prague

*Sport Migrants, Precarity and Identity: Brazilian Footballers in Central and Eastern Europe*

Outside of Europe's top football leagues, migrant athletes are often subjected to short-term contracts, poor housing conditions, isolation, and the ever-present risk of premature career termination due to injuries. In this presentation, I will talk about my forthcoming book, published with Routledge. The book is a multi-sited ethnography on Brazilian futsal and football migrants, primarily based on life-history interviews with migrant futsal and football athletes. Life-history interviews reveal not only how athletes use symbols in their everyday life but also how race, gender, and class are articulated in the experiences of migrant athletes. While sports migration receives considerable media attention, this study focused on lower-division footballers and futsal players to understand how anonymous sports migrants deal with the precariousness of their profession, the contingencies of living temporarily apart from their families, athletes' religiosities, and plans for the future. The focus on futsal and football is justified as professional athletes practice both sports in their childhood and adolescence in Brazil. Around the age of 16, they begin to specialise in one or another sport. In this sense, this study attempts to understand the specificity of futsal and football migration through their differing routes and working conditions. The role that borders and emotions play in the lives of sports migrants is analysed and how athletes manage injuries and pain to understand the precarious careers of sports migrants.

# PANEL E: SPORTING MIGRATIONS

**Michael Crawley**  
**Leo Hopkinson**  
Durham University

*'He's not a runner, he just trained for one year so he could disappear': Ethical Life and Irregular Sports Migration.*

Many aspiring athletes in the Global South hope to migrate by securing lucrative playing contracts in the wealthy sporting leagues and centres of North America and Western Europe. Few, however, realise these dreams. Alongside hopes and incidences of legal sporting migration, some undertake irregular migration – often by ‘disappearing’ after competing in a genuine sporting event in a destination country. This paper explores the ethical lives of athletes who ‘disappear’ and the repercussions that surround such irregular migrations. Drawing on ethnography of Ghanaian boxers and Ethiopian long-distance runners, we ask what logics and practices shape such irregular mobilities, what practices they involve, what relationships they inform and sustain, and what their repercussions are for other sports practitioners (e.g. coaches, managers, agents etc). Perceptions of athletic prowess and shifting bodily capacity often frame decisions about informal migration, and may also involve the denial or re-thinking of dreams of sporting success. Hence, the paper explores how temporalities of actual and anticipated bodily change, ageing and decline inform the ethical lives of irregular migrants and their networks. While significant literature has explored the experiences of irregular economic migrants moving towards Europe, particularly those from sub-Saharan Africa, our analysis shows how sporting contexts create distinct and highly-complex networks within which athletes’ ethical lives are played out. The sporting context also offers a unique set of justifications for irregular migration, as athletes seek reward for the many years spent shaping bodies capable of competing at the top level and the labour of ‘building a passport’ that can enable mobility. We offer new perspective on migrant athletes’ lives, and on the ethics of global mobility in transnational sporting industries.

# PANEL F: INEQUALITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURES

**De-Valera N.Y.M. Botchway**

University of Cape Coast

**Charles Prempeh**

Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology

*‘Scientificity’, Hegemony and Cultural Neoliberalism of European Football League and the ‘Problem’ of Football Betting in Ghana: A Note*

Our paper explores the recent surge of football (soccer) betting in Ghana, particularly among the youthful spectators, who are exposed to European football leagues through subscription television and social media, and contends that it is intricately linked to pervasive hegemonic and cultural influences of European leagues. Sports clubs and betting companies actively promote this gambling culture, capturing the attention of pupils, students and apprentices. While stakeholders tend to ask parents and teachers to “simply” bring this sports-led “social disruption” under control, our paper argues that the matter of football gambling, which attracts the youth, is complicated because it is entwined in a certain subtle triad of hegemony, cultural neoliberalism and so-called scientificity associated with the European leagues which the youths follow. It notes that historically, football in Ghana represented a non-binary world, blending physical and metaphysical elements, creating suspense and unpredictability. However, the popularisation of “scientific” football in European leagues, emphasised in Ghana, has shifted the focus to predictability and trophy obsession. This transformation has led to a departure from the cultogenic nature of football in Ghana, where outcomes were uncertain, to a more rationalised and empirical approach, which makes people feel confident to bet. Through the prisms of social history, neoliberalism, autoethnography, and Marx’s commodity fetishism, our paper examines the commodification of football in Ghana and argues that football-betting growth in Ghana reflects European football hegemony fuelled by capitalism and social media. While challenging simplistic explanations tied to parental and educational factors, it emphasises understanding the broader societal struggle against European football hegemony’s impact on Ghanaian youth’s involvement in sports gambling.

**Goran Pavel Santek**

University of Zagreb

*“When injustice becomes law, resistance becomes duty” – Systemic inequality, corrupted football, and social change*

This presentation examines the resistance of football fans against the corrupt dynamics perceived between sports organizations and political or other power structures in Croatia since the 1990s. It will explore how dissatisfaction with the oversight by state and city institutions regarding FC Dinamo's management influences fans' behaviour, sometimes leading to violence. Despite corruption in sports and structural challenges, the study reveals that sports and related social engagement can have positive societal impacts. Specifically, youth activism through fan groups holds the potential for societal democratization. The conflict between Dinamo club management and its fans was predictable by sociological theories (Rigauer and Brohm), as were the forms of resistance (Goffman and Foucault). This resistance challenges the hegemonic actions of the elite (Gramsci), who seek to maintain their positions and exert complete control over the field – Dinamo (Bourdieu). The interpretation agrees with the viewpoints of Sugden and Tomlinson, asserting that in environments where structural conditions foster widespread perceptions of inequality, resentment becomes a driving force for social movements. Consequently, this resentment acts as a catalyst for social change.

# PANEL F: INEQUALITIES AND INFRASTRUCTURES

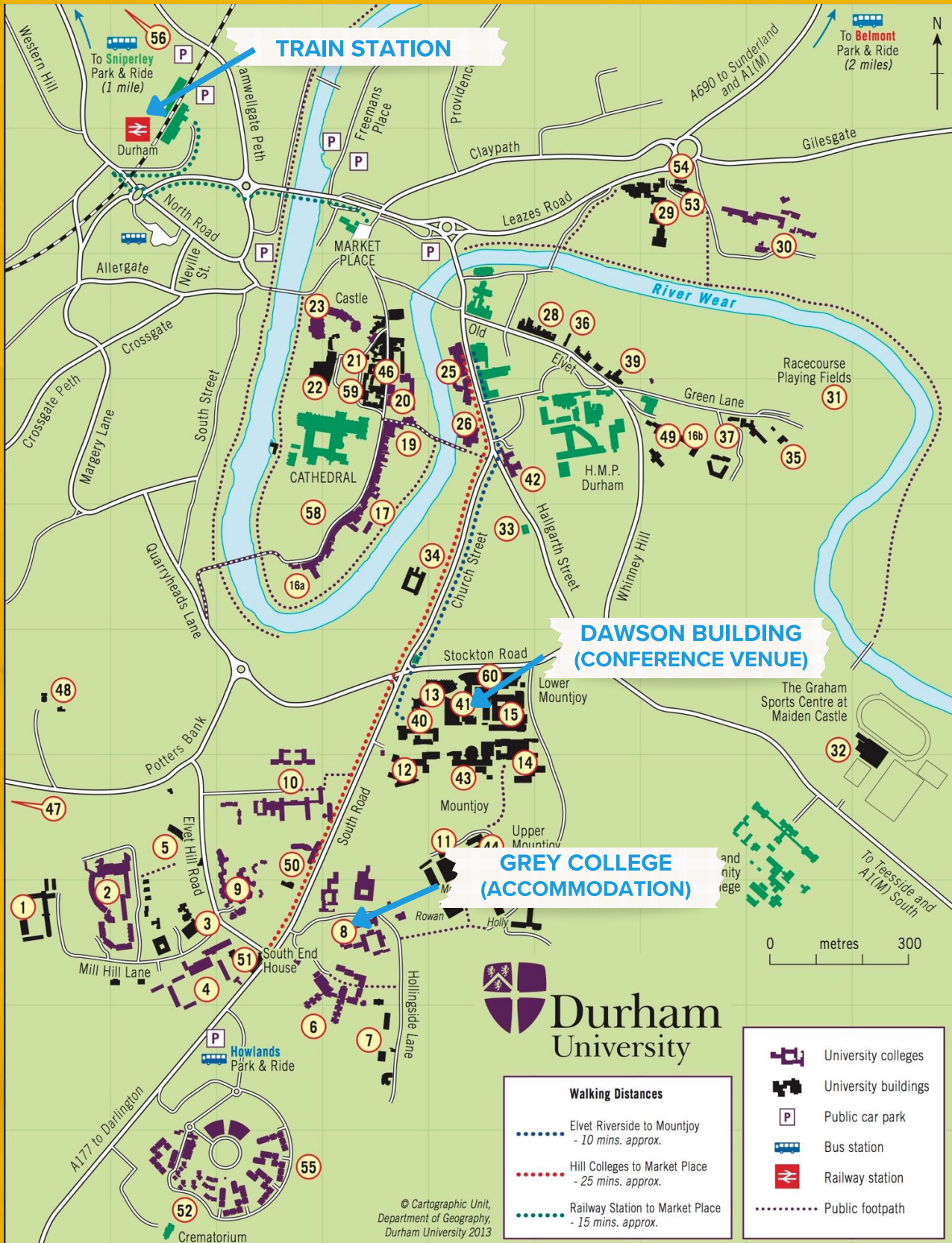
**John Eade**

University of Roehampton

*Football Disasters and Pilgrimage: Commemoration through Religious and Non-Religious Ritual and Materiality*

Although the relationship between religion and football has gained considerable interest during the last twenty years, scant attention has been paid to the relationship between football and pilgrimage. In this paper we seek to advance the study of this relationship through an exploration of collective memory that not only focuses on people's perceptions and feelings but also attends to the materiality of commemoration and the places where that commemoration is ritually expressed. We focus on the ways in which four different tragedies involving British football clubs in Liverpool, Manchester and Glasgow have been commemorated and what light these commemorations throw on the relationship between football and pilgrimage. Commemoration will be analysed in terms of the religious and non-religious rituals performed at various sites in the UK, Germany and Italy and through this analysis we will also show how these rituals linked the local to the global.

# DURHAM MAP





# CONFERENCE VENUE

