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Cultural Economies of Scale

This chapter looks at how the culture of boxing and the sport's economy at local and global levels interconnect to produce the cultural economy of boxing. It aims to provide an explanation of the relationship between boxing, its embodied practices and local routine performance and the economic culture which makes it possible and drives the sport along particular trajectories. This chapter starts with the dialogue between the economic demands of globalized sport and the links between the economic context and local practices and investments in the sport. The media are a focus in this chapter because of their powerful involvement in the making of the cultural economy of boxing. The chapter uses examples of the representation of boxing and the making of its celebrities and heroes in shaping its cultural economy as well as the particularities of boxing and its capacities for change, for example through its localized practices and the continuance of amateur boxing. The chapter offers a discussion of some of the capacities boxing has for attracting illegitimate as well as legitimate finance and the complicated intersection of personal and local commitments and the forces of global capital.

The media play a key role in the cultural economy of boxing in shaping what generates interest, profit and resource and in responding to the particular intensities of the sport and its embodied practices. Boxing offers the promise of individual success and reward for practitioners who invest physical capital in the sport. Boxing is also a marketable commodity which inspires event-driven economies in the developing world, as well as in post-industrial, knowledge economies (Nauright, 2004). Boxing, like most contemporary sports, is part of a global and globalized economy. Economic forces operate in particular ways and intersect with other social, political and cultural axes of power in boxing, which as Chapter 2 demonstrated has its own points of connection with the global economy and with economic inequalities which are manifest at the local as well as transnational levels. Boxing is g/local as a route out of social exclusion and the ghetto for many

migrant men in particular and it is also a global big business that is dominated by what are perceived as exploitative mechanisms of promotion and the relationship between boxing and the media upon which it is dependent for its most spectacular and visible promotion. Boxing remains a massively profitable business, as well as being a popular more local means of keeping fit and feeling good (Woodward, 1997b). The major catalyst for involvement in boxing has most frequently been the financial incentive that accompanies the possibilities of raising self-esteem through earning a living as a professional boxer. For many people, mostly men – although women are participating more widely in the twenty-first century – the increase in self-esteem that goes with being physically fit is closely allied to the community of the gym and the possibilities of financial independence and economic citizenship.

This chapter looks at the cultural economics of boxing in the light of some of the routes boxing has travelled and how the fight game is changing. Boxing is still an important part of the global sport-media nexus in addition to being closely imbricated with local economies and more local economic forces and interests. No sport, and certainly not boxing, ever stands ‘outside the economic, cultural, political and theoretical conditions in which it takes form and reform; sport and the bodies that stand at its centre are always made and remade with particular histories and places’ (Birrell and Cole, 1994:vi). Boxing does, however, have distinctive connections to aspirations of social mobility through pecuniary gain by means of the investment of physical capital for those who engage in its embodied practices.

Boxing is strongly embedded in an assemblage of social, political and cultural forces, in which economic factors play a key role. The connections between boxing and urban poverty have been rehearsed in boxing films and popular legends. In the nexus of economic, class and gender structures and in the politics and lived experience of racialization and ethnicization, the most familiar story is one in which the dominant force which shapes boxing relates to economic deprivation. The escape from the ghetto and the impoverished conditions of boxers are set in sharp contrast to the global commercial systems of sport, with massive returns for investors and promoters and, at an individual level, the huge purses for those boxers who make it in the fight game. Oscar de La Hoya is reputedly boxing’s highest earner, having made \$610m by 2013. Floyd Merryweather Jr, officially the highest paid sportsman in the world at the time of writing, earned \$85m during May 2012 (Coffs Coast, 2013). His fight against Robert Guerrero in May 2013 earned him between \$40 and \$50m (USA Today, 2013). The figures are huge but the detail is not so precise. It is notoriously difficult to ascertain details of boxing purses, beyond headlines of

the big money. This does imply a distinction which is not always explicit or even acknowledged between economic systems and racialized class structures and the financial structures which also operate within economic systems and are the concern of those bound up in the wider political economy of global capital.

Urban poverty is clearly a crucial factor as are the experiences of displacement and dislocation which accompany migration, as Chapter 3 demonstrated, but this is not the whole story. Clearly there is overlap between the experiences of young men in urban contexts (Hare, 1971), but the specificities of masculinity and how it impacts upon and is affected by social and economic circumstance are largely absent from such accounts. Also as John Sugden points out in his comparative study of boxing in the USA, Northern Ireland and Castro's Cuba, the escape from the ghetto narrative – much-celebrated in cinema and popular culture – can present a limited lens through which to understand the complexities of both the culture of boxing and its connections and disconnections with economic systems and financial circumstances (Sugden, 1996). The gym can also be a cash economy in which financial exchanges pass unrecorded without any auditing processes (Beattie, 1996). As Sugden demonstrates in his own work, the reasons people – mostly young men – get involved in boxing are complex and messy, as well as being difficult to research, because

Unlike the farm systems of many other professional sports, which tend to be embedded in the school system and a range of other visible and accountable institutions, the world of professional boxing is subterranean, located in pockets of urban poverty and largely unexposed to the public gaze.

(Sugden, 1996:56)

This invisibility of boxing from the public arena of accountability has led researchers to adopt ethnographic and participant observation approaches to accessing and immersing themselves in the research site (Beattie, 1996, Sugden, 1996, Wacquant, 1995a, 1995b, 2004). Wacquant goes as far as to describe his own approach as that of an observing participant given the full extent of his engagement in the Golden Gloves gym in Chicago where he entered the world of amateur boxing by fighting competitively himself (2004). These are not just methodological decisions which reflect and integrate with theoretical perspectives about the nature of knowledge and subjectivity; they are also made in light of the requirements of the field of research.

Boxing does constitute a particular social world (Woodward, 2008). Even within contemporary sport, it is a social world that has particular links to economies and cultures which operate outside the parameters of legality. As

Chapter 5 shows the relationship between boxing as lived and practised and as represented, for example in cultural artefacts and symbolic systems such as film, and is enmeshed in powerful ways and part of the attraction of boxing is the dangers and excitement of the sport inside and outside the gym and the ring, including the quasi-legal and illegal activities which infiltrate boxing. Sugden's point is that simple narratives of the main motivation for engagement in boxing being construed as the desire to escape poverty and ghetto are insufficient and cannot deliver an adequate understanding of how boxing is situated in economic systems.

Global forces: Local imperatives

The economic forces underlying global sport are closely linked to processes of globalization which involve the intersection of economic, financial, cultural, political and social axes of power in which technological change and more local affiliations are implicated. David Rowe expresses these shifts in the language of the local as the 'passage of modernity from village green ... to global village ... has not only involved the mutation of sport but also profoundly affected the societies and cultures that have housed and received it' (Rowe, 2011:3). In boxing this could be the 5th Street gym or Madison Square Garden on HBO or Sky pay-for-view.

The economics of globalization in sport always has to accommodate the forces and flows of the media and broadcast technologies and the relationship between the embodied practices of sport and their representation and communication. Indeed, the communication of sport has almost become more important than the practice of sport. Umberto Eco, albeit himself not a fan of sport, in fact a very critical opponent, describes sport as merely a spectacle for others and a field in which the talk of sport presents the illusion of interest so that the talker, whom Eco calls a chatterer, thinks that he is himself an athlete and no longer realizes that he is not (Eco [1986] 1990). This offers some indication of how the economics of sport has to be understood through looking at the central part played by the cultural industries, sponsorship and the media.

Globalized economies are marked by massive corporate power which crosses national boundaries through the establishment of transnational organizations which can no longer be controlled by individual nation states and which take all control from local stakeholders. There are contradictions and disruptions to this process but one of the consistent features of the economics of sport, which includes boxing, of course, is the combination of a world media system,

the development of transnational corporations and the foundation of an international sport system which gives the sports business its global character.

The globalization of the economy of sport can be seen to have followed certain stages and undergone transformation through the impact of particular key developments. This is related in a familiar narrative of the initial development of radio, which was overtaken by television, which combined the immediacy of radio with moving images. I can vouch for the immediacy of radio from personal experience. My own introduction to boxing was through radio transmission, when I, as a very small child, crept into my parents' bedroom in the middle of the night to listen to fights live from the Garden with my father. Radio can make sport special and many followers still access their sport through this medium but television was the first opening for massive global investment. Satellite was the next. Far more people watch television and read papers than ever attend, even the most mega of sporting events.

As the modern mass media develop, our relationship with sport has been transformed, as have the investment and growth opportunities for global capital. Advertising, sponsorship, product endorsement and corporate hospitality have been crucial to the transformation and commodification of sport, through the sponsorship of events and of sports stars (Horne and Manzenreiter, 2006, Houlihan, 2008, Tomlinson, 2006, Whannel, 2001). Television's need for sports, which have audience appeal combined with the demands of the advertising industry to find figures with market appeal and dynamic images with positive connotations, has created highly paid sports stars. However, these forces have not always favoured boxing, for a variety of reasons. Boxing is controversial. It is not as popular as it was in the twentieth century up to the 1970s. Boxing's enfolded practices and traditional masculinities – although they invoke some nostalgia, for example, in some of its heroic figures – do not sit happily in late modernity with more fluid and hybrid gender identities. Boxers have attained cult media celebrity status but the androgyny of some advertising projects does not open up possibilities for the traditional masculinity of boxers. The masculinity displayed and performed in boxing has not settled well with metrosexual figures of masculinity in many other sports. David Beckham's celebrity superstar status embodies a sexualized, attractive sports superstar that is unlikely to be generated by boxing. For women athletes, celebrity status as an athlete is always problematic since the athletic body of male athletes so well aligns with idealized views of masculinity in ways that the athletic female body is much less likely to do with conventional femininity. Women's boxing too has had to negotiate the troubled waters of sexualization and voyeurism as well as the unlikelihood

of accessing prime time spots for any women's sport. Consideration of these factors offers some explanation for the decline in viewing figures, and even the possibility of watching boxing on terrestrial television.

Boxing, however, does attract sponsorship and the sport's mega events retain their attractions translated into a different world economy from the era 'when we were kings'. Boxing is part of the globalized sport's economy and the embodied practices and organization of the sport can be seen to have changed significantly in response to economic transformations, especially the advent of television (Rowe, 2011). Boxing is also distinctive in its appeal and in the paths that the cultural economy of boxing has travelled, including its particular local affiliations and personal engagements for participants.

Boxing celebrities and heroes

Superstars play a big part in the economics of sport, both in generating investment and media revenue and in attracting participants and spectators (Cashmore, 2006, Smart, 2005, Turner, 2004, Whannel, 2001). Increasingly celebrities, even in sport, are manufactured rather than achieved and heroism has become marginalized (Rojek, 2001), but boxing does disrupt these ideas in particular ways. In boxing the status of superstars is distinctive for two reasons. First, boxing probably has more heroes as well as antiheroes than any other sport. The cultural economy of boxing generates antiheroes who move – and are moved – across the boundaries of legality; a boxing celebrity is often not straightforward but is contradictory as in the case of Mike Tyson (O'Connor, 2002). Second, boxing celebrities usually retain contact and connections with the gym with which they have been associated because of the trainer who works there (unless they transfer trainers or managers). The Ferrari is parked outside the run-down boys' club in a rough part of the town because one of the gym's boxers has made it into the superstar bracket (Woodward, 2006). Whatever additional perks and specialist training celebrity status permits and finances, boxers frequently remain loyal to a manager or trainer connected with their original local gym (until they get a better offer). In martial arts, for example in the case of Thai boxing, it could be the teacher/trainer who carries particular status and it is the star pugilist about whom the school is organized and upon whom the gym is dependent, especially in Thailand, although translations of the sport into western contexts like the UK, where there are as yet far fewer superstars, are more local and pluralist (Moore, 2005).

Some gyms assume celebrity status themselves; for example the 5th St Gym Miami as a gym which has a very special place in the genealogy of boxing.

Ferdie Pacheco, the boxing analyst, author, artist and fight doctor who was Muhammad Ali's physician and cornerman for 15 years, has recorded the particular combination of superstar status and everyday connections of the gym. Most famously, it is where the Ali legend was born and the Ali story plays a large part in this account, Pacheco recounts the impact of the global and transnational upon the local of the gym which itself generated affects on the international stage of world boxing. This is evident in Ali's realization, after winning a gold medal in the 1960 Olympics, that his accomplishments did not protect him from the rigidity and brutality of racism. Pacheco offers an account of the ordinary affects (Stewart, 2007) of racism that boxing deals with, as well as its more extreme manifestations, and the camaraderie of the gym and its close networks as part of the strategies for survival. Stories of the gym are situated within their historical social contexts and provide insights into the everyday experiences of life in and around the gym.

Another of the ordinary affects of the gym and of the global economics of boxing is patriarchy, which remains deeply embedded in men's boxing and the networks through which it operates. Gyms also contribute to and are part of economic and social change, which locates the everyday as well as the spectacular experiences and representations of the embodied practices of the sport of boxing, located both spatially and temporally. Boxing is not just situated in the wider social terrain; boxing is constitutive of some of the racialized, gendered social world it inhabits through local networks of kinship groups.

Gyms are part of the process of systems through which celebrities are made, as well as the media-sponsorship-promotion nexus. Gyms are located in local communities which draw upon and attract migrant people and those who have experienced social and economic inequalities, linked to structural forces such as racism, social exclusion and class inequalities. The local nature of the gym is one of the factors through which celebrity is created. As Mike Marqusee argues, in his discussion of the distinctive heroic qualities of Muhammad Ali, when compared to superstar Michael Jordan, the celebrity is out of reach but the hero does things that ordinary people might do (Marqusee, 2005). The promise of more everyday participation in heroism than in celebrity fits boxing's regime of truth because, as Marqusee says, the hero, like Ali, has to represent the possibility of political change and be configured by social and political issues as well as athletic excellence. We 'ordinary people' could never play basketball like Michael Jordan (or box like Ali, of course) but we could engage in the political struggles against racism and social exclusion which are the experience and the situation of most of the communities and networks which create boxers.

Modern boxing: The economics of the fight game

The development of boxing as a part of the global economy in the twentieth century is linked to regulatory practices as well as communication technologies which made the sport attractive to mass audiences for whom there was some leisure time beginning to be available. This is, of course, the case for many of the sports – mainly men's – which have become part of the globalized economy, like football and baseball. Not only is the women's game only very recently acknowledged as legitimate and licensed (not until the end of the twentieth century in most parts of the world), but women's sport in general, rarely if ever, manages to generate the necessary sponsorship or media interest to create the income necessary to expand.

Economic and financial forces operate in boxing and the economy, especially the political cultural economy of boxing, works both in specific ways which relate to boxing and as part of the massive globalized economy of sport which generates opportunities for investment and enormous income, especially through the commercial synergies which global sport affords (Bourdieu, 1984). Boxing is both typical of sport, especially in contemporary globalized economies, where sport is big business, and also particular in its relation to global capital and more localized economies. Boxing, like all sports, is highly commercialized and dependent upon sponsorship. Boxing too is marked by the relationship between amateurs and professionals, with particular histories of movement from the amateur to the professional game, which are not consistent across all sports and have features in boxing that are distinctive in many ways. The economy of boxing is, as is the case with so many sports, highly gendered, especially in the financial investments that are made and the rewards which individual participants can hope to achieve.

The political economy of boxing, specifically western boxing, has been closely tied to the sport's links to gambling as well as to the shared synergies between the development of sport and leisure in the late nineteenth and the early twentieth century. (Sammons, 1988). Prizefighting is by definition an activity undertaken in pursuit of reward – the prize or purse awarded to the winner. Boxing has never been a cash- or reward-free zone.

By the twentieth century boxing was able to capitalize on commercial developments and the sport began to play a full part in legitimate business. What is, however, particular to boxing is the specific connection between prizefighting and bare-knuckle fighting with the purse which was put up for competitions by wealthy backers who would be able to recover any losses by being able to make successful bets on the outcome of bouts. Boxing has a long history of patronage

with prizes, the form of the purse for the fight being a crucial aspect of the sport and measure of the success or failure of participants: even in the ancient world there were rewards and prize money. Boxing, even more than most sports, demonstrates the multiple meanings of 'sport' as competitive embodied practices linked to play and sport as gambling upon outcomes.

Modern boxing: Pivotal moments

In the development of modern western boxing the famous fight between Gentleman Jim Corbett and Yankee Sullivan in New Orleans in 1892 holds a special place in boxing writing (Gorn, 1986, Sammons, 1988, Sugden, 1996) because the fight so powerfully condenses the different strands of boxing which persist in the cultural economy of boxing into the twenty-first century.

This was the first championship fight according to Queensberry rules, which could be classified as a world championship or event (Nauright, 2004). Queensberry rules of three-minute rounds and gloves made boxing more acceptable to Victorian middle-class audiences than the brutal free-for-all bare-knuckle prizefighting of the nineteenth century. The rules lent respectability and acceptability to boxing for at least bourgeois gentlemen. Not that Queensberry's rules were necessarily safer than Broughton's rules as Gorn points out (Gorn, 1986:205), but Queensberry's rules made boxing more socially acceptable, if not actually genteel.

The more public presence and visibility of boxing, however, meant the further marginalization of women's boxing. The women's sport became even more associated with low life at this stage in a legacy which has been hard to shake off (Hargreaves, 1996). Whilst boxing does offer particular risks and the promise of danger, it also requires some degree of acceptability in order to be more widely accepted and to attract investment and generate more popular appeal. This point at the end of the nineteenth century marked a moment when this became possible for men's boxing. The men's sport also became more socially inclusive and democratic in its representation and its audience participation. Gorn quotes a newspaper coverage from the day of the Corbett Sullivan fight:

The most intense excitement prevailed throughout the city, the streets were thronged with visitors of all classes, from the millionaire to the baker and the fakir. Politicians, lawyers, merchants and gamblers elbowed each other in all places on comparatively equal terms.

(*New Orleans Times Democrat* quoted in Gorn, 1986:244)

This was boxing under the public gaze and not secretly staged in back streets, at fairs, on barges beyond the scrutiny of the law. Gambling, of course, remained – and endures in the twenty-first century – but it was no longer the only framework in which boxing could be organized. This was also a time when sport became associated with leisure for a wider section of social classes. By the end of the nineteenth century the development of a male industrial working class whose voices could be expressed through trade unions and for example British global, colonial expansion, led to the possibilities of leisure time allied to increased wages: sport became a possibility. Baseball in the USA and football in Britain became popular sports which attracted a following from working-class men who now had some leisure time and the resource to pay for the pleasure.

Boxing remained tainted by its links with gambling and the fixing of fights (Gorn, 1986). As Eliot Gorn argues, ‘the corrupt underworld scent always lingered’ (Gorn, 1986:242). Whereas earlier in the nineteenth century prizefighting had attracted bets on the outcome and a prize for the winner, as the century progressed fights had increasingly been fixed by fixers who raised the purse and made uneven matches in order to earn more from the fight than had been invested. What the Corbett Sullivan fight offered was the possibility of earning money at the gate rather than providing a vehicle for gambling. This was a big change for boxing. It opened up the possibilities of boxing to a wider constituency and provided a public space for display and the promise of legitimacy with much wider currency which could also generate revenue and provide integration of boxing into the world of global sport. This is not, however, the whole story.

The Mob

Once boxing had achieved some respectability and visibility with increasing numbers of public spectacles, financed through ticket sales and later sponsorship, other aspects of the economics and finance of boxing began to change too: the illegitimate and illegal dimensions of the sport also became more organized, notably through the links between boxing and the Mob in the USA.

In spite of its increasingly elevated status as spectacular entertainment by the 1920s and the 1930s, the legacies of boxing, notably in the USA, remained those of exploitation and corruption. When boxing took over at Madison Square Garden just after the First World War, the Mob also moved in (Mitchell, 2009). The 1920s and the 1930s were undoubtedly one of boxing’s golden ages, not least because of the sport’s stars, of whom Joe Louis must be one of the greatest

to invigorate boxing, and the public, who craved not only excitement but also entertainment and some relief from the exigencies of the economic privations of the Great Depression. The US public continued to follow and support boxing through the Depression (Rosça, 2012). This era too, however, had its own legacies which had a particularly powerful impact in the decade from 1950, which saw a confluence of great boxers (and more prosaic and brutal fighters), economic forces of investment and generation of large-scale revenue largely outside the legitimate framework of the US economy, and the production of media, literary and artistic, including cinematic, texts all focused upon the spatial confines of the Garden and Jacob's Beach (Mitchell, 2009).

It is not only the often brutal embodied practices of boxing and the legacy of prizefighting which have impacted upon the cultural economy of boxing. The sport, which had been organized around fixers and gambling, attracted and continues to attract a range of illegal practices such as dog fighting and cockfighting (Beattie, 1996). Boxing has the capacities to attract investment and generate income at all levels: from the petty criminal activities which are often organized around local gyms, becoming part of boxing cultures to the organized criminal syndicates of the Mafia. Boxing and its cultures are open to exploitation in diverse ways, some of which are part of wider, institutional and structural forces like those of racism and social exclusion and, in the case of the Mafia, closely connected to the wider political economy of Prohibition, which opened up possibilities for bootleg alcohol and protectionism, which required well-built men to enforce it, along with weapons of course. The entry of organized crime into the boxing world might appear to have been inevitable. The predictability of corruption did not detract from the moral opprobrium which was directed at the activities of the Mafia. What was popularly construed as the disgrace of boxing in America for decades was the acceptance by some politicians that it was inevitable that racketeers and hoodlums would always move in and take over the sport (Butler, 1986:15).

Boxers as individuals were entangled in the political economy, configured around different versions of heroes and anti-heroes. The motivation to box has always been high among ethnic groups who have experienced disadvantage, as Chapter 3 demonstrated, and the promises and possibilities of boxing were particularly attractive to young African American men whose homes were in the ghetto. As Sammons argues, once they left the ghetto, young men might have been freed to aspire to education and even to white collar work, as was the case with Irish, Jewish and Italian young men (Sammons, 1988). The racialization and insistent racism that was experienced by African Americans created a social world

in which boxing still held compelling attractions. Racism and discriminatory ethnicization are thread through the lives of the majority of boxers, but have particularly powerful resonance to African American boxers (Jefferson, 1996, 1997, 1998, O'Connor, 2002) and are linked to the vulnerability of many boxers to criminal networks and the world of criminality (Sugden, 1996).

It is possible to overstate the vulnerability of the boxer and the story is not entirely one of exploitation (Lemert, 2003) although boxing is powerfully underpinned by racism, which Ali expresses so powerfully as evident in the preponderance of white affluent spectators, possibly wearing evening dress, having dinner and watching two black men within the legacy of slavery hitting each other (Ali and Durham, 1975). Although the governance and cultural economy of boxing were dominated by white men as promoters, things did change with the arrival of Don King, although not substantially within the context of the politics of race. Change was incremental and uneven rather than epochal, but the arrival of Don King did offer some shifts in perception which prefigured some later transformations and at least a breakdown of some racialized boundaries. What it most likely demonstrated was that some of the nefarious and corrupt practices of boxing culture were not the prerogative of white men and the cultural economy of the sport was an assemblage of processes and forces which intersect. This mix of elements includes intentionality, but is not driven by it. A situation in which display and spectacle, media money, corruption, racism and challenges to racial oppression and political disputation pervaded, boxing provided the opportunities for a man who had enormous talents both as showman and as an organizer of spectacular events. Don King was the first black promoter of any significance, the first black promoter in fact. King had the advantage of being black and of having had inside experience of some of the corrupt worlds which surrounded boxing. He had reportedly made his first fortune from an illegal betting operation in Cleveland, Ohio, in the 1960s (Sugden, 1996). King was a figure who was made in the tradition of what Wacquant describes as typical of life in the US ghetto, albeit in a flamboyant and distinctive rather than unobtrusive mode. Just as boxers bring the skills and survival strategies of the street to the gym and the ring, so King brought those skills to the promotion of boxing. Hustling is a way of life in the ghetto and the hustler is someone whose

trade in many instances is unobtrusively inserting itself into social situations, in spinning about him a web of deceitful relations just so that he may derive some more or less extorted profit from them.

(Wacquant, 1994:5)

King has been accused of fraud and of malpractices but he has survived and remains a key player in the fight game and as *Sports Illustrated* has stated, 'King will continue to pull the strings in the fight game, arranging some bouts that shouldn't be made ignoring others that should, always acting in his self-interest. He will continue to play the conflicting roles of promoter, whose profit is optimised by low cost, and manager, whose cut depends on high purse. And he will continue to be the biggest blight on boxing' (McCallum and Kennedy, 1993:25)

Boxers are also vulnerable because, however visible public spectacles were, training has always taken place in downtown backstreet gyms which from the 1920s and the 1930s until the 1960s facilitated the clandestine operations of mobsters, fixing sponsorship and broadcasting, as well as fights and gambling possibilities (Sammons, 1988). Sammons goes so far as to argue that organized crime along with big business and television is what makes boxing (Sammons, 1988). Sammons suggests that it was not until the 1960s that the extent of Mafia and criminal control of boxing was apparent as exposed by the Antitrust and Monopoly Committee of the US Senate. Perhaps ironically, given the visibility and proclaimed transparencies of the contemporary governance of sport, it remains difficult to regulate all the networks which are now part of the global communication internet flows which facilitate gambling and match fixing even more (Jennings, 1996, 2006, Katwala, 2002).

The Mob was able to operate through the exploitation of particular figures, boxing stars like world heavyweight champion Sonny Liston, who, as has been the case for many boxers, had spent most of his youth in reformatories before graduating to the state penitentiary. Liston's size and skills as a boxer attracted the attention of some of the most infamous members of the criminal underworld, Blinky Palermo and Frankie Carbo, who still dominated the sport (Mitchell, 2009, Sammons, 1988). Liston's performances in the ring were hotly debated, both in relation to his defeat against Muhammad Ali (then still called Cassius Clay) in 1964 and in the rematch the following year (Sammons, 1988), where commentators questioned whether Liston could have thrown the fight, first against a weakened Clay who had to be compelled back into the ring after the fifth round by Angelo Dundee, and second, when Liston was knocked out relatively easily in the rematch (Andre and Fleisher, 1993).

Boxing now: A tangled web

The complex interrelationship which might be better expressed as a tangled web, between the enfolded practices of boxing, the economics of the sport, the

management and regulation of boxers and the promotion of fights and their publicity and the role of boxing in the media, is well illustrated in the case of British heavyweight boxers David Haye and Dereck Chisora. On 8 May 2012, it was announced that these two boxers would be fighting in the summer of that year, on 14 July. This was not a case of an expected comeback for boxer David Haye, who had supposedly, as is the case with so many boxers, retired from the sport; comebacks are common and are part of the culture of competitive boxing. On that occasion, the match generated massive media coverage, framed by the controversy surrounding the decision of Frank Warren, Chisora's manager, to pursue the fight.

The shock value of this match lay in a previous, apparently unplanned (although it is very likely that it was staged) fight, between Haye and Chisora at the press conference following Chisora's defeat by WBC champion Vitali Klitcho in Germany in February 2012. The brawl after the official fight received more media coverage than the fight itself and can be viewed on YouTube (Haye Chisora, YouTube, 2012). This was a bizarre spectacle even for boxing, with a panel including Chisora and his manager Frank Warren seated at a table, being heckled by David Haye from the back of the room. Chisora got up and amidst a stream of taunting the two men came to unseemly blows in a fracas which also injured Haye's manager Adam Booth, resulting in Chisora's arrest by the German police. Haye was reporting on the Klitcho–Chisora fight for a television company, which is not an activity which would usually warrant the presence of a manager. There were only limited attempts to restrain the two men and there was a strong suggestion that the display might not have been entirely spontaneous, in an attempt to reinvigorate the heavyweight class and reinstate some of the excitement of boxing possibly. Vitali Klitcho, who had won the heavyweight championship fight against Chisora on points, looked on somewhat bemusedly as someone who had succeeded on technical, embodied and tactical skill and technique and puzzled at the spectacle which seemed to be a post-match entertainment. It is the cultural economy of boxing and its embodied practices which make this offstage event possible.

This generally unfortunate event does demonstrate how power operates in the cultural economy of boxing in the twenty-first century and the legacy of some continuities with earlier times. Such events provide some insight into the relationship between economic and cultural forces and the centrality of sponsorship and the promotion of boxing in the media. Events are assemblages of the intersection of different forces and demonstrate how these expressions of power operate in distinctive ways, which are also part of wider power geometries. Media presence at boxing events and the presence of boxing in the

media are crucial. Controversy feeds media interest and speculation. Whatever the proscriptions of trainers in local gyms about the avoidance of fighting and the desirability of disciplined boxing, this time, a fight outside the ring created more interest than the boxing match inside the ring.

Chisora was banned by the British Boxing Board of Control, unsurprisingly, and his licence was revoked. What was surprising was his manager Frank Warren's decision to arrange a fight with Haye in the ring in July at a time when Chisora was still without a licence in the twenty-first century; boxing has the capacity to make this possible. It transpired in media interviews with Frank Warren, who was keen to point out that he was Chisora's manager and not his promoter, that Chisora had successfully applied for licence from Luxembourg and was appealing against his loss of licence by the British Boxing Board of Control. Warren revealed an additional dimension of his own involvement as a shareholder in Sky and BoxNation, the agencies putting on the fight in July (BBC Haye Chisora, 2012).

The announcement of a formal fight was predictable and also demonstrates the primacy of the media to modern boxing. This series of events also indicates the blurring of boundaries in the roles of the different stakeholders in boxing. Warren is the manager and has significant interests in the broadcast companies involved in the spectacle of the fight. Individuals play key roles in the networks through which power is exercised in boxing although it is economic systems which shape the practices and performances of different stakeholders inside and outside the ring. There are consistencies in some of the connections and relationships, especially in the boxing-media-finance nexus, harking back to earlier times that precede some of the technological developments which might seem to be transforming the economics of sport.

Boxing also still speaks the language of street fighting and brawling and invokes these discourses at key moments in order to regenerate attention and excitement. Boxing always involves a dialogue between what is acceptable and what is not and between what is seen and what is secret, clandestine, forbidden and thus hidden. These relationships are framed by the risks and dangers and particular excitements of boxing.

Excitement and danger

The exhilaration and excitement of boxing is always a mix of what is permitted and what is not, especially outside the ring, and how external forces and financial incentives might impact upon the embodied activities of boxers in the ring.

Boxing is more closely embedded in illegal activities and corrupt practices than most sports. The economics of boxing is tied up with the sport's legacy of gambling as well as the opportunities it offers for coercion and illegitimate practices that are linked to betting: the Mafia involvement in boxing being a case in point (Butler, 1986, Sammons, 1988, Mitchell, 2009). The conversations between what is legal and what is not involve crossing boundaries and occupying liminal spaces between the two.

Modern boxing offers the excitement which Elias and Dunning claim belonged to pre-modern societies (1986). Boxing seems to generate other less legitimate, if technically legal, but more transgressive, combat sports including Ultimate Fighting (Spencer, 2011, Ultimate Fighting, 2012) and cage fighting (Cage Fighting Warriors, 2012). Ultimate Fighting would appear to challenge Elias's and Dunning's civilization thesis. Boxing harks back to earlier pleasures and dangers which disrupt the relentless march of civilizing forces. These variants of MMA and the recent popularity of particularly violent forms of boxing and fighting seem to challenge the civilizing thesis further and lend more support to the capacities of pugilism for generating excitement through often brutal corporeal contact.

MMA has created new markets and new developments, which are also very lucrative. For example in the USA there has been an increase in the number of gyms, such as LA Boxing, which offers traditional health club activities with the facilities of a boxing gym, which more recently include MMAs (Forbes, MMA, 2012). MMA, with a more limited tradition and set of expectations, also opens up more possibilities for engagement in full combat sport as a diversion or leisure practice, with a more diverse clientele, thus making MMA attractive to sponsors and promoters in the leisure as well as the competitive sport markets. In this context, entrepreneurs are seeking opportunities at the higher end of the market and taking boxing out of its traditional downtown settings. Companies like LA Boxing perceive opportunities for return on their investments that could use a niche market but also an expanding market and interest in boxing and martial arts that has more to do with health and well being than with competing or turning professional for most of those who join the gym.

MMA is one of the fastest growing forms of boxing in the world, which gives the sport some status in the canon of western boxing too. As proponents of MMA have argued (MMA Economy, 2012), some of the recent support for the resurgence of interest in MMA is framed within a debate about economic forces which differs greatly from the discussion of the market opportunities which the sports might offer entrepreneurs and commercial interests. Fans and

followers locate the increased popularity and spread of their sport, in a discourse which is resonant of those deployed in boxing at many points in the twentieth century, notably of economic recession (MMA Economy, 2012). Fans argue that since the global economic recession which began in 2008, MMA and its variants, including Ultimate Fighting, have taken off as boxing did during the Great Depression. Interestingly, MMA has also attracted pay-for-view outlets in the USA in which UFC records have been broken as more fights are staged. In spite of the acknowledged financial hardship of those who practise and follow MMA such as KNUXX (MMA Economy, 2012) their engagement is deemed unsurprising, even if it involves some pay-for-view because of the payout (in the language of MMA, rather than a purse, which purports to distance them from prizefighting) for those who succeed. One admitted superstar, of UFC reputedly earned \$215,000 for a fight in Nevada (MMA Economy, 2012), a location which has a special place in the history of western boxing. There are many synergies between different strands in the fight game and illustrations of how MMA with its different spatial genealogies is taken up in western countries and among different ethnic groups and communities. Boxing, however, appears to have more endurances than transformations, although there are both patterns of continuity and disruptions and opportunities for change which are both part of the sport, in all its manifestations, and the wider social and cultural context in which it is practised.

Managing change

Although Joyce Carol Oates argues that boxing is real and the viewing at a distance of the television fan is a sanitized version of the real thing (Oates, 1987), the advent of, first, television and more recently of satellite broadcasting has had a massive impact upon the economics of boxing as with most sport (Woodward, 2012c). In contemporary sport the major source of income is broadcasting. Attendance at fights, even if it reaches capacity, can go nowhere near the income that can be gained from broadcast rights, for boxers and promoters. The boxer's purse is heavily dependent upon past performance, and the strategic management of boxing is structured by income expectations based upon this and how far a fight will generate pay-for-view audiences (Tenorio, 2000).

Boxers no longer top the top ten of highest earners in sport, which may reflect the decline in interest from the former golden ages (Top Ten, 2012). Rankings, however, are relative. Boxing is a multi-million dollar business with typical

heavyweight championship fights in the USA each generating over \$100 million. Boxers are still able to earn a significant purse and the sport plays a key role in satellite, if no longer so much in terrestrial broadcasting. As early as in 1959, even though the crowd at the stadium was relatively small when Ingemar Johansson fought Floyd Patterson in the Yankee Stadium, the fight made over \$1 million in closed circuit telecasts (Andre and Fleischer, 1993). By the time of Muhammad Ali's comeback against Joe Frazier, promoters made \$20 million (Sammons, 1988). The record in the twenty-first century was set in 2007 when Oscar de la Hoya fought Floyd Mayweather at the MGM Garden Arena in Las Vegas Nevada in a superwelter weight contest. Over \$120 million revenue was generated. This massive income was created by the coverage of the fight on HBO pay-per-view at a cost of \$55 fee to watch on television. This fight was preceded by a massively enhanced build-up to ensure maximum pay-per-view revenues. The resource is, of course, distributed, but this fight is recorded as being particularly relevant for the income generated and is an illustration of the extent to which boxing attracts huge amounts of investment upon which there are still very significant returns.

Western boxing retains the language of prizefighting with its use of 'the purse' to describe income from a fight, although not all the purse is, of course, for the boxers themselves. Broadcast rights and pay-for-view (or pay-per-view as it is called in the USA) revenue are now part of the mainstream of the economy of boxing. Recent estimates of a pay-per-view budget total of \$4,700,000 suggest that this would include the live gate at \$650,000, the net pay-per-view income (based on 150,000 homes viewing) of \$2,800,000 and a sponsorship of \$100,000 (other factors would be closed circuit and international sales). The main purses would come to \$3,000,000 in this instance (Pay Per View, 2012). Pay-for-view cannot necessarily be predicted accurately, but this breakdown gives an indication of the relative weighting of pay-for-view revenues and the dependency of boxing on this source of income.

Women's boxing still does not attract the investment of pay-for-view satellite stations (WBAN, Peeves, 2012). The purse is much likely to be lower for women's bouts, largely because of the lack of interest and investment by HBO and Sky, although Sky does have a better record on coverage of women's sport than the BBC in the UK (Woodward, 2009). There have been moments, for example, when women, like Leila Ali, Muhammad Ali's daughter, was fighting in the latter part of the twentieth century. She was the first to achieve a \$1 million purse, but women's boxing is way behind the men's fight game (Woodward, 2006). However, it is amateur boxing that has made most recent impact.

The reach and scope of satellite have massively increased the profitability of the sport which has now largely left terrestrial television and is most commonly

only accessible by subscription, for example to HBO or to Sky TV and then also to Box Nation. Boxing currently depends on broadcasting revenue for its survival, but in a culture of the sports megastar, boxing also needs heroic figures who can create excitement and who have the skills and passion to generate emotional affects as well as strong commitment. At the time of writing, whilst there are highly competent boxers, notably the Klitcho brothers and particular fights may provoke feeling as well as controversy, there is a paucity of artist and practitioners of the Noble Art which offers some explanation of why the cultural products of boxing increasingly hark back to earlier times, for example, in recent cinema.

Another significant factor in the difficulty which fight fans now have in identifying heroic figures and superstars who are comparable to those of earlier golden ages is the proliferation of titles in boxing. In all the seventeen weight categories, there are now a large number of organizing bodies awarding titles, which means not only a large number of titles but also confusion about chains of command and lines of responsibility in regulating the sport and its practices (Economist, 2012). Professional boxing is no longer able to organize a single undisputed world championship. HBO pay-per-view organizes *Showtime* in the USA and television series like Sky TV's *Prizefighter*, which was started in Britain in 2008 and pitted eight largely unknown fighters against each other in three-minute three-round matches, created considerable interest and captured some of the excitement of the fairground booth. However, on the whole, such approaches are antithetical to the main commercial interests of boxing. But boxing still has mega events and significant stars and a match between boxers like American Floyd Mayweather and Filipino Manny Pacquiao can attract enormous interest and big audiences as well as huge profit. Boxing remains a combination of aspiration and hope for many and the source of massive financial gain for the few.

Exploitation: Good practice and bad practice

Boxing remains beleaguered by questionable business practices and the exploitation of those who box, for example through illegitimate contracts and corrupt rankings, not to mention the confusion of fight fans, especially those who watch television and are very uncertain about how to access the fights they want to see and when they do they have to pay extortionately high subscription fees (Heiskanen, 2012). There have been several investigations into boxing, notably in the USA (Millsbaugh, 1994), because of the sport's earlier connections

with the Mafia, for example by the FBI in the 1950s when investigations led to a number of criminal prosecutions on antitrust violations, racketeering and conspiracy charges (Fleischer, 1969). Two bills were introduced in 1961 and 1962 aiming to abolish unfair competition, antitrust scheming and monopolistic practices and establish confidence in the practice and governance of the sport of boxing (Millsbaugh, 1994). Following other interventions, the twenty-first century has seen some significant change both in corrupt financial dealings and in the economic and social exploitation of boxers themselves. First, legislation was passed to secure basic health and safety requirements in the ring and for boxers, such as the US Professional Boxing Safety Act of 1996, which instated regular medical checks including neurological scanning such as MRI scans and CAT scans to detect brain trauma. Second, the Muhammad Ali Boxing Reform Act of 2000 was inspired by the consensus that the economy of boxing meant that some boxers were spending more time in court than in the ring, a notable case in point being Mike Tyson, whose presences in court were not all because of his own criminal activities. Tyson was a prime example of a boxer who lost enormous amounts of money through mismanagement of his finances because of lack of a satisfactory regulatory framework (Heiskanen, 2012). Much of the problem was identified as relating to over-complicated contracts and the role of promoters in the process of staging fights. This legislation has taken boxing into the mainstream of business finance where the current rules of good practice in business apply and boxers are now part of the process; promoters can no longer enforce one-sided contracts. Subsequent legislation has been brought in to attempt to rectify some of the gaps in both of these laws, regarding safety and financial management, but change is happening.

The recent twenty-first century legislative interventions have exposed the persistence of inequality and exploitation in boxing whilst attempting to remedy them; they have, in particular, demonstrated the points of connection between over-dangerous enflashed practices of boxing and the wider economic and social context in which the sport is performed and viewed. Violence and exploitation have not, of course, been eliminated, making visible the less-savoury aspects of boxing. Putting these relationships into discourse within the visible public arena, boxing has been taken out of the criminal underworld in some important and meaningful ways such that boxing, with at least a partially transformed set of practices, endures. As the boxing press so frequently reminds us, the cultural economy of boxing keeps reinventing and justifying itself and people keep watching: 'Go ahead and keep ringing the death knell for boxing if you want, but the numbers tell a different story' (The Ring Extra, 2004).

Conclusion

Financial and economic forces have always played a key role in boxing. Historically, the sport reflects economic transformations, notably those of industrialization and post-industrial globalization which have been implicated in the media-sponsorship nexus and the exploitation of the speed, reach and scope of communication technologies. There are, however, specificities in the sport, especially in its localized affiliations. In the early days, the promise offered, for example, by the Corbett–Sullivan fight boxing built on the excitement and risk of boxing upon which stakeholders in the promotion of the sport were able to capitalize. Some of these stakeholders have been outside rather than inside the law as the control of boxing by the Mob has demonstrated. New stakeholders have emerged from earlier associations, media networks, broadcast services, promoters, agents and a new class of megastars, a relatively small number of whom are able to earn massive fees for performance in the ring and from the commercial synergies afforded by product promotion and appearances in popular cultural fields.

Gambling in boxing has largely moved online as it has in most sports and is subject to the same attempts at control and disruptive forces as its offline counterparts, as well as to other contemporary online gambling.

The mix of hero and anti-hero in boxing and its generation of heroes rather than celebrities have meant that boxing has not befitted quite as extensively from such investments and rewards as sports such as Premiership football, baseball, basketball or American football. Boxing carries enormous weight in some parts of the world, including African countries which stage big events and countries such as South Africa, Ghana, Mexico Tanzania, Tunisia, Egypt and Algeria, even if some of the sport's heroes have a more tarnished image in the USA and the UK. Martial arts and Muay Thai, for example, generate income through performance of the sport and commercial sponsorship and advertising revenues. MMA has become more popular for many of the same reasons that boxing became, starting from the earlier decades to well into the twentieth century. No part of the boxing story is straightforward though and even the economics of boxing is both contentious and contradictory; heroes and anti-heroes mingle with exploiter and promoters along with ordinary punters who enjoy the sport, whether as practitioners or as followers.

Boxing offers a blend of financial incentives and the promise of respectable returns for individuals, which have traditionally often been interpreted as a means of gaining self-respect and looking after your family in boxing legends and a site for large-scale financial investment in the global economy.

The intersection of commercial interests, risk, danger and excitement allied to emotive affiliations and the health benefits of sporting activity inflected by the policy potential of harnessing the energies of young men who might otherwise engage in deviant and illegal pugilism on the streets make boxing an enormously productive field of economic investment. The evidence of sponsorship and especially media engagement suggests much more emphasis on the profitability of promotion of the fight game than any altruistic motives, although boxing is periodically harnessed as a means of occupying possibly disaffected young men in a regulated and disciplined activity rather than criminal activity. These aspects of boxing are, however, more likely to be celebrated and promoted in the local gym than in the boardrooms of global communications companies.

This chapter has demonstrated some of the synergies between the personal and the social financial and economic interests of boxing, for example as reiterated and experienced through celebrity and heroic narratives. The two forces of the personal and the social are clearly interdependent, but the massive purse which a major fight can create feeds the desires and dreams of many of those who participate in boxing in spite of the huge discrepancy between those dreams and aspirations and what might be achieved. Greater democratic participation might be more likely at the local level, although there is a complex relationship between the hopes of boxers in local gyms and the possibilities of professional success. The relationship is also very different for women. Although boxing still occupies a very visible global stage, the sport is also routinely practised and has everyday qualities which are more local and less visible as the everyday engagements of boxers demonstrate, especially in the context of the embodied practices which make boxing what it is and which are explored in the next chapter. It is the material embodied practices of this Noble Art in all its more contemporary and recent manifestations which create democratic possibilities, as was demonstrated in 2012 when women boxed competitively for the first time in the London Olympics, which opened up the possibility that boxing could be routine for women as well as men.