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Movements and Mobilities

This chapter builds on some of the defining features of boxing that emerged from Chapter 2 and moves on to explore the culture of boxing in relation to its links to migration, which establish the sport as one that has particular global dimensions through its association with migrant and mobile peoples and the movement of people from particular groups in and out of boxing. Intensified patterns of migration are linked to diaspora. These links are made both through diaspora as an empirical description of displaced and mobile peoples and as an explanatory concept which provides a means of understanding social relations and changes which are outcomes of as well as catalysts for the creation of diaspora.

This chapter aims to demonstrate how mobilities and the movement of peoples have both impacted upon boxing and how boxing has shaped the understanding of migration, with particular emphasis upon the inequalities and social exclusion that can feature in the lives of displaced, migrant peoples. The chapter starts with a discussion of the contested concept of diaspora in order to demonstrate its relevance to boxing and goes on to explore the intersection of race, racialization and ethnicization with boxing, by looking at the politics of race as played out in the sport and other dimensions of social exclusion, which are negotiated within the sport. Gypsy boxers and the traveller community offer a useful example of the processes through which boxing as a sport travels and the capacities which boxing has to generate different connections. Thai boxing or Muay Thai, as illustrative of the recent popularity of MMA, offers another discussion of the ways in which boxing travels and is redefined and remade through its mobilities as well as its endurances.

Diaspora in all its aspects is most usefully viewed as a relational aspect of globalization, rather than having a causal connection. The relationship between diaspora and globalization is more akin to the correlation between capitalism and Protestantism which the sociologist Max Weber understood as an elective affinity (Weber, 2001[1930]). Diasporas long precede globalization, which is one

counter argument to any causal link between the two (Cohen, 1997). There are, however, particular arguments which support the application of the concept of diaspora to sport, and to boxing in particular, which are linked to the relationship between the distinctive features of globalization in late modernity and the experience and understanding of diaspora. This relationship is materialized in and through the embodied practices of boxing and boxing cultures.

Globalization is characterized by new sorts of social and economic organization, technological change, not least in relation to the speed of contemporary communications systems of knowledge transfer and through transport systems, new modes of production and the syncretization of cultures, each of which has a particular role to play in sport. Sport is also a vehicle for change and development in many of these fields, especially those relating to the media and to technological interventions, especially the development of techno-science in performance enhancement and in extending the capacities of the body as well as crossing boundaries between the human and non-human, such as people and machines (Haraway, 1991). The embodied practices of sport, especially competitive, international sport, generate technological and medical scientific interventions, not least boxing, in which bodies are of central importance.

Boxing has a long history of engagement with migration and in providing a route out of poverty and disadvantage for displaced or migrant people, especially young men (Sammons, 1988, Sugden, 1996). Boxing has different histories in different places through which boxing cultures have been reproduced and reconfigured. There is no single linear narrative of boxing, in spite of the similarities between some of the stories, for example of the opportunities offered by boxing to enhance self-esteem and self-respect for disadvantaged young men and, at some points, young women too.

The different paths which boxing, its culture and its embodied practitioners have taken suggest that boxing can be seen:

not as a mirror but as a magnifying glass of our society. It is hardly accidental that out of the poor Irish immigration of a people being brutalized by their British overlords, we have a wave of great Irish fighters... As the Irish moved up into the mainstream there was less economic need to use the prize ring as their way out and up. The wave of Jewish boxers followed exactly the same pattern, and so did the Italians. The almost total domination of the ring today by African-Americans and Hispanics speaks directly to the continued economic deprivation and discrimination of large sections of our inner-city communities.

(Budd Schulberg quoted in Bodner, 2011[1997]:xi)

Such stories raise questions about where boxing is most popular; who boxes and where and about the interconnections between boxing and migration and diaspora. Boxing is mobile in the spaces it occupies across the globe, with shifting dominance, currently still in the USA, but increasingly in countries like Germany, Mexico, Panama, the Philippines Puerto Rico, Ukraine, Venezuela, as well as of course Thailand, where it has a long tradition with Muay Thai (Box rec, 2013).

Cultural diaspora

The concept of diaspora has been used to describe and explain the dispersal of people through migration from one homeland, usually classified as their original home, to another location, or possibly more than a single new location and often very far removed from the original homeland. The term, which, in one of its early forms was associated with the movement of Jewish people, first, through expulsion from Israel and later, in the twentieth century most emphatically after the Second World War, to different places scattered across the globe, has been applied both to different peoples who experience exile and movement and to explain the processes and identifications of diasporic peoples in a wide range of different contexts. The twentieth century provided a focus on migration which was driven by the negative forces of political extremism and post-colonial dispersal which has led to interest in theories of diaspora as mechanisms for explaining how cultural identifications are made transnationally and in the context of flux and mobility.

The concept of diaspora has been enormously expanded to encompass all sorts of mobilities and has stressed the fluidity and mobility of diasporic identifications. Diaspora refers to people and the processes through which those people are made, for example as experienced by African Caribbean people (Chamberlain, 1998), who have also experienced more than one set of displacements (Hall, 1990). The approaches to diaspora which were associated with postmodernist conceptualizations, for example within cultural studies in the 1980s and the 1990s (Bhabha, 1994, Hall, 1992, Said, 1978), can be seen as challenging more stabilized, 'classic' understandings of diaspora (Chivallon, 2002), which appeal to roots and original ancestral homelands. Theories and politics of diaspora which were associated with post-colonialism and with postmodernist approaches made connections between hybridity and the changing features of diaspora. For example, Stuart Hall argued that the late twentieth century was marked by two apparently contradictory tendencies: that of globalization, which is characterized by homogenization and assimilation whereby cultures become

unified, and, partly in reaction to these globalizing trends, the assertion of local identifications, often based on national, ethnic and religious belongings (Hall, 1992). Global sport demonstrates these tensions between international competition and the movement of athletes and localized affiliations and identifications. Boxing culture with its individualized figures rather than national or regional teams offers a particular version of these tensions, where the man (*sic*) comes to stand for the nation and for oppressed migrant peoples.

The hybrid version of diaspora might sit uneasily with the strong sense of belonging and even of fixity that have been linked to affiliations in sport, perhaps especially in a sport like boxing which is so firmly based on a sense of community and of belonging. Many of these connections and disruptions and seemingly counter-positions, however, are part of boxing culture. Sport has to some extent been under-researched as a field in which these tensions and ambivalences are lived, rearticulated and generated. It is not only the case that the young men who have taken up boxing have been part of diasporic dispersal, but their make-up as diasporic peoples is marked by the uncertainties that accompany economic insecurity as well as those of national and ethnic identifications.

Although the concept of diaspora may have been diluted by its overuse and excessive emphasis upon heterogeneity and fluidity, it remains useful for exploring and explaining some of the contradictions which boxing generates. As James Clifford has demonstrated, the adjectival use of the term 'diasporic' has the advantage of greater flexibility (1997), which makes it attractive as part of the explanatory framework and as a concept that might be applied to transformations, which are taking place in sport, where different versions of attachment to nation and community are experienced and where sex gender is more explicitly part of the mix. Gender has only recently been addressed in studies of globalization and global sport, especially as part of the explanatory framework through which inequalities can be understood, rather than only as an empirical category. The explicit division of sport along lines of sex gender makes sport particularly important to understanding the forces and flows of diaspora.

Diasporic identifications merge with those of multiculturalism which may also be useful for exploring the benefits of migration and the remixing of diasporic peoples which marks boxing. Using the idea of multicultural identities provides a shared sense of belonging which is difficult to achieve and may, in fact, be unattainable, for example, because it feeds 'expectations of being together that are impossibly high' (Gilroy, 2005:54). Gilroy also suggests that the concept of identity may invoke notions of fixity that limit its usefulness in the context of global transformation and proposes the idea of 'conviviality' as a more relevant

follow-on from ‘multiculturalism’, which he claims to have broken down politically, as a means of understanding the ‘processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multi-culture an ordinary feature of social life in Britain’s urban areas and in post-colonial cities elsewhere ... that turns attention toward the always unpredictable mechanisms of identification’ (Gilroy, 2005:xv). Gilroy’s notion of conviviality has considerable resonance, especially in the local affiliations of boxing, for example in the changing, multi-ethnic make-up of the gym with its post-colonial accommodations especially at a local level.

Gilroy’s re-conceptualizations of diaspora and diversity reflect recent preference for the more dynamic notion of identification which highlights mobility and contingency rather than fixity. The concept of identity still provides a politics of location (Hall, 1996), which has purchase in the field of combating racism, and offers some recognition of the force of some attachments that invoke belonging. The pull of the boxing gym is due to not only the promise of a career in the sport, but also the security of belonging as part of a community, which is manifest in histories and the personal and public narratives of spatial and temporal belonging that are an integral part of identification in sport, and especially in boxing, with its links to migration and mobility. As Pnina Werbner has argued,

Post-modernists who attack constructions of ‘culture’ miss the fact that identities matter deeply and are long term ... they are not simply pre-given or inherited: they are formed, made and re-made: they exist in practice dialogically, through collective action and interaction.

(Werbner, 2002:267)

Not only is the local boxing gym a site for the stabilizing of kinship ties and familial connections (Woodward, 2004, 2006, 2008), boxing provides its own version of family (Wacquant, 2004) for diasporic peoples; families in the sense that the boxing gym is a safe place, even for those who might not immediately be seen as belonging to a particular location (Mitchell, 2009).

Boxing provides a site for diasporic peoples to forge new identifications informed by the promise of resistance to social exclusion and marginalization. As Chapter 2 showed, boxing is highly political (Woodward, 2012a, 2012c), especially in relation to the politics of race and equality. Boxing heroes are often those who challenge racism and social injustice, with Muhammad Ali being one of the greatest champions of the golden age of ‘When We Were Kings’ – sporting and political. Gilroy argues that, although sport is, in a sense, an anti-political terrain, lacking the orientations of ‘respectable politics’ (2005:112), sporting events follow the pattern of racialized politics and political conflicts are reflected in the rhythms of sporting events.

As Ashley Doane argues, 'racial events constitute the arena in which racial ideologies are presented, challenged and defended – and are re-shaped in the process' (Doane, 2006:260). This remains a contested arena, where dispute is often concentrated upon specific events, many of which receive extensive media coverage. Historically, some of these moments in boxing have been framed by the traditional politics of race – Jack Johnson's first heavyweight victory and Max Schmeling's defeat by Joe Louis. In boxing racialization and the politics of race have often been implicated in the media coverage of transgressive events whether in the ring in some of the more violent moments, such as Mike Tyson biting Evander Holyfield's ear in 1997, or criminal acts outside the ring such as Mike Tyson's conviction for rape in 1992 (O'Connor, 2002). Race, ethnicity, migration, mobilities and diaspora are components in the processes of globalization which have different weights and impact at different times. These related forces also move in and out of popularity within the literature, although boxing, especially, and sport in general, engages less with the complexities and sophistications of some of the concepts associated with postmodernist critiques.

Sport, especially a sport like boxing, may appear to be more concerned with certainties, for example in deciding who has won and who has lost and how it is to be decided, and who is allowed to participate and in which competitions. The binary logic of sport, with its strong divisions into women's and men's competitions and rules and stress on the exact measurement of success (and failure) and its enfolded practices which include what bodies cannot do as well as what they can, presents challenges to some of the more complex terminology besides sometimes rendering its distance from everyday experience redundant. The experience of racialized and ethnicized classificatory systems in sport – as the history of boxing and of the politics of race demonstrate – indicates the enormous difficulty in establishing scientific categories. Boxing shows the need to recognize the complexities of the field.

Diaspora, with its connotations of moving from one place to another but never actually being fixed in particular cultural spaces, retains useful applications in the genealogy of boxing with its links to migration and movement of peoples. Boxing is populated by diasporic people, but what also matters in the gym and in the ring is the embodied practice of the sport. As Stuart Hall argued:

Diaspora does not refer us to those scattered tribes whose identity can only be secured to some sacred homeland to which they must at all costs return even if it means pushing other people into the sea. This is the old, the imperializing, hegemonizing form of 'ethnicity'... The diaspora experience I intend here is

defined not by purity, but by the recognition of necessary heterogeneity and diversity; by a conception of identity which lives with and through, not despite difference, by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves anew, through transformation and difference.

(Hall, 1990:235)

Race and boxing

Boxing has a longstanding relationship with migration and the movement of people around the globe. Not only have different forms of boxing been practised in many parts of the world over a long period of time, but boxing has been the preferred sport, and the route into a new life of self-respect and independence for those who have moved across the boundaries of nations and even continents, whether from choice or, more likely, compelled to migrate because of economic need and political forces.

In many cases, the people involved in these migrations have experienced the hostile forces of racialization and ethnicization and their racial and ethnic categorizations have been push factors in their expulsion from one place and entry into another.

Ben Carrington argues that the figure of the black athlete was put into discourse within the remaking of race on 26 December 1908, when, in a boxing ring in Sydney, Australia, Jack Johnson, the US fighter from Texas, who was the son of slave-born parents, defeated the white Canadian Tommy Burns, to the disbelief of a largely all-white crowd.

A black man held the title that only the bravest and strongest could lay claim to, the supposed pinnacle of heterosexual manhood, the very definition of a patriarchal identity based upon violence and domination, courage and mastery: heavyweight champion of the world. Race is a productive category capable of explaining social relations and hierarchies, the limits of whiteness, and even the nature of politics and subaltern freedom in the west, would all have to be rethought in the coming years and decades after this fight.

(Carrington, 2010:1)

As Carrington argues, Jack Johnson holds a special place as a champion heavyweight boxer. Johnson's competence and skill as a boxer were so troubling to white racists that he was seen as a sexualized threat to white women. In this

hostile, racist assemblage of the figure of the black athlete, athletic prowess seemed inextricably allied to uncontrolled sexual promiscuity and danger; sexuality and race became entangled in this figure of the black athlete, configured around the binary logic of black and white oppositions.

Johnson fled to Europe but returned to the USA at the end of his career, where he was defeated in the ring by a white Texan, Jess Willard, to the satisfaction of many white fans.

Whatever the circumstances most white Americans rejoiced in the return of the heavyweight crown to their race. Willard became an instant hero, one who brought renewed confidence to the physical and moral strength of white America.

(Sammons, 1988:44)

Boxing in the USA has at times been particularly characterized by the politics of race and processes of racialization as well as the ethnicization that has played a big part in boxing in the UK at many points in its history. Boxing has strong links to the urban poor and with particular ethnic groups – the Irish, Hispanic people and black people – whose status can be measured by boxing (Michner, 1976). This is a complex mix of class, race, ethnicity, sex, gender and place. Sugden points to the oversimplification of boxing as fighting a way out of the ghetto, but the idea still has some relevance in the twenty-first century in the legacy of boxing. The particular diasporic or ethnic groups may have changed but the articulation with social class, poverty and migration persists.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, on both sides of the Atlantic, and increasingly in other parts of the world, urban poverty, racial and ethnic discrimination and relative deprivation had been established as the common denomination of prize fighting and subsequent professional boxing.

(Sugden, 1996:24)

Success in the ring in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries was clearly situated within racialized discursive regimes, so that individual success elided with racial superiority. Although migrant and racialized young men who had experienced the exclusionary forces of racism and poverty were drawn to boxing for economic and social reasons, US society sought to maintain white supremacy for an extended period well into the twentieth century, by attempting to legislate against mixed-race contests (especially when the black boxer was more likely to win). Latter, racism has operated through more diffuse mechanisms and through the post-colonial accommodations of Gilroy's conviviality (Gilroy, 2005).

Even after boxing had been legalized in the USA, there was a prohibition against fights between black and white boxers, sometimes based on similar arguments which resonate with much later disputes about women and men competing against each other. Prohibition against mixed fights was not abolished until Joe Louis, the first widely recognized African American champion since Jack Johnson, beat the white American James Braddock (Cinderella Man) in 1937 in a comeback fight after his defeat by Max Schmeling, Hitler's champion. Joe Louis and Max Schmeling had two fights, which were construed as key moments in the politics of race, which were also mixed up in the articulation of race, gender, class and global politics, especially as framed by the conflict between the neoliberal USA and fascist Nazi Germany (Erenberg, 2006). Schmeling won their first fight but, when they met for the second time, Louis won by a knockout in the first round. Joe Louis came to embody pride and self-esteem for black boxers and thus for black communities. It demonstrates how the narrative of triumph over tragedy and the route out of the ghetto play out in boxing culture.

Earlier commentaries stressed the dichotomies of democracy versus oppressive right wing regimes which in a way open up the possibilities for the appropriation of the heroic stories of boxers from the margins and the dispossessed by neoliberal regimes. On the one hand Hitler had sought to utilize a re-articulation of athleticism and racialized enfolded ideals, using a boxing champion, Schmeling, to embody white supremacy through elite, athletic, embodied success. On the other hand, neoliberal regimes like that of the USA began to see the possibilities of promoting their own democratic systems of governance through more socially inclusive, egalitarian participation in sport. When Louis beat Schmeling in New York City in 1938 the USA celebrated the triumph of good over evil (Sammons, 1988) and Louis went on to dominate the heavyweight category. Louis achieved heroic status because of his boxing success and his support for the US war effort. In terms of an agentic project though, the Louis-Schmeling fights are more conventionally described in relation to Hitler's project.

Schmeling set out to win the heavyweight championship of the world as Hitler goose-stepped through Europe. Each would use the other to achieve his goals and each would come perilously close to succeeding

(Sammons, 1988:107)

Associations with militarism and traditional masculinities are part of the boxing legacy, so it is not surprising that race has been implicated in this mix in particular ways. Links between war and boxing have been last bastions and

mechanisms for the exclusion of women and promotion of masculinity, in a mix in which the politics of race and power coalesced. After the First World War, G. Stanley Hall argued that 'War is, in a sense the last acme of what some now call the manly protest... where male virtues come to the fore, for woman cannot go "over the top"' (Hall, 1920:102). Boxing has been used to 'counter effeminizing tendencies, preparing men for a life of strife' (Gorn, 1986:202). However, the use of black boxing heroes to promote bellicosity and pugilism at a national level has not always been straightforward. Militarism offers a means of integration and acceptance for black male boxers; it also provides another site for the operation of racism and oppression. For successful black boxers, their relationship with war and militarism can also be a site of resistance.

Boxing has also been the site for the expression of political activism and opposition in the politics of race. Ali's story has often been heroic in retrospect rather than in real time and his story incorporates many of the tensions and characteristics of boxing. Boxing might have been encouraged as a set of body practices within the armed forces to promote versions of enflashed traditional masculinity but, for example, Ali's path to being established as a national hero was a rocky and disrupted one.

Ali's gold medal at the 1960 Olympic Games, followed by his move to professional status and his defeat against the odds of 'bad guy' Sonny Liston in 1964, seemed to situate Ali or Cassius Clay, as he had previously been called, as a national American hero rather in the style of Joe Louis (Hauser, 1991, Lemert, 2003, Remnick, 1998). In previous fights Liston as the 'bad guy', backed by the Mob and the criminal underworld, had defeated 'good guys', like Floyd Paterson. Ali's fight against Sonny Liston became more complicated when Ali, who in contrast to Liston was supported by many legitimate businessmen of Louisville, adopted the Muslim religion, rejected his slave name of Cassius Clay and became Muhammad Ali. Not only did Ali proclaim 'I am the greatest' (Hauser, 1991:78) after beating Liston at the age of 22, he also joined the political movement, the Nation of Islam, and asserted, 'I talk to God every day... the real God' (Lemert, 2003:73). Ali disrupted the popular dichotomy of 'good' and 'bad' black masculinity in boxing by espousing a radical political movement, strongly supporting civil rights and ultimately refusing the draft to Vietnam in 1967, which led to the punitive loss of his title and to the threat of imprisonment. The politics of race and the fight against inequality play out in complex and disruptive ways in sport, especially boxing, even if the sport is most strongly represented as providing a route into social acceptance through the investment of physical capital for participants and serving a social function of integration.

The ghost of racism always haunts boxing through its networks and systems of governance and promotion. Until Don King's arrival, the promotion of boxing had been dominated by white men. As Ali himself pointed out there might be two black men slogging it out in the ring, but the profits would largely accrue to white promoters and investors and often be viewed and followed by affluent, white people (Ali and Durham, 1975). Also the physical investment is made by the boxers who take the risks, but the capital returns go to a largely white class which has the resource to make capital investments (Wacquant, 2004).

Ali might have moved in and out of the dichotomous positions of 'good guy' and 'bad guy', but Mike Tyson occupied both at the same time. Tyson's circuitous route through different legends, myths and materialities has generated a great deal of comment (Early, 1999, O'Connor, 2002), but is always based on the politics of race. Tyson has had two distinct, if somewhat contradictory, uses for the racialized history of professional boxing. His identification and expropriation of the great white fighters made him a mainstream figure, depoliticizing his masculinity by making him someone who identified with whites and so someone with whom whites could, on some level, identify. 'But as Don King knew ... [i]dentifying with black fighters of the past – or more precisely with the street life which produced them – promised to re-politicize Tyson's masculinity and stave off charges of racial inauthenticity. The Public Enemy myth ... was Tyson's most convincing role, if only because it fits so neatly into the roles scripted for young and physically powerful black men in the American mind' (Early, 2002:203)

Tyson is a contradictory and fragile as well as successful figure (Jefferson, 1996, 1997). He was and continues to be a hero for many black kids and his criminal convictions, even for rape, are also construed as part of the materialities of his biography and situation (O'Connor, 2002). This troubling combination, however, raises questions about how far it is also possible to celebrate his boxing prowess without excusing his violence and misogyny.

Boxing all too often opens up possibilities for the production and reinstatement of racialized stereotypes and exclusionary classifications of racialized and ethnicized expressions. Boxing and the migrant and marginalized people who box do not always, or even often, occupy visible public spaces though. Not only is it the case that large numbers of those who box never succeed, but some diasporic peoples and some migrant communities receive much less public attention. For example, gypsy and traveller boxers occupy a more marginalized space. Such boxing cultures are distinctive in many ways and although they have synergies with other boxing traditions and practices, they also have cultural and social specificities.

Travelling boxers

There is a long tradition of boxing, or more specifically prizefighting and bare-knuckle fighting, among gypsy and traveller communities which extended into the twentieth century and remains a powerful presence, albeit more local in its representations and social networks than global and transnational in its affiliations and public presence. These local cultural legacies are often reiterated through storytelling and oral traditions through which local heroes are made and boxing legends constituted, within entrepreneurial frameworks which are outside the global sport-media-sponsorship nexus, largely because of the lack of legal status of many of its practices. Boxing, or more specifically bare-knuckle fighting, has played a key role in the perpetuation of gendered social relations and divisions and individualistic, entrepreneurial and transgressive practices within gypsy and traveller cultures. This version of boxing has points of connection with other dimensions of western boxing through its embodied practices, but it retains strong elements of earlier boxing cultures, especially those associated with the boxing booths of the fairgrounds and the operation of boxing outside the parameters of mainstream legal frameworks.

There are, of course, famous figures, notably Bartley Gorman, the Irish traveller and bare-knuckle fighter (Gorman and Walsh, 2003), who was the British champion of what was nonetheless illegal, bare-knuckle fighting, between 1972 and 1992. Gorman was an Irish traveller who moved to Staffordshire in the UK and fought at a variety of unsanctioned sites such as horse fairs, traveller campsites, bars and clubs and even a quarry (Gorman and Walsh, 2003). There are elements of legitimacy in Gorman's life story; he was described as a 'town treasure' at his adopted home town of Uttoxeter in Staffordshire, where he was honoured as a local hero at the town's Millenium monument (BBC. *King of the Gypsies*, 2012). Shane Meadows produced the film *the King of the Gypsies*, in 1995, as testament to Gorman's achievements and cultural significance and the endurance of the raw qualities of boxing (YouTube Shane Meadows, 2013).

Legend has it that Gorman once even sparred with Muhammad Ali, demonstrating some of the interconnections between different elements in the boxing story and the accommodation of different versions of the embodied practices of boxing and its cultural and social meanings. Prizefighting and bare-knuckle fighting still belong to particular spatial traditions, notably those associated with what could be called western boxing, but as Gorman says in Shane Meadows's film *King of the Gypsies*, 'bare knuckle fighting is violent, relentless in its raw experience of aggression' (YouTube, *King of the Gypsies*, 2013).

The persistence of these practices, such as bare-knuckle fighting, has also become associated with other activities which are linked to boxing and maybe outshoots of some of the practices that have come to be classified as illegal. All boxing has had links to illegality in various forms even if only by association, but some of the reworking of activities like bare-knuckle fighting, cage fighting and Ultimate Fighting have emerged in reconfigured contemporary forms which sometimes lay claim to earlier, unregulated practices. Some of the interest in martial arts, especially MMA, has brought in other elements of excitement into the sport which have an uneasy relationship with the legal performance and experience of boxing, whether western boxing or martial arts and Thai boxing.

MMA features boxers in a ring or cage where combatants are permitted to inflict pain on their opponent through techniques of punching, kicking, elbowing and kneeing (Spencer, 2011), but, although fighters are trained and there are rules, some proponents of different forms of boxing are critical of the extent of the violence in some of these competitions. Regulatory bodies of martial arts and Thai boxing express anxiety about the free-for-all practices in venues, which could be a sports centre, used to provide space for those who pay £20 to fight and spectators pay the same amount to watch untrained combatants perform in a cage (Moore, 2012). The unregulated practices of cage fighting plug into some of the excitement of boxing but negotiate a difficult path in relation to the discipline and control which are central to boxing as well as its legacy of respect and conformity to rules.

Not only does boxing draw upon migrant communities so that boxers are part of transnational mobility, it also migrates as a set of embodied sporting practices. What could be called western boxing has achieved popularity in different parts of the world and similarly other varieties of boxing and combat sport have travelled from the part of the world where they were most popular, because of their strong cultural and ethnic connections, and have been adopted in other very different places. One such example is what is called in the west, Thai boxing, and in Japan, kick boxing, but in its place of origin, Muay Thai.

Thai boxing: Muay Thai

Boxing takes many different forms, not all of which are actually called boxing. Whether a set of activities can be called boxing is disputed and within traditional western boxing there is a reluctance to include wrestling or martial arts, although increasingly with the growth of interest in martial arts, in many European countries for example, boundaries are becoming blurred.

Thai boxing or Muay Thai shares many of the features of western boxing and draws upon a long tradition with links to militarism and cultural regimes which date back to the middle ages (Muay Thai, 2012). Militarism has more specific points of connection with the sport in Muay Thai, which also has a tradition of using weapons, notably swords, as part of its ritual practices, which have become key symbolic elements of the sport. The literature cites weapons such as swords and pikes being deployed in the early days of Muay Thai, along with elbows, knees, arms and feet in an assemblage of body parts and material equipment, all of which are part of Muay Thai's ritual performances and its legacy (Moore, 2005, Muay Thai, 2012). Weapons are retained as part of the ritual procedures in a sport to which rituals are central. Its particular cultural legacy also makes it a distinctive form of boxing which is evident in the sport's rituals and practices and its particularities in relation to Thai social and cultural traditions.

Muay Thai is also characterized by actions which are not sanctioned in western boxing; more emphasis is given to the use of elbows, arms and feet; kicking is permitted. Thai boxing is included in martial arts as well as being a distinctive set of practices which sets it apart (Moore, 2012). Much of the literature and the internet coverage of the sport focuses upon its complex sets of practices and routines of combat which make up a detailed syllabus for all who seek to participate. The language is similar, at least in translation to that of western boxing with jabs, crosses and upper cuts, but with a far wider range of techniques due to the inclusion of feet, elbows and arms.

Muay Thai is hugely popular in Thailand but, with the expansion of interest in martial arts such as Judo (Judo, 2012), Karate (Karate, 2012) and Taekwondo (Taekwondo, 2012), participation in the sport grew considerably in the late twentieth century and there has been further interest in the twenty-first century. Muay Thai has generated interest in martial arts, especially the development of MMA in an interactive exchange between different sets of boxing practices and culture. Thai boxing has become more popular in Europe, especially in the UK, France and Holland, in Japan where it is called kick boxing, and in the USA, which boasts the oldest and largest organization outside Thailand, founded in 1968. This form of boxing has travelled and undergone some transnational translations as have other forms of boxing and especially boxing culture. Many practitioners and aficionados of Muay Thai report tracing their interest through different martial arts (Moore, 2012). The sport gives enormous emphasis to the interrelationship between wider cultural factors as well as the ideological and spiritual dimensions of the experience and its embodied practices. Many western gyms frame the

values of the gym within broader social and cultural regulatory frameworks (Woodward, 1997b, 2008), but Muay Thai is much more explicit in setting the context of its culture, for example, through elaborate sets of ritual practices which set the context of embodied engagements at the camp, which is the more common name given to the gym (Moore, 2012). Muay Thai rituals are more formalized and less diverse and flexible than those of western boxing gyms at the local level, but nonetheless, the routine practices do vary according to location.

Thai boxing has a powerful presence in popular culture as well as in the routine practices of local venues where practitioners train. Martial arts have provided the central narrative and major trope for many films, such as kung fu and ninja films in the 1980s and the 1990s and huge numbers of Chinese martial arts films, like Ang Lee's *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon* in 1999. Muay Thai has been a more recent addition, since Jean-Claude Van Damme's *Kickboxer* in 1989 and the more recent *Beautiful Boxer* in 2003 and has generated its own stars like Tony Jaa, star of *The Warrior King*. Popular cultural forms like film are part of the globalized media flows through which sport too is translated into other cultures and crosses national borders. Thai boxing films also manifest elements of western boxing because of the endurance of boxing's links to poverty and disadvantage. In the assemblages of boxing culture, individual heroism and agency mix with the structural constraints of poverty and disadvantage to produce powerful narratives which generate strong feelings of identification and commitment. Thai boxing in Thailand might generate superstars whose fees finance the camp with which they are associated but the sport is still perceived as a route out of poverty and most popular in the poorest parts of Thailand, much of it being concentrated in the north-eastern province of Isan (Moore, 2012).

Thai boxing has achieved some following in the UK, especially at particular locations, which have become centres for the development of Muay Thai according to traditional practices. For example, Manchester in the UK offers illustration of the growth of martial arts, especially Muay Thai. In the UK Muay Thai camps operate more like gyms in western boxing, rather than as locations built around a superstar fighter as they do in Thailand. Western camps have their own authorities like Tony Moore, who is chair of the British Thai Boxing Council (Sitsiam, 2012) in Manchester. He has been taught by some of Thailand's top instructors, including the late Grand Master Samai Messamarn of the Buddhai Swan Institute. Status is accorded through associations with Thailand although each country has its own regulatory body which accords titles and distinctions. For example, Tony Moore was British Light Middleweight Thai

Boxing Champion, British All-Styles Middleweight Champion and Champion of Champions and the first westerner to win an Eastern title and awarded a White Mongkorn, the highest award in Muay Thai.

Boxing, like all sports, generates and reflects hierarchies. The gym is usually controlled by the trainer, who sets the parameters of practice and the rules (Sugden, 1996, Wacquant, 1995a, 1995c, 2004, Woodward, 2006, 2008,). Muay Thai uses procedures and iterative ritual practices to secure relationships and respect (Moore, 2005), which may be part of its attraction as well as creating difficulties for some would-be practitioners in neoliberal western cultures. For example, respect for the teacher is formalized at Muay Thai camps by a show of respect before training commences (Moore, 2012). The sport has shrines to past teachers in an assemblage which is framed by spiritual and even explicitly religious values in a spiritual version of the media-dominated halls of fame of western boxing.

Muay Thai, like western boxing, is classified by amateur and professional practices. In Thai boxing, the amateur sport, which was established in 1989, in which protagonists wear body shields, knee and elbow shields and head protection, is in many ways comparable to other professional amateur distinctive practices in sport where the amateur receives more corporeal protection. Although martial arts are included in the Olympic Games, they carry less status than the traditional professional sports and are associated with the idea of 'play boxing' which is a routine translation of amateur (Moore, 2012) in the sporting language, which distinguishes between the real and the authentic and the trivial and the inauthentic (Oates, 1987, Woodward, 2006). This has particular resonance in boxing where the real is sometimes counterpoised to the dramatic, which can be viewed at a distance and, especially, to the authenticity of the men's sport as opposed to the women's, which might be seen as inferior or even parodic (Oates, 1987). Muay Thai and other forms of martial arts, however, offer possibilities for amateurs and particularly for women, especially in less-orthodox versions of the sport, because of boxing's emphasis upon self-defence. Even if women are barred from the competitive ring in Muay Thai, they can benefit from and enjoy the enfleshed practices which enable the development of competent body techniques through which they can, in the language of *psy-discourse* (Rose, 1996), feel empowered. More substantially, women are able to engage in the routine practices of Muay Thai and feel good about themselves in the same way that many men who spar to keep fit do in western boxing (Sugden, 1996, Woodward, 2006). Muay Thai more formally prioritizes the professional sport as does western boxing, but the body practices of boxing create their own values and culture. Boxing changes culture as well as being changed by social and cultural forces.

The valuing of professional over amateurism is complex in boxing though and whatever the prioritizing of the professional in Thai boxing, this is not the case everywhere nor at all times in the sport as a whole, as the discussion of women's boxing across the globe for the 2012 Olympics in the context of change and transformation in Chapter 7 shows. Amateur status can provide a route in professionalism and in some parts of the world, such as Cuba, the kudos of competing for one's country in amateur competitions rather than as an individual (or for the promoter) carries higher status (Sugden, 1996). The collective identifications of Thai boxing are differently configured but remain embedded in codes of honour which are linked to militarism and masculinity. Although there are variations in the embodied techniques and associated rituals there are points of connection between different types of boxing.

This relatively unequal weighting given to the amateur sport is allied to women's participation in the amateur, but not the professional game. Women have competed as amateurs in Thailand since 1966 but women experience more distinctions than that between amateur and professional in Muay Thai, especially as practised in Thailand where they do not perform in the major stadiums and are not permitted to touch the ring, which is construed as sacred (Moore, 2012). Religious notions of the sacred provide criteria for exclusion and for marking gendered difference in traditional sport. Western versions of kick-boxing have increased in popularity among women which may lead to possibilities of transformation through transnational migration of the sport. As in western boxing, the coexistence of different practices and routines is possible, Muay Thai remains powerfully embedded in networks and cultures of hegemonic masculinity, although differently configured in different parts of the world. The persistence of parallel strands of the sport remains possible and the relationship between amateur and professional and between women and men in boxing raises questions about how far women are interested in doing masculinity or emulating the men's fight game or whether there are distinctive challenges women might offer to the transformations of the sport. By taking up boxing and martial arts, women are initiating change. It is also the particular nature of boxing which makes it attractive to body projects which can enhance self-respect as well as provide techniques and mechanisms for self-defence. In most sports, men are the norm, and women, if they are allowed to participate at all, are invited to attempt a separate form of the sport's embodied techniques, which nonetheless remain subject to the evaluation criteria of the men's game (Hargreaves, 1994).

Kick-boxing is a fast-growing sport among those, including young women, who seek to keep fit by engaging in disciplined sporting routines and for whom

traditional constraints on public display and performance in mega spectacles present no disincentives. The traditions of the sport are sources of attraction as well as appear outdated at points. Although women are taught skills and techniques, they are excluded from its traditions of militarism and the code of honour which linked Muay Thai to the capacity for defending one's country, which in the genealogy of Thai boxing has only been available to men (Moore, 2005). This is unlikely to be a disincentive to women in the UK or Holland or the USA, who perceive the sport as an opportunity to work out and feel good about themselves. The routes the sport has taken in its journeys across continents represent cultural specificities in the place of adoption as well as the endurance of traditional values. Kick-boxing provides opportunities for the enjoyment of achieving success in personal embodied success and in attaining confidence through gaining control and establishing both fitness and self-esteem, which demonstrate the possibilities of flexible translation even with the most traditional of sports. Women who participate in Thai boxing learn the same skills, techniques and body practices as men, as they have been traditionally taught in Thailand. Thus, women are able to participate in and benefit from the capacities which boxing has for generating feelings of well-being, which may seem contradictory for so pugilistic a sport. It is, however, the body practices iteratively developed in the gym or camp and the highly disciplined regimen which create these effects and permit the development of self-esteem and self-respect.

Muay Thai presents particular versions of translation across cultures because of its strong and closely defined social and cultural specificities. The sport is practised widely in the USA, Europe and Japan, more explicitly as a martial art along with other Japanese martial arts. There is some blurring of boundaries between the constraints and formalities of traditional Muay Thai and how these can be accommodated in western societies in the twenty-first century and some debate about the tensions between making the sport accessible and popular whilst retaining its traditional qualities and cultural practices and disciplines.

Conclusion

The temporal and spatial interpretations and translation of boxing across different cultures represent an interesting example of how globalization works and the processes through which local and global forces intersect. The discussion in this chapter demonstrates that mobilities and movement are of people and practices. The embodied practices of boxing offer some endurances and

synergies across time and space so that it is still possible to identify distinctive features of the sport, but even if boxing appears to be embedded in traditional values and enduring qualities, there is some flexibility and movement within the sport as it travels and as those who participate in the sport do so in different parts of the world.

Migration, mobilities and diaspora play out in distinctive ways in boxing. Boxing is a sport with a culture which attracts migrant people and, especially, young men from diasporic communities and which has strong associations with poverty and economic disadvantage. Participation in boxing across the globe has been an iterative process whereby immigrant communities have engaged in the sport and been recruited into its culture and possibilities on arrival in their new home and social processes ensure that the process is repeated with subsequent new arrivals. This has been well illustrated by the Jewish diaspora. For example, in the USA and in the UK, in areas such as the east end of London there were high numbers of Jewish boxers in the early part of the twentieth century, but by the 1950s there were very few (Berkowitz and Ungar, 2007). Traditions and legacies are made and remade by participation in the sport through the intersection of economic and social circumstances, the properties of the sport and its culture.

The interrelationship between boxing and migration is particular to the sport through its associations with poverty and deprivation. As a sport, boxing requires limited equipment and facilities, as anyone who has visited the average downtown gym will know. It requires enormous dedication and courage to succeed, but not complex and expensive equipment. Boxing requires physical capital (Bourdieu, 1984, Wacquant, 1995a, 2004). Economic factors operate powerfully within the boxing culture but they are widely implicated with cultural values and more personal matters of identification.

Boxing is a productive site for the exploration of diaspora and diasporic identifications. This is in some ways surprising because boxing might seem to be one of the most traditional and least fluid and changing of all sports. Its binary logic of sex and gender and seemingly primitive practices and traditional values make it an unlikely candidate for understanding fluid and hybrid conceptualizations of diaspora. Boxing is, however, enmeshed with insecurities and uncertainties. The sport is contentious and its morality is often debated. Boxing is the sport of the poor in spite of intermittent forays of the aristocracy into the ring and more recent celebrations of white-collar boxing, for example among city bankers, modern aristocrats and young professionals.

In the context of the uncertainties, fluidities and insecurities of migration, boxing offers some stability, and boxing cultures have both routines and

disciplines that provide a sense of purpose and of belonging. The legacy of securing self-esteem through embodied disciplines and routines has always been a valued dimension of boxing. Boxing can offer a strong framework for gaining control of who you are through control of the body. Boxing culture is organized around routine practice which distances itself from the free-for-all uncontrolled street fighting. Success is only achievable through developing techniques of control which precede by a long time the apparatuses of contemporary body projects and have cultural and social meanings embedded in a lived experience which transcend the individualized practices and strategies of the health club, which Nikolas Rose included in his concept of 'psy discourses which characterize the inward looking individualism of contemporary societies' (Rose, 1996). The feeling of well-being which boxing of all varieties can invoke is testament to the properties of the sport for transcending some of the boundaries between individualism and collective belongings. Kick-boxing might be part of the body projects movement which coexists with traditional values of Muay Thai, but manifests little engagement with them.

Boxing becomes part of the culture of people within particular groups, and predominantly as categorized by gender. These associations are predominantly linked to masculinity and the expression and articulation of masculinity which achieve some cultural hegemony, which is reinforced through the networks that permeate modern sport. The networks of the Fancy discussed in Chapter 2 are translated in more recent networks of trainers, promoters, journalists, commentators, broadcasters, sponsors and followers who are often excluded from critiques of the body practices of boxing, but which make up the global flows of boxing culture. These networks still constitute boxing communities and are what make the sport attractive to diasporic people and part of diasporic cultures.

What an exploration of boxing in relation to mobilities and migration most powerfully demonstrates is the inextricable links between economic forces and diaspora, whether it is the pull or push aspects of globalization which motivate those who leave their homeland for another. Boxing has a legacy, not only in popular culture and in its myths and legends, of providing a means of attaining self-respect and financial independence through being able to earn money through the sport, but also in its strong spatial connections to impoverished places and poor people whose poverty is often a dimension of their having had to migrate. The fluidities of diaspora are also its uncertainties and insecurities. Boxing and its associated cultures offer the possibilities and promise of belonging

as well as being a set of activities which are strongly linked to diasporic and migrant peoples and the unsettling insecurities of displacement and dislocation.

Boxing itself has migrated across time and space and the sport has transformed in different ways besides retaining its primary qualities and features. All sport has changed through the explosion of regulatory interventions, bureaucratic systems and the forces of the media-sport-sponsorship nexus with all the demands of recruiting sponsorship and the possibilities of satellite broadcasting. Boxing has been particularly subject to regulatory procedures and mechanisms because of the perceived dangers of the sport and these regulatory systems have themselves generated change and resistance. The increased interest in MMA and cage fighting may be a response to the challenge of increased monitoring and control of mainstream boxing as well as part of a movement towards utilizing body practices and body projects to exercise control over the self through the body.