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Conclusion: G/local Boxing

Globalizing Boxing has demonstrated that however contradictory it may at first appear in the twenty-first century, boxing is a productive site for the exploration of social, economic, political and cultural practices and processes. Boxing provides opportunities as well as being an example of a sport where traditional social divisions persist and inequalities remain. An exploration of the diversity and plurality of forms of boxing across the world also challenges some of its traditional binary logics. Boxing is a globalizing force, besides being subject to globalizing forces.

Boxing is widely enmeshed in the relationship between what is happening in sport and how boxing, in particular, responds to and impacts upon the wider social world in different practices across the globe. Boxing is a g/local sport that feeds g/local imaginaries, which is why, although it seems to embody an anomalous set of practices in the contemporary world, it endures, providing excitement, opportunities for widening participation and cohesion, as well as the dangers of exploitation. Whilst many sports generate controversy about their practices and culture, especially in relation to management and promotion and the payment of superstars, as well as some of their embodied sporting practices, and the possibilities for exploitation that are opened up by excesses of commercialism, few are so contentious as boxing. Boxing is particular for a number of reasons, not least in its whole *raison d'être* of one person inflicting pain and damage on another, with the victor being someone who knocks another person unconscious. Stated as such, this seems to be a stark indictment of boxing, but it is also particular and a reminder that despite a plethora of regulatory interventions, the sport retains some of its primordial qualities and offers some resistance to mechanisms of globalized disciplinary regimes.

Boxing and the g/local

Boxing is typical of the globalization of contemporary sport, for example in its media coverage, its celebration of superstars, staging of mega spectacles, the investment of large-scale finance and links to betting and gambling on a transnational as well as local scale and the performance of hegemonic masculinities. There is a sense in which all sport is g/local, in that there has to be some localized practice before a sport can become global and be performed on a global platform although the interrelationship becomes more complicated as it develops and in relation to changing social and economic contexts (Giulianotti and Robertson, 2007, 2009). Boxing has particular capacities for bringing together local and global forces and communities. However, the sport has very particular localized contexts, for example in urban communities that are often populated by diasporic and migrant people. Boxing offers a particular version of the combination of the spectacular and the ordinary, of commercial forces and personal hopes and dreams of the dispossessed and dislocated, as well as those seeking self-respect and well-being through the investment of physical capital.

Local networks and local communities carry enormous weight in the culture of boxing: the gym, the trainer and other fighters at that gym become family in ways that are distinctive to boxing. Boxing is both typical of a domain characterized by globalization in its forces and mobilities including the speed of global communication systems, the movement of peoples and transnational affiliations and connections and regulatory structures, which characterize global sport in the twenty-first century. Boxing is not only globalizing in its associations with migrant people, the sport itself travels and is translated in different cultural contexts. Spatiality is central to boxing, both through the connections between local gyms and networks and the sport as practised internationally and in the shifts in its popularity across the globe. Some of the intensities and flows which so mark globalization in its contemporary manifestations do not have a singular trajectory but involve two-way exchanges and the specificities of what is local about boxing. Boxing and, in particular, boxers retain their attachments to local communities, spatially and culturally, and to local gyms, even when they attain commercial success on the world stage. Boxing, in all its permutations across the globe, carries distinctive features of local geographical attachments as well as those to peoples and ethnic groups which demonstrate grassroots and localized specificities as well as, in the case of racialized and ethnicized identities, being part of wider structural forces. In boxing, there is often a strong sense of community around the gym and cultural belonging.

Globalizing Boxing has demonstrated some of the intersections of local attachments and globalizing forces, notably those generated by the sport-media-commerce network, but which are played out in distinctive ways in boxing because of the sport's genealogies of cultural, ethnic and class-based attachments. Notions of belonging are also central to boxing, whether through its heroic masculinities and triumph over tragedy or the spatial displacements and dislocations of the migrant and diasporic peoples who are drawn to the sport. The binary logics and legacies of boxing might offer some security in response to the shifts and mobilities of globalizing forces as well as being a rational and pragmatic choice for those whose investments are largely limited to those of physical capital. The mobility of boxing culture is illustrated by the increased popularity of MMA and particular forms of boxing, like Muay Thai.

Boxing rules

Boxing, like all sport in late modernity, is disciplined and regulated by transnational and international bodies. Boxing is more regulated than most in that the sport has a multitude of governing bodies and hence a large number of titles. Boxing, however, can be distinguished from many other sports, in fact, many of those with traditional heritages and legacies, because boxing has so many layers of unwritten rules through its networks of associated activities and illegal and quasi-legal practices; prizefighting and bare-knuckle and cage fighting; as well as a whole range of gambling opportunities, dog fighting and other forms of entertainment that are no longer formally legitimate or publicly visible. Boxing demonstrates some of the less-visible and certainly less-legitimate forces of globalization.

International governing bodies are characteristic of global sport and have developed in order to contain and discipline sporting practice, partly in the interests of participants, especially in a sport like boxing where the rules have been instituted to protect boxers' health and limit the excesses of corporeal combat, for example in the inheritance of prize fighting. Regulatory bodies both target enfleshed bodies but are also constitutive of those boxing bodies. There is not a simple polarization between the bodies that govern boxing and the bodies that take part; enfleshed bodies are material and generate their own impact upon the bodies which regulate them so that material bodies and regulatory bodies are all part of the assemblage of forces which make up boxing, boxing culture and boxing bodies.

Wider forces are implicated in these assemblages too. The rules also govern spectatorship and sponsorship and in boxing this has also meant being attentive to the corruption and illegality which have been so strongly and ubiquitously linked to boxing. Most sports, including the Olympics and football, have been subject to accusations of corruption (Jennings, 1996, 2006), but boxing has particular histories of local affiliations which feed into and coexist with global forces. The expansion of governance in neoliberal states has included regulation of legitimate commercial enterprises as well as providing some safeguards for the protection of the financial interests of boxers as well as their enfleshed bodies. The rules have changed both in response to the activities in the ring and in the gym and in relation to social, economic and cultural forces in the wider social arena. In this sense, boxing is typical of modern sport although some of its disruptions and challenges to regulatory and disciplinary interventions are more specific to the sport.

Rules are made and rules are broken and the civilizing processes of the development of regulatory frameworks for the governance of sport are not part of the even progress towards more civilized, safe practices (Elias, 1978). The more regulated boxing becomes, the more expansion there seems to be in Ultimate Fighting and cage fighting (Spencer, 2011), which may in part be an attempt to capture some of the spontaneity and danger of prizefighting as well as engaging in a more challenging set of body practices which carry the exhilaration of risk and a greater promise of excitement. This is not to say that such forms of boxing and fighting do not still have regulatory bodies and clearly demarcated practices which are acceptable and unacceptable but they do offer more of the excitement of transgression and even for participants the 'attraction of repulsion' (Stallybrass and White, 1986:140) which can also be attributed to spectatorship of boxing (Woodward, 2006).

These aspects of boxing culture are allied to others such as the growth of the amateur sport and women's increased participation. As boxing moves more into the mainstream, whether of established legitimized systems as is the case with amateur boxing and the Olympic Games, or in the mainstream of global economies as part of the globalized sport-media-commerce nexus, Ultimate Fighting and cage fighting may offer more of the negotiation of fear and disgust which prizefighting once offered at fairground booths. Ultimate Fighting also provides more of the carnivalesque in the sense in which Stallybrass and White use the Bakhtinian concept of carnival as a transgression of civilized culture (Stallybrass and White, 1986) with its connections to low culture in the high-low cultural binary, but where these two are inextricably linked and co-constitutive.

Some of the expansion of interest in different forms of boxing is, of course, highly regulated – for example, the ever-growing interest in martial arts, particularly ritualized and subject to strict controls, even if bouts permit more use of body parts in combat, such as feet and elbows.

What is missing in the above analysis of the interest in different forms of boxing, especially those that appear to challenge some of the constraints of regulatory processes and to establish their own, less-formal rules, as in the case of Ultimate Fighting, is the operation of sex gender in boxing and boxing's most powerful links to masculinity, especially traditional enfolded masculinity and the hegemonic masculinity through which gendered relations and connections which privilege men and masculinity, over women and femininity especially, are forged.

Boxing masculinities

The gendered networks and informal associations of boxing in the twenty-first century still draw on some of the connectivities and attachments of the *Fancy* which embraces the whole culture of boxing through fans, journalists, followers, promoters, writers, film-makers and artists. It is often through these networks that hegemonic masculinities are forged and reinstated. Some of these points of connection are reconfigured through the strong affinities between gambling and sport and the ways in which social worlds overlap and intersect. Hegemonic masculinity is one of the mechanisms of both social and cultural continuity and is a means of explaining the gender inequalities in sport and in other spheres of social, political and economic life.

The mix of enfolded practices and economic, political, social and cultural forces makes boxing a productive site for the reiteration and performance of hegemonic masculinities. It is consideration of the combination of these forces which demonstrates how boxing is not simply dominated by men and masculinity because of its embodied practices and focus on corporeal strength and aggressive physicality, but because of its assemblage of forces. All these elements connect in the production of boxing culture, which also manifests more contradictions and ambivalences than other gendered configurations. Whilst the posturing machismo of some heavyweights might appear to endorse a secure and dominant masculinity, such simplifications have been challenged, for example in the vulnerability and insecurity of boxers like Mike Tyson, formerly known as the little fairy boy who became the complete destroyer

(Jefferson, 1998, 1996). The performance of dominant and dominating physical masculinities is also a strategy for dealing with insecurity and anxiety.

The conceptualization of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1995) has particular resonance in boxing. Global sport is characterized by networks of actors who are part of the transnational as well as local associations of the media-sport- sponsorship nexus with all its permutations of practitioners, followers, promoters, trainers and commentators, but boxing offers particular connections and disruptions and has legacies that draw upon and reproduce hegemonic masculinity, notably as evidenced by the Fancy. Boxing too speaks a language to which, in the words of the Fancy, insiders are 'flash' (Egan, 2011). The collusions of hegemonic masculinity work through language and social and cultural connections as well as enfleshed practices of bodies categorized as male.

Hegemonic masculinities have persisted in boxing, whatever the extent to which women are able to gain entry into the sport. Change may be incremental, but women's boxing in the 2012 Olympics, as a sport which was taken seriously by fans, journalists and commentators, offered some reconfiguration of boxing culture. Not only is the legacy of 2012 that it is possible to think the unthinkable and accept that women engage in the same enfleshed practices in the sport as men, but the ubiquity of a particular version of masculinity equating pugilism exclusively with male aggression has been challenged. The amateur sport also provides a focus upon the body practices and techniques of the sport. The containment of women's boxing within this framework also reduces the possibilities of the sexualization of the women's game and the voyeuristic readings that can be given to women fighting. The Olympics provide a very public space for display and the games opened up new possibilities for new political stories and new identifications. Women boxers, whether from unlikely locations like Afghanistan or those configured as local heroes like gold medallist Nicola Adams, can reconstruct the heroic narratives and legends of boxing within a sexual politics of difference where it is possible for a woman boxer to celebrate her sport and state that she is fighting for her country, as men traditionally have claimed, *and* for women.

Boxing generates affects as well as responding to and being shaped by social forces, which is well illustrated by the choice of boxing among women in a country like Afghanistan. Without wanting to overstate the significance of this intervention, it does disrupt expectations and the hegemony of masculinities within boxing as well as social and cultural expectations of the role of women in Islamic countries, as well as the role of sport, and focus upon bodies in

Islam. Prejudices may have been fed by the extreme exclusionary practices of the Taliban, but Muslim women choosing boxing says something about boxing culture and practices and about the women and their culture and hopes in a two-way process. Boxing is not simply a reflection of particular legacies of masculinity and narratives of escape from the ghetto; boxing is productive of the nuance of these legacies as well as of change as is manifest in women's participation in the sport. Although stories and legends are certainly not the only expression of boxing or the key factor in shaping boxing culture, legends and heroic narratives provide a particularly influential force within the assemblage of different strands which make up boxing and relate to its body practices and enfleshed materialities.

There is a line in Elia Kazan's film *On the Waterfront* (1954), delivered by Marlon Brando as Terry Molloy, in which he says 'I could have been a contender.' Although *On the Waterfront* is not a boxing film in any way, the statement not only encapsulates the spirit of boxing culture, but also highlights the aspirational attraction of boxing. This is not to say that this version is necessarily lived, but it is dreamt.

Inner worlds and outer worlds

It might seem strange that boxing remains legal, let alone popular, in the twenty-first century given its particular enfleshed practices, but as has been argued in this book, change, albeit incremental rather than epochal, happens at the local as well as the global level and is ordinary and routine as well as extraordinary and spectacular. The investment of practitioners in the Noble Art is partly explicable in terms of the desire for belonging and security and the rational choice to invest physical capital. Spectatorship, however, is more likely to be understood in relation to the risk and promise of the display of enfleshed violence through which the excitement of boxing is constituted.

Boxing provides us with the experience and the non-experience of violence. The sport always has the possibilities of excess and of material enfleshed damage being inflicted. Violence is, to some extent, contained by the frame of the ring and the regulatory practices of the sport so that boxing provides a space for dealing with the fears of excess and the risk of violence, which may also be why there are so many boxing films; it is ritualized and contained.

Sport in late modernity poses problems for understanding the part played by spectatorship and how it operates. Sports' broadcasting depends upon the elision

of the desires and dreams of fans and the capacities of the sport. Boxing can deliver because it so powerfully invokes desires and fears as well as the enfleshed practice of sport being able to generate affects and sensations that feed on as well as create those desires. The sports broadcasting companies seek to plug into those possibilities. Boxing has the properties to make space for the synergies between psychic investments, inner worlds and social, cultural structural forces. Some of these structural forces involve the operation of economic power, which clearly underpins much of the growth of modern sport and of its visibility in the public arena and in discursive regimes of truth which are still loosely based on some understanding of sport as a healthy pursuit; the healthy mind and the healthy body of *mens sana in corpore sano*.

Given the massive investment in the cultural industries and especially in the possibilities of broadcast and communications technologies, sport offers enormous potential for recruiting massive audience figures and for financial competition the commitment of fans and supporters bordering upon exploitation, as the opposition to the takeover of Premier league football clubs against the wishes of fans evidences. In boxing the ghosts of exploitation have centred more on boxers in the legacy of the rule of the Mob and the influence of the Mafiosi. Nonetheless in boxing, too, fans protest at the exorbitant charges for access to satellite technologies demands, which as Chapter 4 suggested, can influence and even determine who fights who and which fights are included in the programme. Many of us will have waited through the night for the big fight, one of the Klitchos–Floyd Mayweather perhaps, while a series of journeymen slog it out without any comment, let alone commentary from those covering the fight on the pay-for-view channel. Contemporary commercialized sport can offer spectacular displays on a scale and of a quality never before imagined, but the apparatuses of commercial sports broadcasting can also limit choice, either through decision making about displays that are determined by profit and not quality of embodied action, or by charging fees that bar many fans from participating.

Boxing has provided routes into understanding some of the ways in which the processes of spectatorship work. The danger of the enfleshed contact of the sport, which elements of boxing culture such as films attempt to capture, also embraces the connections between fantasies and the material objects of desire. There has to be a wider community, a social world which is privy to and participates in these desires in order for them to be commercially viable. The technologies of boxing culture enable and reproduce that culture as well as inspire some of these fantasies.

Bodies enfleshed selves

The centrality of bodies to boxing is undisputed, given its *raison d'être* of one-on-one corporeal contact and the aim to inflict physical damage, along with its very basic classifications by body weight. The use of 'bodies' is preferable to 'the body' through the capacity to embrace difference and diversity rather than being restricted to a biological classification, merging biology with embodiment (Howson, 2005, Price and Shildrick, 1999, Richardson and Robinson, 2008, Turner, 1996). The materiality of bodies implies a reductionism and avoidance of the role of emotional affect and of intentionality, which has been taken up by phenomenological accounts which posit embodiment as a means of bringing minds and bodies together. Boxing is particularly sensitive to accusations of reductionism and limited possibilities of agency for its participants which have generated considerable interest in the agency afforded by ideas of embodiment.

Embodiment in the phenomenological sense (Merleau-Ponty, 1962) provides a means of explaining the relationship between the mind and the body, which is particularly apposite to boxing as a sport in which the two are inseparable. In boxing, almost more than in any other sport, mind and body become one through iterative body practices so that the boxer keeps going through habituation (Wacquant, 1995a, 2004). There is an element of agency in the process although embodiment can offer more to describe the inseparability of mind and body than to explain the relationship between the two. The concept of embodiment may explain why boxers keep going even when they are injured, but it says little about why they fight in the first place, and embodiment contributes little to debates about the shared properties and materialities of flesh which are elements in the processes through which boxing cultures are made.

Flesh is a crucial element in boxing as it is what generates its excitement and its contradictions and ambivalences. Flesh cannot fully explain the attraction of boxing but the shared capacities, frailties and strengths of flesh combine with political, cultural and economic forces along with intention, agency and rationality to make the boxing culture. Intention is not synonymous with flesh as it might appear to be with embodiment. I suggest the idea of enfleshed selves as a way of retaining the materiality of flesh and its specificities. Not only is the flesh subject to injury, flesh is also marked by differences, such as those of sex gender. Enfleshed selves are made through the assemblages which bring together different forces; those of economic, political social and cultural power as well as the agency and flesh of individuals. Through events and processes such as those which make up the culture of boxing, it is possible to retain a

focus upon the strengths and weaknesses, promises and limitations of the flesh without reducing everything to bodies and body practices. Enfleshed selves are also made through the values of social and cultural processes, which those selves also shape and affect. One of the big challenges in boxing, and of boxing culture in the twenty-first century, is the inclusion of women who bring themselves and their own ways of being in the world to the sport.

Changing times

Theories of globalization have stressed the speed and ubiquity of change which might seem to contradict much of what has been argued about boxing in this book. Boxing offers a particular take on the interrelationship between continuity and change and between the global and globalizing forces and local and personal affiliations and attachments.

Some of the most enduring dimensions of boxing relate to its relationship with sex gender. Thus, it is appropriate to focus upon this aspect of both change and continuity in exploring the role of boxing in changing times. Masculinities are constructed and experienced through the enfleshed practices of boxing, most of which are much more strongly associated with and emerge from enfleshed masculinity, and conversely femininity. The contemporary social and cultural terrain is changing and traditional gender roles have been challenged so that the essentialism of flesh as a determinant of binary categories of sex is more open to question and interpretation. The empirical presence of women in boxing makes a difference, not only to how boxing is understood and presented but also to the body practices and the materialities of the sport. On the one hand, it opens the possibility of women routinely engaging in these enfleshed pugilistic practices, challenging some of the ways of being in the body, and on the other it changes representations of the sport and its legacies. The discursive regimes through which boxing cultures are made are also transformed. Women's involvement may create new versions of heroic endeavour and they may challenge the hyperbole of such constructions and perform the sport as an everyday set of body practices to maintain health and fitness and as a means of acquiring the necessary skills of self-defence. The structural forces of sex gender, however, make it unlikely that there will be any great challenges to entrenched hegemonic masculinity which is a social and cultural force in which those who have never and will never engage in the Noble Art participate. Boxing culture, along with much of globalized sport, especially, as well as boxing, the big team sports, which receive massive

global media coverage, remains the site at which networks of followers and commentators are deeply embedded in the performance and reinstatement of masculinity, which still largely excludes women and devalues and marginalizes alternative ways of gendered being.

Boxing culture is complex and is not just marked by dichotomized simplifications and crude exaggerations. Boxing is full of ambivalences and contradictions; it is exciting and spectacular as well as routine; it is corrupt and encoded in the language of heroism and legendary courage; it is about poverty, racism and social exclusion and about escape and achievement; it is terrifying and very boring; it is gross and beautiful; it is about psychic and physical investment; it is personal and political; there are fighters and boxers and what is particular in relation to *Globalizing Boxing* is that boxing is local and global, and in many ways and much of the time it is both.

Boxing and boxing culture present an important site for the exploration of social, cultural and political transformations. In providing a means of understanding social change and the endurance of entrenched continuities in social relations and inequalities, boxing signals the possibilities of change, even if the change is incremental. Boxing not only reflects and responds to social processes, it is also generative of social change, whereby however limited the possibilities might be, the persistence of boxing in the twenty-first century becomes less of an anomaly and more of a way of looking at social inequalities and social worlds outside sport as well as inside it. Boxing is also a sport which offers excitement, challenge, displays of courage and enfolded materialities and a whole set of everyday practices and engagements which might also show how the flesh is fighting back analytically as well as empirically.