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BOXING IN MEXICO:
MASCULINITY, MODERNITY, AND NATIONALISM, 1946-1982

by

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ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

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This dissertation analyzes how, through the violent sport of boxing, Mexicans imagined their nation's position within the world in the mid to late twentieth century. Examining changes within the social context of the sport from the end of World War II to the Debt Crisis of 1982, I argue that boxing was essential to constructing Mexican national identity and fashioning a specifically Mexican modernity. The period between 1946 and 1982 was one of relative optimism in Mexican history. Mexican elites hoped that the Mexican nation would attain 'First World' status. At the same time, Mexican boxers won several world championships and, with the support of Mexican and Mexican-American fans, played a key role in Los Angeles' rise as the center for pugilistic activity in the United States. These successes allowed boxers to become important components of a Mexican national culture that was simultaneously cosmopolitan, nationalist, and masculine. Focusing on the gendered performances of boxers inside and outside of the ring, this research reveals how Mexicans used boxing to debate what it meant to be Mexican and masculine during this period.

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Introduction

In 2010 North American sports cable television network ESPN and Mexican brewer Tecate announced a new sponsorship deal. Since 2007, Tecate had aired advertisements on ESPN Deportes (ESPN's Spanish language network) and its boxing series *Viernes de Combates* (known as *Friday Night Fights* in English). This new sponsorship deal, however, allowed Tecate to create thirty-second long advertisements in Spanish for the English-language broadcasts of *Friday Night Fights*. Moreover, ESPN incorporated Tecate's slogan "*Con Carácter*" ("*With Character*") into these telecasts, creating a bilingual atmosphere that catered to the large Spanish-speaking audience for boxing in the United States.¹ For Tecate, the deal was one part of a larger strategy of branching out from its traditional clientele of Mexican immigrants to the larger demographic of male Latinos in the United States. For boxing, Tecate's interest in the sport helped fill a void left by Budweiser which had cut back on its sponsorships.² In an ironic twist of fate, a Mexican brewery was helping to keep boxing alive and financially afloat in the United States, the nation from which the sport had been introduced to Mexico. The fact that this was possible stems from both the long history of Mexican boxing in the United States and the sport's significance to Mexican national culture, both of which profoundly changed between the late 1940s and early 1980s.

This dissertation is the first scholarly history to examine Mexican boxing during the mid to late twentieth century and examines how this violent sport helped to shape Mexican national identity from 1946 to 1982. Following World War II, boxers became

¹ "ESPN and Tecate Renew Multimedia Boxing Sponsorship Agreement," *ESPN Media Zone*, 7 January 2010, n. pag.

² Tom Van Riper, "Tecate Gladly Fills Boxing's Sponsorship Void," *Forbes*, 11 December 2011, n. pag.

powerful symbols of Mexican national culture because their performances inside and outside of the ring allowed Mexican elites to portray the nation as cosmopolitan, nationalist, and masculine. When boxers properly preformed as athletes and upright citizens, they received praise from Mexican political and media elites as well as boxing fans from all classes for presenting a virile and modern image of Mexico at home and abroad. As a result, the sport shaped Mexican national culture and allowed Mexicans to brand their national culture abroad in a very masculine manner. Thus, imagining and projecting Mexican nationhood was a highly gendered process.

This dissertation builds off the work of Judith Butler in asserting the importance of performance in establishing Mexican and masculine identities. Butler characterizes gender as “an identity instituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*.”³ Not only did boxers need to reaffirm their masculinity through their actions in and out of the ring, they also needed to reaffirm their *mexicanidad*. This unstable characterization of Mexican identity draws parallels to the observations of Octavio Paz in his essay, “Mexican Masks.” Paz describes a Mexican populace reluctant to share its true emotions and resorting to deception to protect its identity. He identifies the prototypical Mexican as a “dissembler,” who in every moment “must remake, re-create, modify the personage he is playing.”⁴ Paz’s comments matter not because of their ability in creating a national typology that supposedly explains the flaws of Mexican character, but because they highlight a distinctly Mexican example of Butler’s more universalistic notion. The

³ Judith Butler, “Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory” *Theatre Journal*, 40, 4 (1988): 519.

⁴ Octavio Paz, *The Labyrinth of Solitude, The Other Mexico, and Other Essays*. Trans. Lysander Kemp, Yara Milos, and Rachel Philips Belash (New York: Grove Press, 1985), 40.

activity of boxing provided opportunities not only for boxers to assert and perform masculine and Mexican roles, but also for politicians, bureaucrats, media elites, and fans to do the same.

The construction of masculine identity plays a vital role in the study of boxing. As Joyce Carol Oates bluntly declared, “Boxing is for men, and is about men, and *is* men.”⁵ Throughout Mexican history, non-elite men have fought to preserve their personal and masculine honor, qualities Mexican elites believed they were incapable of possessing.⁶ Success in the boxing ring has meant a chance to rise in social status and to become a national celebrity in an unmistakably masculine way. Although the Mexican media and government celebrated achievements within the nation, they celebrated international successes more fervently. This quest for national honor was masculine because Mexico City excluded women from boxing for over fifty years (1947/1948-1998). Moreover, twentieth century Mexican males consistently associated their masculine identities with Mexico’s politics and prestige. A strong bond linked *mexicanidad* and masculinity.⁷ Given the homosocial world of boxing and the forced exclusion of women, it appears that part of the appeal of the sport to Mexican men of all classes was the exaggeration of male agency in the construction of Mexican national culture.⁸

⁵ Oates, *On Boxing* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2006), 72.

⁶ Pablo Piccato, *City of Suspects: Crime in Mexico City, 1900-1931* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001). James Alex Garza, *The Imagined Underworld: Sex, Crime, and Vice in Porfirian Mexico City* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2007).

⁷ Matthew Guttman, *The Meanings of Macho: Being a Man in Mexico City*, 2nd ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996, 2007), 244.

⁸ For an example survey of the literature on the active role women played in Postrevolutionary Mexico, see the edited volume Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughan, and Gabriela Cano, eds, *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics, and Power in Modern Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

Mexican achievements in the international realm were an essential component of Mexican national culture during this era. President Manuel Ávila Camacho (1940-1946) was instrumental in increasing Mexico's presence internationally. Prior to its entry in World War II, Mexico had diplomatic relations with neither the United Kingdom nor the Soviet Union, as it had remained internationally isolated since the Revolution of 1910-1920.⁹ The Ávila Camacho administration not only established more diplomatic ties, it also sought to make Mexico an influential member of the regional and world organizations created after the war.¹⁰ The presidency of his successor, Miguel Alemán Valdés marked a major shift in economic and social policies.¹¹ Moving the emphasis from social reform to economic development, Alemán sought to present Mexico's image to the world as modern and stable and aspired to attract the necessary foreign investment in a Mexican-led project of industrialization, allocating the state "the role of referee in order to prevent the excesses of capitalism."¹² This uneasy balance between state-led and internationally financed industrialization remained until the collapse of the Mexican economy in 1982, which ushered in a new era of modified dreams. The Mexican government no longer sought a prominent international role and allowed the private sector greater freedom in producing popular culture.¹³ Before 1982, boxing successes

⁹ Blanca Torres, *México y el mundo: Historia de sus relaciones exteriores, Tomo VII: De la Guerra al mundo bipolar* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, Centro de Estudios Internacionales, 2010), 24.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 17.

¹¹ John Sherman calls Alemán "arguably the most important president in 20th-century Mexican history" and "the real genius of modern Mexican political life." John Sherman, "The Mexican 'Miracle' and Its Collapse," in *The Oxford History of Mexico*, ed. Michael C. Meyer and William H. Beezley (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 576.

¹² Torres, 66.

¹³ Haber, et al. have even called the post 1982 period a "second revolution," due to the massive political, economic, and social changes that have occurred in the fallout of the collapse of the Mexican economy. Stephen Haber, Herbert S. Klein, Noel Maurer, and Kevin J. Middlebrook, *Mexico Since 1980* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), Ch. 1.

provided the ruling *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI)¹⁴ with opportunities to project the positives of its state-led modernization to the world.

Boxers embodied this paradoxical nature of twentieth century Mexican national culture. Following the Revolution of the 1910s, the Mexican government frequently looked to popular culture as a means to consolidate power and often relied on “traditional” cultural practices to make “modern” economic changes more palatable to the Mexican people.¹⁵ Beyond the 1930s the Mexican government relied upon a cultural nationalism that attempted to combine the clashing ideologies of ‘modern’ cosmopolitanism, fixated on worldliness, and ‘traditional’ nationalism, focused on *mexicanidad*,¹⁶ to promote these rapid changes.¹⁷ Mexico’s world champion boxers became ideal symbols for combining these conflicting ideologies because their humble socioeconomic origins helped anchor these otherwise cosmopolitan figures to the Mexican nation.

Mexican sporting culture transformed itself after World War II, becoming increasingly commercialized, internationalized, and intertwined with mass consumption.¹⁸ Throughout the late 1940s and the 1950s, as sport grew in popularity in

¹⁴ The PRI (Institutional Revolutionary Party) ruled Mexico from 1929 to 2000. From 1929 to 1938, it was known as the Partido Nacional Revolucionario. From 1938 to 1946 it was known as the *Partido de la Revolución Mexicana*.

¹⁵ Alan Knight, “Popular Culture and the Revolutionary State in Mexico, 1910-1940,” *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 74 no. 3 (1994): 398. Anne Rubenstein associates the public discourse of tradition with “conservatism, rural life, and Catholicism” and the public discourse of modernity with “progress, industrialization, and urbanity.” Anne Rubenstein, *Bad Language, Naked Ladies, and Other Threats to the Nation: A Political History of Comic Books in Mexico* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998), 42.

¹⁶ Joanne Herschfield defines *mexicanidad* as “the term given to describe an ‘official’ postrevolutionary Mexican national identity through concerted political efforts.” Herschfield, *Imagining la Chica Moderna: Women, Nation, and Visual Culture in Mexico, 1917-1936* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 8.

¹⁷ Carlos Monsiváis, “Notas sobre la cultura mexicana en el siglo XX,” in *Historia general de México*, ed. Centro de Estudios Históricos (Mexico City: Colegio de México, 2000), 1036.

¹⁸ Joseph Arben, “Sport, Development, and Mexican Nationalism, 1920-1970,” *Journal of Sport History* 18, 3 (1991): 358.

Mexico, Mexican elites and government officials began discussing the possibility of placing a bid to host the Olympic games. In 1954 Mexico City hosted the Central American and Caribbean Games and in 1955 the city hosted the second Pan-American Games. Both events allowed Mexico City to display the large sporting infrastructure that would make it a suitable host for the 1968 summer Olympics.¹⁹ In addition, the 1950s marked the regency of Ernesto Uruchurtu in the nation's capital. As Federal District regent (1952 to 1966) Uruchurtu sponsored the construction of at least thirteen sport facilities as a counterbalance to the corrupting influences of vice and rock'n roll.²⁰ Furthermore, commercial television arrived in Mexico in 1950 and with it live broadcasts of bullfighting, *jai alai*, tennis, baseball, *lucha libre*, and boxing.²¹ By 1953, journalist and sports announcer Antonio Andere contended that boxing had become the most popular program on Mexican television, with over 200,000 Mexicans tuning in every Saturday to watch their pugilistic idols.²²

Aside from its obvious connection to consumer culture, the relationship between boxing and modernity can at times seem problematic. The brutal violence commonly linked with the sport contradicts the images of order and progress that the term modernity implies. Historian Elliot Gorn argues that the "safety" reforms that transformed bare-knuckle prize fighting in the United States into modern boxing did not make the sport safer. Instead, they made prize fighting more entertaining and suitable for public

¹⁹ Kevin B. Witherspoon, *Before the Eyes of the World: Mexico and the 1968 Olympic Games* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008), 21-23.

²⁰ Rachel Kram Villareal, "Gladiolas for the Children of Sánchez: Ernesto P. Uruchurtu's Mexico City, 1950-1968," (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Arizona, 2008), 138-176.

²¹ Fernando Mejía Barquera, "Televisión y Deporte," in *Apuntes para una historia de la Televisión Mexicana II* (Mexico City: La Revista Mexicana de Comunicación, 1999), 169-173.

²² Antonio Andere, "DAÑA O BENEFICIA? La Televisión Y el Deporte," *Siempre!*, 11 July 1953, 62.

spectacle.²³ The sport itself requires such a rational and calculated performance that, at its elite echelon, it sometimes “bears more relationship to a shrewdly cerebral contest like chess than to anything like street fighting.”²⁴ Sociologist Loïc Wacquant contends that boxing training converts “the body into... *an intelligent and creative machine capable of self-regulation*.”²⁵ Thus, in addition to boxing’s ‘traditional’ masculine qualities (courage, violence, the ability to endure pain), the sport demands personal traits and performs societal functions that very much cohere with conceptions of modernity.

Boxing’s rampant corruption presents another hurdle to connecting the sport with modernity. In the early 1960s, because of recurring scandals, the Mexican sports media harshly criticized North American regulation of the sport. The monthly sport magazine *Deporte Ilustrado* published a regular feature entitled “Gangsters del box” (“Gangsters of Boxing”). Frequently, Mexican journalists lamented the sport’s demise from its apex in U.S. popularity in the 1920s and 1930s. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, with the help of the Mexican government, the Mexican boxing community (commissioners, managers, and promoters) set out to make Mexico an important participant in the international regulation of boxing. These efforts led to the creation of the World Boxing Council (WBC) in Mexico City in 1963. Upon the founding of the WBC, sports daily *ESTO* celebrated Mexico’s “modern leaders” for moving the nation towards a “favored” destiny by deciding “to seek the unification of boxing, parallel to its humanization, to its

²³ Elliot Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986), 205.

²⁴ Oates, “The Mystery of the Ring,” *The New York Review of Books* 55, 2 (May 29, 2008).

²⁵ Loïc Wacquant, *Body and Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 95. Emphasis in the original.

dignification, before it was too late.”²⁶ Corruption did not provide a hurdle to displaying Mexican modernity. Rather, it provided an opportunity to display Mexico’s status among the community of nations.

More importantly, many Mexicans associated boxing with modernity and national progress. A 1933 telegram from a frustrated boxer to President Abelardo Rodríguez denounced the mayor of Oaxaca City as “anti-athlete and reactionary-spirited” for his attempts to ban boxing.²⁷ The sport also provided opportunities to underscore how Mexican society was rapidly changing. Advertising for the 1965 bout between Vicente Saldivar and Harold Winstone featured commercials for Modelo Brewery that served as propaganda for a modern and urban Mexico City, highlighting the modernist apartment complex at Tlatelolco. In addition, Banco de Comercio advertised itself between rounds as “a bank with modern ideas.”²⁸ In January of 1967, José Medel traveled to Japan to challenge for the world bantamweight championship. During the radio broadcast of the fight, an advertisement for Banco de Comercio (Bancomer) boasted, “One more time Mexico is represented in a world sporting event by one of its most distinguished athletes. This gives us an opportunity to appreciate how Mexico occupies an increasingly important place in every aspect of the international panorama.”²⁹

The fascination Mexican elites had with their nation’s position vis-à-vis the international community dates back to the late nineteenth century. Mauricio Tenorio

²⁶ Antonio Hernandez H., “Comentarios a una historica reunion: Por encima de recelos y rencillas México ha creado el comite mundial,” *ESTO*, 17 February 1963, 8(A).

²⁷ Archivo General de la Nación, Fondo Abelardo L. Rodríguez, José Juan Canceco to Abelardo L. Rodríguez, 24 February 1933.

²⁸ *Vicente Saldivar vs. Harold Winstone*, Televisa (Mexico City: XEW-TV, 7 September 1965).

²⁹ Fonoteca Nacional, “Box. Medel vs. Harada/1,” Televisa Radio, (Mexico City: XEW, 3 January 1967).

Trillo describes Mexican participation at World's Fairs as "opportunities for being part, albeit briefly, of the cosmopolitan concert of nations, to be one with the modern community of values, beliefs, and concerns."³⁰ Whereas participation at a World's Fair could provide a flirtation with performing Mexican modernity, participating in or observing 'modern' sports, such as baseball, boxing, or bicycling, could provide a more permanent affirmation of one's and Mexico's modernity.³¹ As the twentieth century progressed, elites viewed the hosting of sporting events, such as the Central American and Caribbean Games and the Pan-American Games, as an ideal means to broadcast Mexico's stability and modernity to the outside world. Hosting these sporting events prepared the nation for planning and organizing the 1968 Summer Olympics, the most obvious and famous example of Mexico's use of sport for international self-promotion.³²

Although boxing in Mexico is understudied, the sport has received a great deal of attention from scholars of many disciplines. Many historians have used boxers' life stories as windows into the social history of a particular period, usually within the United States.³³ Of these, Michael Isenberg's *John L. Sullivan and His America* also investigates

³⁰ Mauricio Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs: Crafting a Modern Nation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1996).8.

³¹ William H. Beezley, *Judas at the Jockey Club: And Other Episodes of Porfirian Mexico* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2004).

³² Arbena, "Hosting the Summer Olympic Games: Mexico City, 1968," in Joseph L. Arbena and David G. LaFrance, eds., *Sport in Latin America and the Caribbean* (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2003), pp. 133-43; Keith and Clare Brewster, *Representing the Nation: Sport, Control, Contestation, and the Mexican Olympics*, Special issue of *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 26, 6 (2009): 711-880; Ariel Rodríguez Kurí, "El otro '68: Política y estilo en la organización de los Juegos Olímpicos de la Ciudad de México," *Relaciones* 19, no. 76 (1998): 108-129; Witherspoon, *Before the Eyes of the World*; Zolov, "Showcasing the 'Land of Tomorrow.'"

³³ For example, see Peter Benson, *Battling Siki: A Tale of Ring Fixes, Race, and Murder in the 1920s* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2006). Michael T. Isenberg, *John L. Sullivan and His America* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1988); Randy Roberts, *Jack Dempsey: The Manassa Mauler* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2003 [1979]); Randy Roberts, *Papa Jack: Jack Johnson and the Era of the White Hopes* (New York: Free Press, 1983); Russell Sullivan, *Rocky Marciano: The Rock of His Times* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 2002).

the boxer as a symbol of ethnic identity, which forms another category of scholarly treatments of boxing.³⁴ Historians and sociologists have examined boxers as ethnic symbols in various locations around the world, including African-Americans, Chicanos, and ethnic whites in the United States, the Ga of Ghana, and Palestinians in Israel. Other scholars have focused on the boxing ring as a stage for national and international drama, the most obvious case being the 1938 Joe Louis – Max Schmeling bout, which many on both sides of the Atlantic saw as a prelude to World War II.³⁵ Others have investigated the meaning of pugilism, including the ring as place for members of a new urban working class to prove their masculinity, the gym as a moral oasis in a world of vice, or both ring and gym as sites of gender identity construction.³⁶ More recently, scholars have taken a cultural approach to boxing, examining it through the lenses of Anglophonic film and literature.³⁷ This dissertation incorporates these themes while also examining the sport through the lenses of cosmopolitanism and internationalism. In the process it joins a

³⁴ For example, see Emmanuel Akyeampong, "Bukom and the Social History of Boxing in Accra: Warfare and Citizenship in Precolonial Ga Society," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, 35, No. 1, (2002): 39-60; Frederic Cople Jaher, "White America Views Jack Johnson, Joe Louis, and Muhammad Ali," in *Sport in America: New Historical Perspectives* ed. Donald Spivey (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1985): 145-191; Peter Levine, "Oy Such a Fighter," in *The New American Sport History: New Approaches and Perspectives*, ed. S.W. Pope (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 251-283; Gregory S. Rodríguez, "Raza Boxing: Community, Identity, and Hybridity in the 1960s and 1970s in Southern California," in *Mexican Americans and Sports: A Reader in Athletics and Barrio Life*, ed. Jorge Iber and Samuel O. Regalado (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2007), 160-187; Tamir Sorek, "The Only Place Where an Arab Can Hit a Jew and Get a Medal for It: Boxing and Masculine Pride Among Arab Citizens of Israel," *Sport in Society* 12, 8 (2009): 1065-1074.

³⁵ For example, see Lewis A. Erenberg, *The Greatest Fight of Our Generation: Louis vs. Schmeling* (Oxford, UK; New York: Oxford University Press, 2006); Edward D. Krzemiński, "Fulcrum of Change: Boxing and Society at a Crossroads," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 21, No. 2 (2004): 161-180; Jeffrey Sammons, *Beyond the Ring: The Role of Boxing in American Society* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1988).

³⁶ Gorn, *The Manly Art*; Gorn, "The Meanings of Prizefighting," in *The New American Sport History*, ed. S.W. Pope (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1997), 225-250; Benita Heiskanen, *The Urban Geography of Boxing: Race, Class, and Gender in the Ring* (New York: Routledge, 2012). Wacquant, Kath Woodward, *Boxing, Masculinity and Identity: The 'T' of the Tiger* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007).

³⁷ Kasia Boddy, *Boxing: A Cultural History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008); Dan Streible, *Fight Pictures: A History of Boxing and Early Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Woodward, *Boxing, Masculinity and Identity*.

growing scholarly literature that uses boxing to investigate masculinity, nationalism, and race among Latin American and Latino cultures.³⁸

This dissertation also opens new ground in the study of Mexican sport. Historians have examined the post-revolutionary Mexican government's use of sport to fuse together a divided nation wracked by civil war and to improve the habits of an 'underdeveloped' indigenous population.³⁹ Studies with more local foci also have highlighted the faith post-revolutionary government leaders and elites had in sport's ability to improve the bodies and habits of lower-class Mexicans.⁴⁰ The 1968 Olympics have also drawn much attention, as Mexico was the first 'Third World' country to host the games and used them as an opportunity to advertise the nation as a desirable destination for foreign investment

³⁸ The second half of the twentieth century witnessed a "Latinization" of boxing, as Latino and Latin American boxers proliferated the ranks of pugilism. Heiskanen, "The *Latinization* of Boxing: a Texas Case-Study," *Journal of Sport History* 32, 1 (2005): 45-66;. Heiskanen's work is part of a growing literature on Latino boxing in the United States. For example, see Fernando Delgado, "Golden But Not Brown: Oscar De La Hoya and the Complications of Culture, Manhood, and Boxing," *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 22, 2 (2005): 196-211; Rodriguez, "Raza Boxing;" Tom I. Romero II, "Wearing the Red, White, and Blue Trunks of Aztlán: Rodolfo "Corky" Gonzales and the Convergence of American and Chicano Nationalism," *Aztlan* 29, 1 (2004): 83-117. There is also a burgeoning literature on boxing in Latin America. For example see Christina D. Abreu, "The Story of Benny "Kid" Paret: Cuban Boxers, the Cuban Revolution, and the U.S. Media, 1959-1962," *Journal of Sport History* 38, 1 (2011): 95-114; Enver Michel Casimir, "Champion of the *Patria*: Kid Chocolate, Athletic Achievement, and the Significance of Race for Cuban National Aspiration," (PhD Dissertation, University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill, 2010); "Daniel Fridman and David Sheinin, "Wild Bulls, Discarded Foreigners and Brash Champions: US Empire and the Cultural Constructions of Argentine Boxers," *Left History*, 12, 1 (2007): 52-77; David LaFevor, "Forging the Masculine and Modern Nation: Race, Identity, and the Public Sphere in Cuba and Mexico, 1890s-1930s" (PhD Dissertation, Vanderbilt University, 2011); Anju Reejsinghani, "For Blood or for Glory: A History of Cuban Boxing, 1898-1962," (PhD Dissertation, University of Texas-Austin, 2009).

³⁹ Arbena, "Sport, Development, and Mexican Nationalism;" Keith Brewster, "Patriotic Pastimes: The Role of Sport in Post-Revolutionary Mexico," *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 22 no. 2 (2005): 139-157. Brewster, "Redeeming the 'Indian': Sport and Ethnicity in Post-Revolutionary Mexico," *Patterns of Prejudice* 38,4 (2004): 213-231.

⁴⁰ Gilbert M. Joseph, "Forging the Regional Pastime: Baseball and Class in Yucatán," in *Sport and Society in Latin America: Diffusion, Dependency, and the Rise of Mass Culture*, ed. Joseph L. Arbena (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1988): 29-61; Miguel Lisbona Guillén, "Mejorar la Raza: Cuerpo y deporte en el Chiapas de la Revolución Mexicana," *Relaciones* 27, no. 105 (2006): 60-106.

and for tourism.⁴¹ Much of the historiography of Mexican sport during this time has focused on Mexico City's hosting of the 1968 Olympics with much of the attention paid to the intentions of the organizers of those games. Very little attention has been paid to individual Mexican athletes during this time. Furthermore, very little literature exists on Mexican boxing during these years, despite the fact that this was an era when Mexico became one of the most important producers of elite boxers in the world. Boxing is unique among Mexican sporting traditions, primarily because boxers have enjoyed international success unparalleled by any other Mexican athletes. They have labeled Mexico an important nation in the realm of professional boxing. As one state-sponsored publication on Mexican boxing boasts, "Mexico is a synonym for great boxing all over the world."⁴² The popularity of Mexican boxers among Mexican and Mexican-American boxing fans transformed Los Angeles into the center of pugilistic activity in the United States by the late 1960s. The international impact of Mexican boxers places this dissertation in dialogue with scholars who have examined how Mexicans exported their cultural practices to the outside world.⁴³

⁴¹ Arbena, "Hosting the Summer Olympic Games: Mexico City, 1968;" Claire and Keith Brewster, "Mexico City 1968: Sombreros and Skyscrapers," in *National Identity and Global Sports Events: Culture, Politics, and Spectacle in the Olympics and the Football World Cup*, ed. Alan Tomlinson and Christopher Young (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2006), 99-116; and Eric Zolov, "Showcasing the Land of Tomorrow." See also *Representing the Nation: Sport, Control, Contestation, and the Mexican Olympics*. For an analysis on the internal dynamics and contradictions of the Mexico City Olympics, see Ariel Rodríguez Kurí and Witherspoon.

⁴² Roberto Valero Berrospe, *Historia del boxeo mexicano: a traves de sus campeones* (Mexicali, B.C., Mexico: Gobierno del Estado de Baja California, Instituto de la Juventud y el Deporte, 1993): 3.

⁴³ Helen Delpar, *The Enormous Vogue of Things Mexican: Cultural Relations between the United States and Mexico, 1920-1935* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1992). Amelia M. Kiddle, "Cabaretistas and Indias Bonitas: Gender and Representation of Mexico in the Americas during the Cárdenas Era," *Journal of Latin American Studies* 42, 2 (2010): 263-91. Tenorio-Trillo, *Mexico at the World's Fairs*.

As a cultural form imported from the United States to Mexico, boxing also touches upon issues raised in post colonial cultural, especially the supposed “cultural imperialism.” In the 1970s, Edward Said and Dorfman and Mattelart argued that ‘Western’ powers imposed cross-cultural encounters and interpreted their encounters in a way that justified the colonization and exploitation of the ‘non-Western’ world.⁴⁴ These structuralist frameworks, however, overlooked the agency of non-Western peoples in shaping their cultural encounters with more powerful countries and the numerous directions and unintended outcomes that these encounters can engender. This is especially evident in the field of modern sports. Despite their British origins, sports like soccer and cricket have often served as activities for asserting nationalistic pride and for contesting Anglophilia.⁴⁵ For example, the late anthropologist Eduardo Archetti contended that the hybrid Argentine *criollo* identity, which combined the soccer styles of native Argentines with that of Spanish and Italian immigrants, helped to create a national soccer (and masculine) identity that distinguished Argentine soccer from its British origins.⁴⁶ Similarly, this dissertation examines how Mexicans branded a sport with roots in the Anglophonic world as a nationalistic activity and converted it into a source of nationalist pride.

⁴⁴ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage, 1978); Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart, *How to Read Donald Duck: Imperialist Ideology in the Disney Comic*, trans. David Kunzle (New York: International General, 1991 [1971]).

⁴⁵ For example, see Gregg P. Bocketti, “Italian Immigrants, Brazilian Football, and the Dilemma of National Identity,” *Journal of Latin American Studies* 40, 2 (2008): 275-302; Mike Cronin, *Sport and Nationalism in Ireland: Gaelic Games, Soccer, and Irish Identity since 1844* (Dublin and Portland: Four Courts Press, 1999), Patrick F. Mc Devitt, “*May the Best Man Win*”: *Sport, Masculinity, and Nationalism in Great Britain and the Empire, 1880-1935* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2004).

⁴⁶ Eduardo Archetti, *Masculinities: Football, Polo, and the Tango in Argentina* (Oxford, U.K., New York: Berg, 1999), 15.

The literature on cultural relations fits in well with the historiography of Mexican popular culture, which stresses the diverse origins of Mexican cultural activities. William Beezley's work on sports and leisure in the Porfiriato (1876-1911) reveals a Mexican elite class eager to import activities such as boxing and bicycling, then being emulated by the Mexican lower classes.⁴⁷ Historians have also revealed how another cultural import, cinema, was transformed to suit Mexican tastes and became a site of contention over notions of *mexicanidad* and proper gender roles.⁴⁸ Historical analyses have also portrayed twentieth-century music as a highly debated cultural form, with intellectuals, government officials, and middle-class families debating over the proper balance between foreign and indigenous elements to create an ideal modern form of Mexican music.⁴⁹ Even Mexican cuisine has come under scrutiny, as Mexican elites have battled with the lower classes over the indigenous influence on national cuisine and the place of refrigeration in meat preparation.⁵⁰ Anthropologist Heather Levi has studied *lucha libre* (Mexican professional wrestling), which "arrived in Mexico as a cosmopolitan practice, but... came to signify the continuity of the pre-Hispanic past in the urban present."⁵¹ These works highlight the instability of Mexican culture and how its foundations rest on hybrid cultural practices.

⁴⁷ Beezley, 13-66.

⁴⁸ Seth Fein, "Myths of Cultural Imperialism and Nationalism in Golden Age Mexican Cinema," in *Fragments of a Golden Age: The Politics of Culture in Mexico since 1940*, ed. Gilbert M. Joseph, Anne Rubenstein, and Eric Zolov (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001), 159-198; Rubenstein, "Raised Voices in the Cine Montecarlo: Sex Education, Mass Media, and Oppositional Politics in Mexico," *Journal of Family History* 23, no. 3 (1998): 312-323; Rubenstein, "Bodies, Cities, Cinema: Pedro Infante's Death as Political Spectacle," in *Fragments of a Golden Age*, 199-233.

⁴⁹ Alejandro L. Madrid, "The Sounds of the Nation: Visions of Modernity and Tradition in Mexico's First National Congress of Music," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 86, 4 (2007): 681-706; Eric Zolov, *Refried Elvis: The Rise of the Mexican Counterculture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

⁵⁰ Jeffrey Pilcher, *¡Que vivan los tamales!: Food and the Making of Mexican Identity* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1998); Pilcher, *The Sausage Rebellion: Public Health, Private Enterprise, and Meat in Mexico City, 1890-1917* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2006).

⁵¹ Heather Levi, *The World of Lucha Libre: Secrets, Revelations, and Mexican National Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008), 26.

This focus on consolidation and instability is especially germane to this dissertation because much of it focuses on the years of the so-called Mexican ‘Miracle,’ a period of consistent economic growth and political stability that lasted from roughly 1940 to 1970.⁵² These ‘Miracle’ years have long been portrayed as years of stability until the massacre of student protesters at Tlatelolco one month before the 1968 Olympics. Recent historical works, however, have overturned this thesis by revealing the prevalence of political dissent prior to 1968.⁵³ There is also new scholarly literature on the period that continues to examine political dissent (especially Mexico’s ‘Dirty War’) beyond 1968 and up to debt crisis of 1982.⁵⁴ In my research, I have yet to find a boxer who outwardly opposed the PRI. In fact, the vast majority publicly supported the PRI and often dedicated their championship matches to the Mexican President. Any sort of political contention or disagreement is almost impossible to find during this era, even though the sport drew attention to Mexico’s urban poverty and economic inequality. What boxing did, then, was substantiate elite discourses of stability and harmony during a politically contentious time in Mexican politics.

The first three chapters of this dissertation examine boxing from a national perspective. Chapter one examines how Mexicans remembered the original Golden Age

⁵² Sarah Babb, *Managing Mexico: Economists from Nationalism to Neoliberalism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004), 77-81.

⁵³ For example, see Robert Francis Alegre, “Contesting the ‘Mexican Miracle’: Railway Men and Women Struggle for Democracy, 1943-1959” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Rutgers, the State University of New Jersey, 2007); Sandra Mendiola García, “Street Vendors, Marketers, and Politics in Twentieth-Century Puebla, Mexico” (Ph.D. Dissertation, Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey, 2008); Tanalis Padilla, *Rural Resistance in the Land of Zapata: The Jaramillista Movement and the Myth of the Pax-Priista, 1940-1962* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2008); Jaime Pensado, “Political Violence and Student Culture in Mexico: The Consolidation of *Porrisimo* during the 1950s and 1960s” (Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2008); Zolov, *Refried Elvis*.

⁵⁴ For example, see Fernando Herrera Calderón and Adela Cedillo, eds., *Challenging Authoritarianism in Mexico: Revolutionary Struggles and the Dirty War, 1964-1982* (New York: Routledge, 2012).

of boxing (1933-1937) and its significance to Mexico's post World War II sporting culture. In the process, it analyzes factors within Mexico and global sporting culture that gave sport its high status in mainstream, consumer society in Mexico during this time. Chapter two underscores how place and masculine honor impacted boxer Raúl Macías' rise up the Mexico social ladder in the 1950s. It focuses on the environments of how the urban slum and boxing gymnasium contributed to his becoming a mass media celebrity. Chapter three reveals how boxing magazines served as sites to debate various masculine behaviors in Mexican society. Not only does it examine the behaviors promoted and critiqued by the magazines themselves, it also probes letters from readers published in the magazines that commented on the actions of boxers as well.

The final two chapters look at Mexican boxing from an international standpoint. Chapter four focuses on the World Boxing Council (WBC). Based in Mexico City, the WBC became the world's first international sanctioning body for the sport in 1963. The chapter examines the WBC's foundations in Mexican economic nationalism and how those foundations change as the Council became a vehicle for corruption and cooperation with U.S. boxing interests. Chapter five centers on one of the stars of Mexico's second Golden Age (1968-1982), Cuban-born José Nápoles. The chapter unearths the tensions between Mexican nationalism and cosmopolitanism, as Mexicans used Nápoles' in-ring successes as opportunities to debate roles of *mexicanidad* and cosmopolitanism in Mexican national culture.

A Note on Sources

Since this project's inception, I have intended to analyze Mexican boxing from a variety of perspectives and sources. I originally imagined that my project would primarily rely upon Mexican government archival sources and oral histories, in order to ascertain the points of view from 'above' and 'below.' When I arrived in Mexico, this proved to be a difficult plan to enact. On one hand, the Archivo General de la Nación and the Archivo del Secretario de Relaciones Exteriores had some, but not much, documentation on boxing. The Archivo Histórico del Distrito Federal, which should house the documents of the Comisión de Box y Lucha Libre del Distrito Federal, has very little documentation after the early 1930s that is organized and accessible to the public. The Comisión only has records dating back to the mid to late 1990s.

Furthermore, oral histories also proved difficult to obtain. Through Alfonso Hernández Hernández of the Centro de Estudios Tepiteños, I was connected to a member of the group of boxing fans and ex-boxers that met the second Sunday of every month for lunch and dancing. I met several friendly and knowledgeable boxers, trainers, boxing fans, spouses and trainers, but most seemed mystified as to why I would want to interview them. My abilities to persuade were often met with polite nods and vague yes responses that left details uncertain. I did meet several ex-boxers, including former world champion and current boxing commissioner, Rafael Herrera. Through one of the group's members, I was introduced to former world champion Rubén Olivares and former Mexican national champion Enrique García. Olivares wanted compensation, which effectively ended my contact with him. García, however, proved to be an excellent interview, partly because he was also a journalist and partly because he is currently

working on his memoirs. Through another group member, a trainer of a boxing gym in Tepito, I was introduced to boxer Gerardo “Cantinflas” Gutiérrez, who also proved to be gracious and very helpful. Finally, through personal connections in the historical profession, I was able to interview Gregorio “Goyo” Vargas Sr. and his son, Gregorio “Goyo” Vargas Jr. The difficulty in getting these interviews, along with the fact that sometimes my interviewees did not show up for their interviews led me to rethink my research agenda. A three-hour wait at the treeless plaza outside Metro Pino Suárez on a sunny day that leaves one red-necked and lobster-faced will have that effect. Although I did not interview the quantity of people that I wanted, the quality of the people I did interview was amazing. I would like to think that my interviews, while not especially germane to my dissertation, are the start of a future project that will deal more with memory and narrative in the present era. Also, getting to meet my historical subjects was a thrill and added nuance to the people about which I had read so much. All interviews listed in the dissertation are recorded and in my possession.

Luckily for the project, boxing magazines proved to be a trove of evidence. I never imagined that magazines like *Ring Mundial* (both epochs) and *Nocaut... Sólo Box* would provide so many details about boxers’ lives and publish so many interviews that often delved into the intimate details of their lives. Furthermore, these magazines published letters from readers, which provided me with a source of documentation for the reception of boxing, often a difficult find for studies of sports and of spectacles in general. Despite their limitations, they have proven invaluable in analyzing Mexican boxing from multiple angles.

During the timeframe of this dissertation, Mexican boxing fans had several options when choosing a boxing magazine. Most were weeklies dedicated to covering boxing and professional wrestling equally, usually fifteen pages per sport. They occasionally featured interviews, usually not of great depth, and never published letter from the readership. These periodicals included *Box y lucha*, *K.O.: Semanario Deportivo (K.O.)*, *ARENA... DE BOX Y LUCHA* (hereafter, “ARENA”). The writers for these periodicals expressed the majority of opinions printed, and occasionally interviewed boxers, managers, and promoters. Direct quotes from these figures were rare and direct quotes from fans never appeared. Based on the advertisements in them, it is clear that these publications had a national audience and writers frequently wrote of “Mexican boxing,” as a fixed entity without regional variations.

Additionally, there were weekly periodicals dedicated strictly to the sport of boxing, such as *Nocaut... Sólo Box* (hereafter “*Nocaut*”) and *Ring Mundial*. These magazines featured more in-depth coverage of the sport, featuring detailed interviews with Mexican boxers that revealed a great deal of personal information, and letters from the readership. The original *Ring Mundial*, which ran from the 1940s into the first half of the 1950s, featured advertisements from businesses in Mexico City, Tijuana, and Los Angeles. These advertisements ranged from boxing supplies, adult-themed “nocturnal clubs,” to ballroom dance lessons. *Nocaut*, which began publication in 1972 did not feature the high-end advertisements of the original *Ring Mundial* and aimed at a broader audience. The second epoch of *Ring Mundial*, which started in 1964 under different ownership from the original magazine of the same title, balanced the sensibilities of its

predecessor and *Nocaut*. Both *Nocaut* and *Ring Mundial* featured fan letters from Mexico City, the Mexican provinces, and from abroad, including California, Nicaragua, and Puerto Rico.

Regardless of their opinions about boxers specifically and boxing in general, the writers for these periodicals, like their counterparts' writing about boxing for newspapers and cultural magazines, fell within the bounds of the Presidentialist standards of Mexican media during the time. Eric Zolov defines Mexican presidentialism as "an unqualified reverence for the president as the supreme arbiter of political disputes and the standard bearer of the Mexican body politic." Mexican periodicals could criticize Mexican society, but never the President.⁵⁵ The government did not own the vast majority of periodicals in Mexico during this time, but that did not mean that periodicals were free to criticize the government. Through PIPSA (Paper Producer and Importer, Inc.), the government subsidized the cost of paper, an imported product that was costly otherwise. Rather than practice outright censorship, the government instead could threaten to strip a newspaper of its right to buy PIPSA-subsidized paper. According to Anne Rubenstein, from 1940 to 1976, not a single periodical that was independent of PIPSA survived more than a year.⁵⁶ Mexican boxing magazines were often critical of Mexican and North American boxing authorities, but rarely, if ever, discussed issues outside the realm of the boxing. Any coverage of the Mexican President remained positive and innocuous. While poverty within Mexican society was at times acknowledged, its causes, which certainly

⁵⁵ Eric Zolov, "The Graphic Satire of Mexico's Jorge Carreño and the Politics of Presidentialism During the 1960s," *Estudios Interdisciplinarios de América Latina* 17:1 (2006): 13.

⁵⁶ Rubenstein, "Mass Media and Public Culture in the Postrevolutionary Era," in *The Oxford History of Mexico*, 640.

contributed to the large supply of boxers, were never analyzed in a serious manner. That said, within these bounds, boxing magazines expressed a surprising variety of opinions on topics that dealt directly with boxing, Mexican nationalism, and masculinity.

Chapter 1:

Sport, Masculinity, and Memory:

Rodolfo Casanova and Mexico's Original Golden Age of Boxing

It was the middle of January 1948. Former Mexican boxing great Rodolfo “Chango” (“Monkey”) Casanova sat outside the National Palace in Mexico City’s Zócalo, or main plaza. Creating a “shameful spectacle,” the thirty-two year-old ex-boxer Casanova vowed to starve himself until he received proper remuneration from movie producer Raúl de Anda for the movie *Campeón sin corona*.¹ Casanova claimed that de Anda owed him 500 thousand pesos because “nobody can deny that the box-office success of the film is precisely owed to the fact that it is based on my life.”² After Casanova starved himself for fifty hours, de Anda offered the former boxer 1,000 pesos, a far cry from the sum Casanova had suggested. Afterward, Casanova’s representative told the Mexican media, “As you see, the exploitation of Rodolfo continues. Only now it is not managers and boxing promoters. Now the culprit is none other than the tycoon of cinema... Raúl de Anda.”³ Casanova and his representative never settled with de Anda. The ex-pugilist continued to live in poverty, squandering whatever money came his way.

The film may not have benefited Casanova economically, but it certainly helped to cement his place in Mexican boxing lore. *Campeón sin corona* was the first full-length feature film in Mexico to focus solely on boxing. It enjoyed immense popularity and garnered David Silva an Ariel (the Mexican version of the Oscar) for best lead actor in

¹ “POR LA FUERZA OBLIGARON A RODOLFO CASANOVA A SALIR DEL ZOCALO,” *El Universal Gráfico*, 12 January 1948, 1.

² L.F. Bustamante, “EL CHANGO CASANOVA: quiere medio millón,” *Jueves de Excelsior*, 13 November 1947, 21.

³ L.F. Bustamante, “MIL PESOS para el chango Casanova,” *Jueves de Excelsior*, 29 January 1948, 42.

his role as boxer Roberto Terranova.⁴ The movie inspired several imitators to create similarly plotted films about pugilism, including *Mi Campeón* and *El Kid Tobacco*. These films formed part of Mexico's cinematic "Golden Age" of the 1940s and early 1950s. The film drew on the life story of Casanova, quite possibly Mexico's most popular athlete in the 1930s, also known as the "Golden Age" of boxing in Mexico City. His failed flirtation with greatness made his story not only fascinating, but also very relatable to Mexicans.

Casanova's story was all the more fascinating to Mexican boxing fans due to the dearth of quality boxers in Mexico in the late 1940s and early 1950s. In 1948, boxing magazine *Ring Mundial* called the sport "our decaying spectacle" that was "below the level of inept," and characterized Mexican boxing promoters as "voracious" men who would "only bring about the death of the once flourishing sport."⁵ At a time when Mexico looked to increase its presence internationally, it lacked talent in an activity that had helped bring together multiple sectors of Mexican society a decade before. The memory of Rodolfo Casanova and Mexico's Golden Age of boxing served to galvanize the same feelings of belonging to the Mexican nation in the 1940s as it had in the 1930s. As Mexico industrialized, urbanized, and became more prominent in the international community, it needed people and events to symbolize the positive outcomes of these processes. Casanova provided optimism, as he broke through Mexico's rigid social structures, and served as a cautionary tale to Mexicans in the 1930s, as his lack of self-

⁴ Tory, "CINE," *Mañana*, 24 May 1947, 71.

⁵ "DECIMOS," *Ring Mundial*, 3 April 1948, 3.

discipline led to a life of abject poverty. When current events did not conform to the ideals of Mexican elites, the immediate past became a useful compensatory tool.

Casanova's fall from grace helped formulate the classic rise-and-fall narrative of the Mexican boxer. Many have emphasized the negative feelings associated with this narrative. According to anthropologist Heather Levi, boxers symbolized "instability and the failure of social reproduction in the urban setting."⁶ Addressing the appeal of both the film and the life of Casanova to Mexicans, Carlos Monsiváis asked, "How is it possible for him, an ugly Mexican, a *peladito*, beat a *gringo*? Kid Terranova decides to lose because that is the destiny of the race that was born suffering."⁷ Mexican intellectual Sealtiel Alatríste called Casanova, "a bastion of the Mexican inferiority complex."⁸ Alatríste casts the career of Casanova and *Campeón sin corona* as a classic struggle between tradition and modernity. In this regard, Casanova epitomized Mexico's twentieth-century flirtation with First World greatness, only to fail in the end. Clearly, Casanova's life story, and that of many boxers, appealed to Mexicans because its exaggerated peaks and falls served as a reminder that many Mexicans faced uncertainty in a rapidly industrializing and urbanizing Mexico.

The tragic narrative of Casanova was not compelling based strictly on his failures, however. His story also allowed Mexican males to feel like they had some control over their own unstable lives. Here, Arjun Appadurai's analysis of cricket in India provides insight into the viewing experience for fans of sport. Appadurai argues, "the bodily pleasure that is at the core of the male viewing experience is simultaneously part of the

⁶ Levi, 189.

⁷ Carlos Monsiváis, *Los rituales del caos* (Mexico City: Ediciones Era, 1995), 28.

⁸ Sealtiel Alatríste, "El jamaicón y sus precursores," *Revista de la Universidad de México*, June 2006, 92.

erotics of nationhood... The erotic pleasure of watching... is the *pleasure of agency* in an imagined community that in many other arenas is violently contested.”⁹ Similarly, the unpolished but powerful Casanova provided Mexican boxing fans with feelings of belonging and control within the Mexican nation. Casanova’s appeal was similar to the appeal of Jack Dempsey to North American boxing fans in the 1920s. In his study of Dempsey and rival Gene Tunney, Elliot Gorn contrasts the disciplined Tunney, who “symbolized the glorious fulfillment of industrial culture” with the wild Dempsey, who “represented the secret impulse to smash through the restrictions imposed on men by bourgeois, bureaucratic society.”¹⁰ Thus, Casanova’s life served to remind Mexicans in the 1930s not only that they were not alone in their instability, but also that they could potentially break out of their condition. Unfortunately for Mexican boxing fans in the 1940s, there were not many moments to cheer Mexican boxers. Aside from Enrique Bolaños, who unsuccessfully fought three times for the world lightweight champion in 1948 and 1949 but who spent all of his time in Los Angeles, very few Mexican boxers achieved international attention.

Without many contemporary athletic achievements to include Mexican males into the nation, Mexican elites relied upon another unifying force: memory. In his study of memory and the Mexican Revolution, Thomas Benjamin argues that Mexicans have long struggled to create a sense of national solidarity and cohesion in their deeply divided country. Drawing on Ernest Renan and Benedict Anderson, Benjamin stresses the

⁹ Arjun Appadurai “Playing with Modernity: The Decolonization of Indian Cricket,” in *Consuming Modernity: Public Culture in a South Asian World*, ed. Carol A. Breckenridge (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995), 44-45.

¹⁰ Elliott Gorn, “The Manassa Mauler and the Fighting Marine: An Interpretation of the Dempsey Tunney Fights,” *Journal of American Studies* 19, 1 (1985): 44.

importance of “memory, myth, and history, organized remembering and deliberate forgetting” to creating Mexican national solidarity.¹¹ According to Irene O’Malley, mythologizing the revolution entailed the instilling of patriarchy by maintaining masculine images of revolutionary participants.¹² According to O’Malley, “it may be said that racist class oppression emasculated lower-class-men, who recovered their manhood during the revolution by assaulting the socioeconomic structures that had oppressed them.”¹³ Glorifying the masculinity of all revolutionary participants allowed lower class Mexican men, in theory, to achieve equal status with all men in a patriarchal post-revolutionary Mexico. Recalling the feats of Casanova and other boxers from the Golden Age, then, would not only allow Mexican men to feel like active members of the Mexican nation, but also to feel fully masculine and empowered.

This chapter analyzes the construction of the narrative of Mexican boxer at a time when Mexico needed contemporary sporting heroes to affirm its greatness but had none. In the 1930s, then, Chango Casanova gave many Mexicans the pleasure of feeling like they were active members of the imagined Mexican community. By the 1940s, however, Mexican boxing had tailed off, even as the nation was in the midst of an economic “miracle.” With few boxers who inspired Mexicans to feel the pleasure of being Mexican and a burgeoning mass media apparatus, films about previous Mexican boxing successes and failures began to fill the ranks. In addition, biographies about Casanova and his contemporaries multiplied in this era, as did articles about them in sports dailies, boxing

¹¹ Thomas Benjamin, *La Revolución: Mexico’s Great Revolution as Memory, Myth, and History* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2000), 14.

¹² Irene O’Malley, *The Myth of the Revolution: Hero Cults and the Institutionalization of the Mexican State, 1920-1940* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1986), 113.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 136.

magazines, and cultural magazines. With a dearth of world-class Mexican pugilists in the late 1940s and early 1950s, the Mexicans turned to the past to celebrate their present and future. To understand why Casanova's life story continued to strike a chord with Mexicans after his career had ended, this chapter probes three factors: the development of sport in Mexico, twentieth century urbanization in Mexico City and Los Angeles, and the relationship between masculinity and Mexican national identity.

SPORT AND NATIONAL IMAGERY IN POST-REVOLUTIONARY MEXICO

The advent of modern sports in Mexico dates back to the late nineteenth century and the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, but sporting activities in Mexico predate the Spanish conquest. The Mesoamerican ballgame created by the Maya around 1,000 BCE eventually spread throughout the Aztec Empire in the fifteenth century and became closely associated with ritualistic violence.¹⁴ In the first millennium A.D., indigenous elites in central Veracruz employed the ballgame to increase their followings and to legitimize their rule, a strategy directly linked to a fertility ceremony that often included decapitation as a form of human sacrifice.¹⁵ Ritualistic boxing was also prevalent in Mesoamerica, ranging from the Pre-Classic (Zapotecs in Oaxaca) to the Classic (in Teotihuacán and the Maya in Belize) to the Post-Classic eras (Maya in the Yucatan). The very bloody fights often ended in death and featured helmeted men dressed up like

¹⁴ Vernon Scarborough and David R. Wilcox, eds., *The Mesoamerican Ballgame* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1991).

¹⁵ Adrian Agüero and Annick Daneels, "Playing Ball - Competition as a Political Tool," in *Blood and Beauty: Organized Violence in the Art and Archaeology of Mesoamerican and Central America*, ed. Heather Orr and Rex Koontz (Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology Press, 2009), 117.

jaguars and were usually related to the coming of the rainy season. The fights also served an entertainment role, with spectators consuming alcoholic drinks while in attendance.¹⁶

Mexico's sporting culture in the twentieth century owed very little to this indigenous past. In Colonial New Spain and the early years of the Mexican republic, bull fighting and cockfighting served as popular spectator sports. By the late nineteenth century, modern sports, most of which came from Great Britain, gained popularity worldwide. Activities such as soccer, cricket, and cricket's American variation, baseball, were brought to Latin America through British and American expatriates and Latin American elites who had studied in the United Kingdom and the United States and had learned about these sports abroad.¹⁷ Allen Guttman differentiates these modern sporting activities such as baseball and soccer from traditional pastimes such as bullfighting and cockfighting through seven characteristics: "secularism, equality of opportunity to compete and in the conditions of competition, specialization of roles, rationalization, bureaucratic organization, quantification, the quest for records."¹⁸ Likewise, sociologist Pierre Bourdieu viewed modern sports as a break from previous physical activities. He stressed the rationalizing aspect of sports that ensures predictability and calculability and eliminates local peculiarities.¹⁹

¹⁶ Karl Taube and Marc Zender, "American Gladiators: Ritual Boxing in Ancient Mesoamerica," in *Blood and Beauty*, 162, 164-174, 209-210.

¹⁷ For an example of expatriate sporting activities in Mexico, see Michael Casteloe, "To Bowl Over a Mexico Maiden: Cricket in Mexico, 1827-1900," *Bulletin of Latin American Research* 26,1 (2007): 112-124. To better understand the role of elites in Cuba's incorporation of baseball into its national culture, see Louis A. Pérez, Jr., "Between Baseball and Bullfighting: The Quest for Nationality in Cuba, 1868-1898," *Journal of American History* 81, 2 (1994): 493-517.

¹⁸ Allen Guttman, *From Ritual to Record: The Nature of Modern Sports* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 15-16.

¹⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, "Sport and Social Class" *Social Science Information*, 17, 6 (1978): 821-824.

It should come as little surprise, then, that ‘modern’ sports arrived to Mexico during the rule of Porfirio Díaz at the end of the nineteenth century. The Porfiriato marked a time when Mexican elites sought to break from Mexico’s past and to create a modernized and rationalized Mexican society. As a result they imported several Western sporting activities, including baseball, horseracing, and boxing, to replace bullfighting and cockfighting. Porfirian elites believed that as their country became more Westernized and modernized, they should adopt the habits of the people they sought to emulate.²⁰ Sports like American football and boxing originally were promoted in Mexico as spectator sports, with American athletes performed before Mexican elites. Mexican elites participated directly in activities like bicycling, often as a means of showcasing their modern and Western tastes to Mexicans of lower social strata. Porfirian elites recognized that their society was rapidly changing and thus needed new hobbies that fit this new lifestyle, but they incorporated these activities in a manner that ultimately reinforced the societal status quo.

After the long and bloody revolution and civil war that last from 1910 to 1920, a new set of Mexican elites came to power. They maintained Porfirian elites’ enthusiasm for Western sports, but they viewed these activities as key to transforming Mexican society rather than for maintaining its societal power structures. According to historian Joseph Arbena, the post-Revolutionary Mexican government promoted sports in two ways. First, the government promoted sports in schools as a way to eradicate vices and other forms of unproductive behavior. Second, the post-Revolutionary government

²⁰ Beezley, 13-66.

looked to host international sporting events as a means to display Mexico's stability and thus attract foreign investment. This policy led to Mexico hosting the Central American Games of 1926 and 1954, and the Pan American Games of 1955.²¹ This second use of sport tied together two major developments that occurred in the 1920s: the employment of sport as public spectacle and as an expression of nationalism.

Sport became increasingly connected to spectacle and leisure in the 1920s, especially in the United States. According to Mark Dyreson, the combining of sport with leisure was a departure from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, when athletes were celebrated as instrumental in the construction of a liberal modern society.²² Mass media played a key role in this process. Newspapers and radio broadcasts kept Americans abreast of million-dollar prizefights, college football rivalries, the feats Babe Ruth on the baseball field, and the newly professionalized leisure activities of golf and tennis.²³ During the decade, sport moved away from the ideology of Progressives who had promoted it and became intertwined with the entertainment industry and more clearly associated with leisure culture and big business. The most emblematic figures of this change were Ruth and boxer Jack Dempsey, both of whom symbolized that social ascension meant the freedom to buy whatever one wanted. Sport did not lose all of its reformist meanings, however, as men like Ruth and Dempsey were still supposed to symbolize that hard work and perseverance had its rewards.²⁴

²¹ Arbena, "Sport, Development, and Mexican Nationalism," 359.

²² Mark Dyreson, "The Emergence of Consumer Culture and the Transformation of Physical Culture: American Sport in the 1920s," *Journal of Sport History* 16, 3 (1989): 261.

²³ *Ibid.* 261-262.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 275.

In Mexico, the association of sport with consumer consumption was not best symbolized with athletes like Dempsey and Ruth, but rather with the “modern girl” or *chica moderna*. An international phenomenon, the *chica moderna* provided a new archetype for Mexican women, with her short hair, short dresses, and athletic build. The new fashions emphasized the long limbs of athletic women, rather than the curves of the ideal Victorian female physique. Ageeth Sluis has penned this new female look, the “Art Deco” body. It changed ideas of beauty in the 1920s and 1930s, and started with onstage performers and movie actresses and worked its way to the masses.²⁵ This athletic new look for women corresponded with an increase of athletic activity among elite Mexican women. Joanne Hershfield contends that the consumerist aspect of the lifestyle resonated with other sectors of society, arguing, “While dress style did circumscribe modern life by confirming dominant notions of gender, sexuality, and class, modern fashion’s democratic nature provided a space in which women could cultivate practices of agency and self-determination in the context of their everyday personal and public lives.”²⁶ The new look sparked controversy, however, and in 1924 there were several attacks on shorthaired women around Mexico City.²⁷ In an era that celebrated indigeneity and *mestizaje*, those who appeared to have rejected Indianness were chastised for their supposed foreignness.²⁸

²⁵ Ageeth Sluis, “Bataclanismo! Or, How Female Deco Bodies Transformed Postrevolutionary Mexico City,” *The Americas* 56, 4 (2010): 471.

²⁶ Hershfield, 37.

²⁷ Anne Rubenstein, “The War on ‘Las Pelonas’: Modern Women and Their Enemies, Mexico City, 1924,” in *Sex in Revolution: Gender, Politics and Power in Modern Mexico*, ed. Jocelyn Olcott, Mary Kay Vaughn, and Gabriela Cano, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 57-80.

²⁸ Rick A. López, “The India Bonita Contest of 1921 and the Ethnicization of Mexican National Culture,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 82, 2 (2002): 291-328.

The 1920s were not just important for the increased associations between sport and commercialization, they were also key in for the development of the international sporting community. The International Olympic Committee (IOC) greatly expanded the number of women's sporting activities into the Olympic games, which resulted in the IOC eliminating the female-focused *Fédération Sportive Féminine Internationale* and establishing a masculinist ethos for female sporting activities.²⁹ It was not just women who participated in greater numbers in the 1920s. Latin American nations witnessed a boom in the number of national Olympics committees created during the decade, a process that would continue into the 1930s. In previous decades, Latin American athletes participated in the Olympics self-financed and out of individual determination. Starting in the 1920s, Latin American athletes increasingly belonged to national contingents that mirrored those sponsored by the United States and the nations of Europe.³⁰ Soon afterward, at least one Latin American nation stood out on the world stage, as fans witnessed the speed, skill, and dominance of the Uruguayan soccer team, which easily won the gold medal in the 1924 and 1928 Olympic games. Following the 1928 Olympics FIFA (*Fédération Internationale de Football Association*) accepted the idea of hosting an international soccer championship, or World Cup, every four years. The first World Cup took place in Uruguay in 1930, in which the host team claimed the championship.³¹

²⁹ Florence Carpentier and Jean-Pierre Lefèvre, "The Modern Olympic Movement, Women's Sport and the Social Order During the Inter-war Period," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 23, 7 (2006): 1112-1115.

³⁰ Carlos Torres, "The Latin American 'Olympic explosion' of the 1920s: Causes and Consequences," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 23, 7 (2006): 1089.

³¹ Laurent Dubois, *Soccer Empire: The World Cup and the Future of France* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2010), 28-29. This international success was indicative of the prominence of soccer in everyday life in South America during the 1920s. For more information on this process and its Chilean context, as well as an analysis of the role of soccer in working-class Chilean politics, see Brenda Elsey, *Citizens and Sportsmen: Fútbol and Politics in Twentieth-Century Chile* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2011).

Mexico fielded its first Olympic team in 1924. Its most accomplished athletes, however, were the Tarahumara Indians known for running races up to 100 kilometers, an event that did not exist in the Olympics. Indigenistas like painter and writer Dr. Atl believed that the Tarahumara runners represented a more noble and segment of Mexican society and were Mexico's best hope for winning an Olympic medal. Although no Tarahumara participated in the 1924 Olympics, they did participate in the Central American Sporting Games of 1926, with the race's winner establishing a new world record time for that distance. Mexican sporting authorities believed that the Tarahumara would help improve Mexico's image abroad and co-sponsored a 100-kilometer race in Austin, Texas in 1927. Again the Tarahumara runners easily defeated their competition, proving themselves as modern sportsmen capable of excellent athletic performances in various environments. Mexican sporting officials lobbied the IOC to include the 100-kilometer ultramarathon for men and the marathon for women in the 1928 Olympics, but the Committee refused. In fact, the Committee deemed women incapable of properly performing at any distance over a hundred meters for the 1928 Olympics. The Tarahumara quickly disappeared from the national and international spotlight, as their limited Spanish and lack of English deemed these ultra-marathoners too 'primitive' for modern mass media.³²

As the 1930s approached, the relationship between sport and nationalism cemented worldwide. Barbara Keys argues that the 1930s were the most important decade in the creation of the modern international sports system. According to Keys, "the

³² Dyreson, "The Foot Runners Conquer Mexico and Texas: Endurance Racing, *Indigenismo*, and Nationalism," *Journal of Sport History* 31, 1 (2004): 1-32.

1930s laid the foundation for the extraordinary flowering of international sport after World War II, when membership in the international sport community became a *sine qua non* of nationhood.”³³ She argues that the international sports system, in particular the Olympic movement, more effectively united the world’s nations than the international political system, as the Olympic movement enjoyed greater participation than the League of Nations. In addition, the Olympic Games of 1932 and 1936 marked a shift “from a European-based pageant for the elite to mass entertainment on a global scale.”³⁴ The United States wielded tremendous influence on the international sporting system in the 1930s, as its hosting of the 1932 Olympics in Los Angeles greatly expanded the connections of international sport with consumerism, mass media, and the entertainment industry.³⁵

The Mexican federal government also promoted sporting activities as a means of national development. Following the revolution, the government heavily invested in the building of stadiums. The 60,000 National Stadium, built in Mexico City with government funds in 1924. It became the site of mass spectacles such as sporting events and presidential inaugurations until torn down in 1950.³⁶ The government also promoted physical education. In overwhelmingly rural states like Chiapas, physical education, particularly the instruction of team sports, played an important role in schooling. In the 1930s, government pedagogical magazines, such as *El Maestro Rural*, provided rural

³³ Barbara Keys, *Globalizing Sport: National Rivalry and International Community in the 1930s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2006), 187.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 2.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 92.

³⁶ Ruben Gallo, *Mexican Modernity: The Avant-Garde and the Technological Revolution* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2005), 201-209. For an geographical analysis of soccer stadiums in South America, see Christopher Thomas Gaffney, *Temples of the Earthbound Gods: Stadiums in the Cultural Landscapes of Rio de Janeiro and Buenos Aires* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2008).

teachers with in-depth instructions on how to implement sporting activities in their schools. These articles also supplied teachers with court/field dimensions and with an advance set of rules so that teachers unfamiliar with sports like baseball and basketball could direct these endeavors. Within the framework of socialist education, sports were not only vice-eradicating pursuits, but also team-building activities that taught students how to function properly within a group setting.³⁷

Sport did not just benefit the national government and consumerism; it also impacted local communities. In her study of patriotic festivals in a rural town in Puebla, Mary Kay Vaughan argues that the introduction of team sports like baseball and basketball reinvigorated these festivals and broadened their appeal. According to Vaughan, “Few schools... had flourishing gardens, chicken coops, or beehives, but all had sports fields and a Mexican flag.”³⁸ Sports proved vital to village life in Mexico because they attracted male youth and allowed them to vent their aggressiveness in a socially controlled manner during a peak time of political violence and criminality. It was the entertainment aspect of sports that cemented their status in patriotic festivals. It allowed young men to display their skill and strength in front of the town, most importantly to single young women. Over time, sports replaced music as the chief entertainment for secular festivals, as athletes were cheaper to hire than musicians. The competitive nature of sport spectacle led to intercommunal rivalries, where even towns that had difficulties attracting students to school could amass a basketball or baseball

³⁷ Lisbona Guillén, 60-106.

³⁸ Mary Kay Vaughan, “The Construction of the Patriotic Festival in Tecamachalco, Puebla, 1900-1946,” in *Rituals of Rule, Rituals of Resistance: Public Celebrations and Popular Culture in Mexico*, ed. William H. Beezley, Cheryl English Martin, William E. French (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1994): 224.

team to compete against a nearby town. Eventually, politicians from the capital city of Puebla realized the power of sport in legitimizing a heavily contested post-Revolutionary state. Vaughan argues, “Through team sports, athletes articulated new values of individualism, mobility, youth, and change inimical to traditional peasant society.”³⁹ Vaughan also contends that athletic events in the 1930s positioned men “as actor hero” and women “as supportive spectator,” an observation that also rang true for boxing. For Vaughan, other events showcased women’s agency in patriotic festivals, such as dancing, singing, and craftwork. Thus, sports formed an important, spectacular component of post-revolutionary culture, but they did not fully encapsulate the contributions of all Mexicans to the formation of this culture. Sports like baseball and basketball merely highlighted the masculine contributions to this formation. Boxing, then, provided an even more extreme case to study the masculine components of Mexican culture than either of those two sports, especially once women were banned from participating in the sport (at least in Mexico City) in 1947.

The 1920s and 1930s were also formative years for professional sports in Mexico, most notably for baseball. 1925 saw the founding the first professional Mexican baseball league. By the early 1930s, it began to attract players from the Caribbean (primarily Cuba) and even some African-Americans who had played in the Negro Leagues. Throughout the 1930s and 1940s, the Mexican League included among its players U.S. Hall-of-Famers Josh Gibson, Martín Dihigo, “Cool Papa” Bell, and Satchel Paige. This accumulation of talent caused consternation for owners of Negro League teams but not

³⁹ Ibid., 225.

for owners of segregated Major League Baseball teams, whose salaries easily outpaced those of the Mexican League.⁴⁰ This sentiment changed in 1946, when Jorge Pasquel, at this point the most powerful owner in the Mexican League signed Major League Baseball players to his roster. A cousin of President Miguel Alemán, Pasquel attempted to sign star players like Stan Musial or Ted Williams, but instead settled for players like Buck Owen. Pasquel's limited success in signing alarmed U.S. baseball authorities, who launched a nationalist propaganda campaign against the Mexican who dared to challenge U.S. baseball hegemony. The experiment with Major League Baseball players proved detrimental for Pasquel. Major League Baseball players commanded exorbitant salaries (in Mexican terms), which made it difficult for the Mexican League to stay financially afloat. In 1948, the league failed to finish its season, due to lack of funds. The league restructured the following year with a more reasonable economic model. Pasquel left the league for good in 1953 and by 1955 the Mexican League had allied itself with Major League Baseball, gaining official recognition as a AAA level league (the highest level of minor-league baseball).⁴¹ Pasquel's experiment, however, reflected the new ambition of Mexican elites in the post-war period.

The internationalization of Mexican sport intensified in the 1950s. In the 1950-1954, the National Automobile Association of Mexico, with governmental help at the local, state, and national levels, hosted the Pan-American Road Race, which extended from Ciudad Juárez near Texas to the Guatemala border. Hundreds of drivers from

⁴⁰ G. Richard McKelvey, *Mexican Raiders in the Major Leagues: The Pasquel Brothers vs. Organized Baseball, 1946* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc., 2006), 41-55.

⁴¹ Lou Hernández, *The Rise of the Latin American Baseball Leagues, 1947-1961: Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Puerto Rico and Venezuela* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Company, Inc, 2011)., 3-47.

Europe and the Western Hemisphere entered the race each year until it was banned by presidential decree in 1954. The new highways and modern cars were supposed to announce the modern Mexico to the world, but frequent and deadly car wrecks undermined the discourses of progress and modernity that the race was supposed to reinforce.⁴² Thus, in both baseball and racing Mexican elites had attempted to attract foreign athletes in order to announce Mexico's importance in the world. In this vein of thought, it becomes clearer why recalling the Golden Age of boxing, which featured several foreign boxers and many Mexican victories over them, gained greater importance in the years of the Miracle.

The Global History of Boxing up to the 1940s

Pugilism dates back to the ancient Greeks and was a popular activity in medieval Venice, but the modern sport of boxing traces its roots most directly to eighteenth-century England. There prizefights attracted an eclectic mix of rich and poor, both of which sought to escape the discipline of capitalist and evangelical modes of living that stressed labor specialization and self-control. In essence, boxing allowed both the gentry and the working-class to rebel against middle-class reforms. One of the attractions of prizefighting was the equality within the ring, which allowed Irishmen, blacks, and Jews the chance to compete with an Englishman on equal ground. In the early 1800s, pugilism declined in popularity, as the sport fell victim to the wave of middle-class, evangelical reform that forced the sport underground.⁴³

⁴² J. Brian Freeman, " 'La carrera de la muerte': Death, Driving, and Rituals of Modernization in 1950s Mexico," *Studies in Latin American Popular Culture*, 29 (2011): 2-3.

⁴³ Gorn, *The Manly Art*, 19-33.

At the time that professional prizefighting was declining in popularity in Great Britain, the sport was gaining in popularity in the newly industrialized United States. Both Irish immigrants and English immigrants became avid fans of pugilism, much to the horror of American elites. Despite the sport's popularity, it remained illegal in most states throughout the nineteenth century. Most of the early prizefighters in the United States came directly from England and Ireland, prompting Elliot Gorn to observe, "*boxing* did not immigrate, *boxers* did."⁴⁴ As Irish immigration to U.S. cities continued and English immigration slowed down, Irish and Irish-American boxers came to dominate pugilism in the United States. The crowd often consisted of middle-class and working-class men whose families had been in the United States for several generations, but the participants continued to be the sons of immigrants or immigrants themselves. Thus, by the mid nineteenth century, Irish-American boxers like James Morrissey, who would eventually become a powerful state legislator in New York, and Yankee Sullivan escalated the social ladder through their pugilistic abilities.⁴⁵

Another son of Irish immigrants who rose to prominence through prizefighting was the last bareknuckle heavyweight champion, John L. Sullivan. Sullivan claimed he could "lick any son-of-a-bitch alive," but avoided fighting any African-American opponents based solely on racist principles. Sullivan toured the United States throughout the 1880s, challenging opponents to what were normally clandestine bouts that prizefighting fans somehow knew of but authorities did not. When Sullivan lost to Gentleman Jim Corbett in 1892 under the Marquis of Queensbury rules (as opposed to

⁴⁴ Ibid., 46..

⁴⁵ Ibid., 69-128.

the London Prize Ring rules that Sullivan normally fought under), an important shift occurred, as prizefighting became converted into the modern sport of boxing. According to Gorn, the Queensbury reforms did not make the sport of pugilism safer (as was its stated intent), but actually made the sport more palatable for modern mass spectacle.⁴⁶

The dominance of white boxers (due to the large-scale exclusion of other ethnicities and races) in both the United States and Great Britain fed into beliefs of a Social Darwinism that casted Anglo-Saxon masculinity in a more favorable light than other masculinities. African-American Jack Johnson's victory over Tommy Burns in 1908 made him the first non-white world heavyweight championship and proved that boxing could also undermine the very racial myths that were often purported to uphold.⁴⁷ As heavyweight champion, Johnson traveled throughout the world. He fascinated French observers, who often viewed him through an anthropological gaze, and frightened British authorities, who banned interracial boxing matches in response to Johnson's visit.⁴⁸ Facing trumped up charges of white slave trafficking in 1913, Johnson fled the United States for seven years and spent significant time in Argentina, Cuba, and Mexico, created a large celebrity spectacle wherever he went. Johnson was especially popular in Cuba, where he lost his heavyweight championship to Jess Willard in 1915, but he did very little to increase the sport's popularity in Latin America.⁴⁹ In all three cases, boxing was in the

⁴⁶ Ibid., 207-247.

⁴⁷ Theresa Runstedtler, "White Anglo-Saxon Hopes and Black Americans' Atlantic Dreams: Jack Johnson and the British Boxing Colour Bar," *Journal of World History* 21, 4 (2010): 661-662.

⁴⁸ Runstedtler, "Visible Men: African American Boxers, the New Negro, and the Global Color Line," *Radical History Review*, 103 (2009): 59-81. Runstedtler, "White Anglo-Saxon Hopes and Black Americans' Atlantic Dreams."

⁴⁹ Runstedtler, "Journeyman: Race, Boxing and the Transnational World of Jack Johnson" (PhD Thesis, Yale University): 2007, 358-426. Richard V. McGehee, "The Dandy and the Mauler in Mexico: Johnson, Dempsey, *et al.*, and the Mexico City Press, 1919-1927," *Journal of Sport History* 23, 1 (1996): 20-33.

process of developing a broad base of support that would allow each nation to develop its own culture. Anju Reejhsinghani calls the Johnson-Willard bout “more anomaly than foundational moment for boxing in Cuba.”⁵⁰ Johnson may not have played a role in the development of boxing in Latin America, but his popularity in the region revealed how, by the 1910s, boxing had moved beyond merely justifying myths of Anglo-Saxon superiority and began to develop an international following.

In the 1920s, Jack Dempsey became the main attraction in the business of boxing in the United States. His victory over Argentine Luis Firpo in 1923 earned “The Manassa Mauler” fame throughout Latin America. In 1925, he visited Mexico City, where his exhibitions attracted larger audiences than any other sporting event at the time, quite possibly making Dempsey the most popular athlete in the Mexican capital.⁵¹ Dempsey, however, garnered more fame in the United States for his fights with Gene Tunney, an ex-marine whose disciplined style in and out of the ring contrasted greatly with Dempsey’s wild antics in and out of the ring. Gorn argues that both fighters represented different aspects of advanced capitalist society. Tunney represented the self-discipline and diligence needed to work in industrialized society while Dempsey embodied the “self-gratification and self-indulgence” needed to increase consumer demand for mass produced goods.⁵²

The 1930s and 1940s saw the rise of African-American boxer Joe Louis. In contrast to Jack Johnson, who married a white woman and publicly flaunted convention, Louis maintained a very conservative public persona, earning the backhanded

⁵⁰ Reejhsinghani, 73.

⁵¹ McGehee, “The Dandy and the Mauler,” 32-33.

⁵² Gorn, “The Manassa Mauler and the Fighting Marine,” 44.

complement that he was ‘a credit to his race.’ The rise of German heavyweight Max Schmeling and the promotion of sports by Nazi Germany provided Louis not only with an opponent but also with an opportunity to rise from race hero to national hero. In their original encounter in 1936, Schmeling surprisingly defeated Louis. Hitler rejoiced and German sporting fans saw the victory as “part of the rescue of German pride and manhood, and the triumph of the master race” in the wake of the “defeat of German manhood in World War I.”⁵³ Louis’ loss met with a dramatic reaction from the African-American community, who had seen the pugilist as a race ambassador. The majority of white North Americans, in contrast, washed their hands of Louis and relied upon racist ideas to explain his surprising loss. Two years later, however, white public opinion shifted, and most North Americans decided to support nationalist sentiment over racist sentiment. After Louis’ crushing defeat of Schmeling, the Nazi government downplayed the political ramifications of the fight and, instead, emphasized the sporting nature of boxing. Victory was for the nation, loss for the individual.

Boxing reached a new level of popularity in Latin America in the 1920s. Luis Firpo’s loss to Jack Dempsey marked merely the beginning of the eventual rise of Latin American boxers in the professional ranks. In Nicaragua, the sport gained popularity in the late 1910s, with future dictator Anastasio Somoza García serving as one of the sport’s major proponents. José Santos Ramírez, the top boxing promoter in Nicaragua in the 1910s and 1920s even tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to promote matches featuring women.⁵⁴ The most successful Latin American boxer of the 1920s, however, came from

⁵³ Ibid., 96.

⁵⁴ McGehee, “Sport in Nicaragua, 1889-1926,” in *Sport in Latin America and the Caribbean*, 192-194.

Cuba. Afro-Cuban Kid Chocolate dazzled New York City audiences in the late 1920s before reigning as world junior lightweight champion from 1931 to 1933. His victories were cause for celebration among his Cuban fans, who at times portrayed him as a national hero, cultural ambassador, or symbol of Cuba's greatness, roles that Chocolate often embraced.⁵⁵ Despite his technical superiority in the ring, Chocolate did not exercise much discipline outside of it. Like Dempsey and Chango Casanova, He enjoyed alcohol, women, and nocturnal entertainment and remained unapologetic about it well after his career had ended.⁵⁶ Thus, Casanova's rise to national fame was not merely an isolated affair in Mexico, but rather part of a larger change in the demographics of the sport.

The 1890s not only marked the shift to Marquis Queensbury rules, they also marked boxing's arrival in Mexico. The first exhibitions featured North American boxers performing to entertain Mexican elites. They would continue to headline many boxing bills in Mexico City and throughout Mexico until the mid 1930s. The migration of North American boxers, thus, echoed Gorn's contention that boxers, not boxing, immigrated. The sport would initially become popular among elites but eventually diffused to the working-class. It was during the Mexican Revolution that boxing gyms began to crop up in working-class neighborhoods of Mexico City. The three most successful Mexican boxing trainers of the mid twentieth century, Arturo "Cuyo" Hernández, Pancho Rosales, and Lupe Sánchez, all started their careers in the early 1920s. Hernández and Rosales grew up as childhood friends in the Guerrero *colonia*, which was the center of Mexico

⁵⁵ Casimir, 152-156.

⁵⁶ Reejhsinghani, 160.

City's boxing community in the 1920s and 1930s before Tepito reigned supreme. At the time, Guerrero was a center for rural migrants who came to Mexico City looking for factory work. Rosales' father came from the small city of Cuernavaca, while Hernández moved to Colonia Guerrero from a small town in the state of Jalisco at the age of eight.⁵⁷

Boxing for working-class Mexicans was very informal in the late 1910s.

Sometimes, bouts took place in the street or in a series of very small arenas.⁵⁸ Boxing matches involving residents of Mexico City took place in much smaller venues than those involving foreign nationals. By the 1920s, major boxing matches were held at the Frontón Nacional, a court that hosted an array of sporting events, including *jai alai* and professional wrestling. In 1923, the Federal District formed a boxing commission. U.S. boxing magazine *The Ring* commented that the boxing commission had "done wonders towards building up the game and placing the sport on a higher plane," as U.S. boxers were "confident of coming to Mexico and getting a fair deal."⁵⁹ 1923 was also the year of the Jack Dempsey-Luis Firpo fight that proved instrumental in the popularization of radio.⁶⁰ Throughout the decade, most of the Mexican champions were North Americans of white, black, or Mexican extraction. It was these Mexican-American boxers, usually from Texas, who became the first Mexican boxing idols. With their white and African-American counterparts, they traveled a circuit that included the state of Texas (at the time

⁵⁷ "EL CUYO, TORMENTA EN EL BOX: EL BARRIO BRAVO DE GUERRERO," *Ring Mundial*, 21 February 1965, 26. Jorge Monroy, "Los managers que forjaron el boxeo en México: 'Todo empezó en aquella casa redonda': Cuyo Hernández," *Uno Más Uno*, 26 June 1985, 29. Monroy, "Los managers que forjaron el boxeo en México: Lupe Sánchez: 'El boxeo nunca se estanca,'" *Uno Más Uno*, 6 July 1985, 29. Monroy, "Los managers que forjaron el boxeo en México: Rosales: 'En esto no hay romanticismo; es un negocio,'" *Uno Más Uno*, 10 July 1985, 29.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ V. Paul Hopwood, "Mexico Boxing Notes," *The Ring*, February 1925, 35.

⁶⁰ Marvin Alisky, "Early Mexican Broadcasting," *Hispanic American Historical Review* 34, 4 (1954): 519.

the state with the largest Mexican population), northern Mexico and Mexico City. Thus from the beginning Mexican professional boxing was a transnational activity encompassing ethnic Mexicans on both sides of the Rio Grande.

In the 1920s, Mexican participation in boxing was still a cross-class phenomenon, practiced by poor urban youth and more affluent members of society, such as educational minister José Vasconcelos and future presidents Adolfo López Mateos and José López Portillo.⁶¹ By the early 1930s, however, the middle and upper classes stopped boxing, and the sport became the refuge for the lower classes. Many promoters of boxing noted that the sport could provide a positive outlet for urban poor male youth, as the sport could help them redirect their restless energies and distract from them from the vices that infiltrated Mexico City's poorer neighborhoods. Ideally, it would bring equality to a highly unequal Mexican society. After observing a school's physical education program that featured boxing lessons, sportswriter Fray Nano declared, "if socialism brings equality to humans, then sport is profoundly socialist."⁶²

By the late 1920s, Mexico started producing boxers of note, but the sport continued to be transnational in nature. Fighters such as Baby Arizmendi, Kid Azteca, and Casanova, became renowned for their fistic talents in Mexico City, Texas, and California. Their achievements drew the attention of Mexican-American promoter Jimmy Fitten, who had been active in the Mexico City boxing scene since he started fighting there in the early 1920s. Starting in 1930, most of Fitten's promotions took place

⁶¹ "ADOLFO LOPEZ MATEOS, BOXEADOR DEL CLUB DEPORTIVO INTERNACIONAL," *ESTO*, 7 September 1963, 5(A). Jorge Monroy, "Los managers que foraron el boxeo en México: Un nocaut ante López Mateos, Gómez Huerta, Vasconcelos..." *Uno Más Uno*, 11 July 1985, 29.

⁶² "Comentarios de Fray Nano: Los Grandes Deportistas No Nacen... Se Hacen," *La Afición*, 12 February 1963 [Originally printed 13 November 1934], 2.

at the Frontón Nacional, which closed briefly in 1932 to be remodeled and subsequently renamed the Arena Nacional, an indoor venue dedicated solely to boxing and professional wrestling.⁶³ Under Fitten's direction a "Golden Age" of Mexican boxing would ensue. From 1933 to 1936, the Arena Nacional hosted numerous boxing matches that often pitted Mexican nationals against North Americans. In essence, this was a golden age for Mexico City boxing fans, who had the opportunity see the best their nation had to offer versus some of the world's top pugilistic talent. Several matches drew capacity crowds of 30,000 people. The boom in Mexico City boxing began to wane toward the end of 1936 and the Golden Age officially died when the Arena Nacional burnt down, under suspicious circumstances, in February of 1937.

After the burning of the Arena Nacional, most boxing matches took place at Arena México, a 14,000-seat arena in Colonia Doctores that opened in 1933 and the smaller Arena Coliseo, which opened in 1943. Major boxing matches took place in bullfighting rings, specifically the Toreo in the Condesa neighborhood. Mexicans from all classes came to the Toreo de Condesa, which promptly sorted them by class in the seating, with the upper class men and women seated closest to the ring and the people at the lowest rungs of society seated farthest away. Advertisements adorned the interior of the Toreo, with announcements for Cadillac and assorted whiskeys aimed at the wealthier patrons [Figure 1]. Later, the Toreo would move to the suburb of Naucalpán in 1947 and was renamed El Toreo de Cuatro Caminos. By the late 1930s, boxing matches had ceased to be glamorous affairs, and most matches in Mexico City tended to draw spectators from

⁶³ "Comentarios de Fray Nano: LA ARENA 'MEXICO,'" *La Afición*, 11 February 1937, 3.

the middle and lower classes. With the onset of World War II, the U.S. experienced a shortage of boxers, but not of boxing fans. This changed the pattern of migration from U.S. boxers coming down to Mexico City to box, to Mexico City boxers spending most of their time abroad, or as many Mexican journalists described it, going *bracero*.⁶⁴ With the end of the war, the hope that Mexican boxers would box more frequently in Mexico City faded away as quickly as the white American population suburbanized.⁶⁵

Unfortunately, for Mexican fans of live boxing, the post-war era saw an increase in Mexicans fighting in the United States, attracted by higher wages and by the chance to become world famous.

The Golden Age, however, continued to live in the imagination of many Mexican boxing fans. Of all Mexican boxers from that era, the memory of Chango Casanova remained the strongest. Most Mexican observers considered and continue consider Casanova the best boxer from that era, a man who regularly defeated all of his Mexican rivals except for Joe Conde. Casanova, however, disliked boxing abroad and performed significantly worse in foreign cities than he did in Mexico, as did his contemporary Luis Villanueva, more famously known as Kid Azteca. Azteca remained a popular figure in Mexican boxing lore because he remained Mexican welterweight (147 lbs.) champion from 1933 until he abdicated in 1949, but Azteca hated fighting abroad more than the

⁶⁴ The bracero program was an agreement between the United States and Mexico that allowed Mexican agricultural workers to work in the United States. The need for the program arose from the labor shortage caused by World War II. It lasted from 1942 to 1964.

⁶⁵ In March of 1946, writers for *Ring Mundial* expressed hope that Mexican and North American boxers would return to fight in Mexico: "With termination of the war, and the return of many fighters from the battle fields, the promoters of the United States are improving their programs, and the reliability of the Arena Coliseo's promoters will allow [foreigner] to come [to Mexico]." "Decimos," *Ring Mundial*, 9 March 1946, 3.

Chango. Years later, Pancho Rosales surmised that it was Azteca's wife who hated the idea of living abroad for a significant period of time.⁶⁶



Figure 1. Boxing Match at the Toreo de Condesa, 1930s. AGN, Enrique Díaz Collection, Tema, boxeadores, Caja, 50-6.

Mexican success in professional boxing, then, did not stem directly from specific government policies. Mexican politicians may have capitalized on the success of Mexican boxers, but they did not support them outright. Instead, an increasingly urbanized Mexican society provided the nation with many young, urban, and poor men, the same constituency that became boxers in the United States and England. Most Mexican cities grew exponentially throughout the twentieth century, but Mexico City produced the vast majority of Mexican boxers and the Federal District Boxing

⁶⁶ Jorge Monroy, "Los managers que forjaron el boxeo en México: 'Kid Azteca' pudo ser campeón mundial... pero no quiso" *Uno más uno*, 14 July 1985, 29.

Commission wielded influence nationwide. The other city that proved pivotal in establishing Mexico's reputation as a center of boxing activity was Los Angeles. The southern California metropolis served as a stage from which the world watched Mexican pugilists. Mexico City and Los Angeles shared similar trajectories because of the staggering growth from the late nineteenth to the late twentieth centuries and for the importance of both cities to Mexican national culture.

Urbanization: Mexico and Los Angeles

Mexico City's rapid growth had a major impact on the development of Mexican sport. Mexico was far from alone in this regard. Steven Riess argues that, for the United States, "The evolution of the city, more than any other single factor, influenced the development of organized sport and recreational athletic pastimes."⁶⁷ Citing the work of Stephen Hardy and Roy Rozenzweig, Dyreson contends that both middle-class Progressives and working-class groups in the United States saw "sport as a technology for ordering communities confronted with the dislocations fostered by industrialism and urbanization."⁶⁸ Not only did cities offer more participants and spectators, they also provided more facilities to engage in sporting activities. While the middle and upper classes had more access to green spaces and clean water and could, thus, participate in sporting activities like baseball, the working classes drifted to sports like boxing because boxing gymnasiums could be constructed easily in confined spaces.

The story of Mexican boxing revolves chiefly around the cities of Mexico City and Los Angeles. Over the course of the twentieth century, Mexico City produced the

⁶⁷ Steven A. Riess, *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989): 1.

⁶⁸ Dyreson, "The Emergence of Consumer Culture and the Transformation of Physical Culture," 265.

vast majority of Mexico's national champions and world titlists. Even boxers who started their careers in other cities, such as Guadalajara, eventually moved to Mexico City to work with Mexico's best trainers, such as Pancho Rosales and Arturo "Cuyo" Hernández. The only exceptions to this rule were boxers from the northern frontier of Mexico, who regularly traveled between northern Mexican cities such as Ciudad Juárez and Tijuana and southwestern U.S. cities such as Los Angeles and San Antonio. Within Mexico, Mexico City stood out as the destination city for those considering a career in boxing. In fact, moving to the nation's capital was often the first piece of advice that boxing magazines gave to young men who inquired on how to best start a career in the sport. Aside from housing Mexico's best gymnasiums, Mexico City was home to many young male rural migrants who, along with their marginalized children, would form the basis for the city's boxing talent pool.

The exponential urban growth of Mexico and Mexico City can be traced to the construction of the railroad that connected the Mexican capital to the eastern port city of Veracruz, a process that started in 1873. Under the dictatorship of Porfirio Díaz, Mexico City rapidly expanded and modernized, helped by the arrival of electric energy in 1879.⁶⁹ Government policies evicted peasants from their land in favor of railroad companies and large landowners. As a result, many of these rural migrants headed to Mexico City in search of work. As the same time, Porfirian elites were determined to modernize Mexico City along the lines of European cities, especially Paris. Observers who visited the city in both the 1880s and the 1900s remarked on the drastic changes the city underwent.

⁶⁹ Gustavo Garza Villareal, *La urbanización de México en el siglo XX* (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2002): 23.

City planners had widened and paved the streets, constructed new building and monuments, and introduced electric tramways to the Mexican capital. Historian John Lears highlights three important changes in Mexico City in the Porfiriato: the middle and elite classes left the downtown area to live in residential neighborhoods on the city's western edge, the colonial center of the city gradually became more committed to business and banking, and increasing rents and demolitions forced the working classes and urban poor to the tenements on the fringes of the center or to poorer neighborhoods in the southern and eastern peripheries of the city.⁷⁰

Through Porfirian metamorphosis, revolutionary disruption, and 'miraculous' industrial development, Mexico City continued to expand. The population, which stood at 542,000 in 1900, grew to over fifteen million in 1990.⁷¹ The population in Mexico City and throughout Mexico expanded most dramatically between 1930 and 1970. Following the global economic depression of 1929, the Mexican government enacted economic measures (mainly duties on imports) that protected Mexican industries and the jobs associated with them. Three cities benefited greatly from these policies: Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey. The ensuing economic growth and the government spending that accompanied led to the considerable increase in population. The population growth rate, 1.72% in 1930, shot up to 3.28% by 1960, which also was the

⁷⁰ John Lears, *Workers, Neighbors, and Citizens: The Revolution in Mexico City* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001), 16-17.

⁷¹ Diane E. Davis, *Urban Leviathan: Mexico City in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994), 329.

first year that census figures revealed that most Mexicans lived in municipalities of 2,500 or more people.⁷²

A key shift in Mexican demographics occurred under the presidency of Manuel Avila Camacho (1940-1946). Whereas his predecessor Lázaro Cárdenas balanced rural needs with industrial promotion, Avila Camacho focused his attention entirely on industrial growth. In an attempt to appease the middle class of Mexico City, Avila Camacho promoted “industrial-led urbanization” and concentrated his efforts on building up Mexico City’s industrial sector.⁷³ This had a dramatic effect on Mexico’s urban demographics. Between 1940 and 1970, the number of Mexican living in cities with at least 15,000 people more than quintupled. The number of urban areas increased from fifty-five to 178. The most dramatic effect was in Mexico City. In 1940, eight percent of all Mexicans lived in the national capital. By 1970, that number had increased to sixteen percent.⁷⁴ Until the presidency of Luis Echeverría (1970-1976), this increase in the urban (and overall) population was viewed by Mexican elites as a positive development, and they believed that urbanized Mexicans would better contribute to Mexican national development than backwards, rural Mexicans. The negative depictions of rural Mexicans continues to this day, as evidenced by a recent CODEME (Confederación Deportiva Mexicana – Mexican Sporting Confederation) publication that characterized the 1930s as a time when “illiteracy and the absolute predominance of the rural world, that represented

⁷² Luis Aboites Aguilar, “El último tramo, 1929-2000,” in *Nueva historia mínima de México*, ed. Pablo Escalante Gonzalbo, Bernardo García Martínez, Luis Jáuregui, Josefina Zoraida Vázquez, Elisa Speckman Guerra, Javier Garciadiego, and Luis Aboites Aguilar, (Mexico City: El Colegio de México, 2004), 263-275.

⁷³ Davis, “The Social Construction of Mexico City: Political Conflict and Urban Development, 1950-1966,” *Journal of Urban History*, 24 (1998): 378-380.

⁷⁴ Soledad Loaeza, “La construcción de un país moderno, 1945-2000,” in *Arma la Historia: La nación a través de dos siglos*, ed. Enrique Florescano (Mexico City: Grijablo, 2009): 215-216.

sixty percent of the population in the entire Republic, were the principal obstacles in achieving modernity.”⁷⁵

The economic problems of the 1970s coincided with the decline of Mexico City’s centrality to Mexican national culture. According to Claudio Lomnitz, Mexico City served as the national center of power and modernity in the years following the Revolution and leading up until the 1970s.⁷⁶ As the center of Mexican modernity, Mexico City monopolized political and cultural control in the country. It was the undisputed cinema center of the nation, producing a “Golden Age” in the 1940s. From the 1930s to 1950s, Mexican cinema performed an educational function: it taught rural migrant Mexicans how to survive and properly function in their new urban environments. Actors such as Pedro Infante, David Silva (the star of *Campeón sin corona*), and Cantinflas helped Mexicans better comprehend the rapidly changing and confusing world of Mexico City.⁷⁷ Films such as *Nosotros los pobres* (1947) and *Los olvidados* (1950) warned of the dangers inherent in the poorer neighborhoods of Mexico City, such as Tepito, which also was known as one of the city’s best sources of boxing talent.

As the centrality of Mexico City to Mexican national culture dissipated, regional cities and even Los Angeles became increasingly important cogs in the machine of cultural production. This change was also reflected in Mexican boxing. After the death of Salvador Sánchez in 1982, most world-class Mexican boxers came from provincial

⁷⁵ Armando Satow, *Décadas: Confederación Deportiva Mexicana A.C.*, [Mexico City: Confederación Deportiva Mexicana A.C., [n.d.] 44.

⁷⁶ Claudio Lomnitz, *Deep Mexico, Silent Mexico: An Anthropology of Nationalism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), 115.

⁷⁷ Serge Gruzinski, *La ciudad de México: Una historia* (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2004): 494-495.

cities. Mexico City ceased to be the center of Mexican pugilistic activity, which it had been since the sport's introduction to Mexico. In addition, Los Angeles' Mexican population continued to grow. By 2000, the Mexican population of Los Angeles County was three million, making it the fourth largest Mexican population after the Mexico cities Mexico City, Guadalajara, and Monterrey.⁷⁸ By the end of the twentieth century, Carlos Monsiváis argued that Mexico City was no longer seen as the "Mecca" of Mexican modernity. Instead, he contended, "Los Angeles is the promise of modernity, being in tune with the changes at the end of the century."⁷⁹ Thus, Mexico City and Los Angeles had a dynamic and slightly competitive relationship in creating and shaping Mexican national culture in relation to boxing and other activities.

Like Mexico City, Los Angeles was affected by the societal changes wrought by railroad construction and Porfirian economic reforms. The construction of the Southern Pacific and the Santa Fe railroad lines in 1875 and 1885, respectively, transformed Los Angeles from a small Mexican settlement in 1848 into a burgeoning U.S. city at the turn of the century.⁸⁰ The Anglo Americans who soon formed the powerful and elite class of Los Angeles attempted to erase the city's Mexican past and present. They successfully marginalized the remaining Mexican *californios* who had lived in Los Angeles before the U.S.-Mexico War.⁸¹ The 1890s marked the first wave of Mexican immigration to Los

⁷⁸ Betsy Guzman, "The Hispanic Population 2000: Census 2000 Brief," *U.S. Census Bureau*, May 2001, 5. Secretaría de Desarrollo Social, Consejo Nacional de Población, and Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática, *Delimitación de las zonas metropolitanas de México* (Mexico: Secretaría de Desarrollo Social, Consejo Nacional de Población, and Instituto Nacional de Estadística, Geografía e Informática, 2004), 97-98.

⁷⁹ David Thelen, "Mexico's Cultural Landscapes: A Conversation with Carlos Monsiváis," *Journal of American History* 86, 2 (1999): 618.

⁸⁰ Greg Hise, "Industry, Political Alliances, and the Regulation of Urban Space in Los Angeles," *Urban History* 36, 3 (2009): 475

⁸¹ William Deverall, *Whitewashed Adobe: The Rise of Los Angeles and the Remaking of its Mexican Past* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

Angeles, as displaced rural Mexicans moved to cities in California and the southwestern United States in search of employment. This wave continued until the early 1930s, when the U.S. government forced Mexicans throughout the United States to repatriate to Mexico. In addition to U.S. governmental policy, the Great Depression discouraged Mexicans seeking employment from immigrating to Los Angeles.⁸²

During the first wave of immigration, Los Angeles' Mexican residents were subject to intense discrimination. White Angelinos did not consider them full citizens and Mexicans were victims of harsh treatment in the legal and labor realms. Mexican children were often denied educational opportunities and those who chose to pursue higher education were often diverted into vocational classes.⁸³ Tensions grew between ethnic Mexicans and whites. In the 1920s, the Los Angeles police department began to promote the link between race and crime. Throughout the 1930s and early 1940s the relationship between the police department and Los Angeles' Mexican residents continued to grow more antagonistic until the outbreak of the Zoot Suit Riots in 1943. These clashes between white marines and navy men and Mexican youth gangs sparked a series of reforms that, at least at superficial level, ended outright police discrimination against Los Angeles *Chicanos*.⁸⁴ According to historian George Sanchez, Mexican-American identity formation began to take shape during the 1930s, as racial tensions

⁸² Douglas Monroy, *Rebirth: Mexican Los Angeles from the Great Migration to the Great Depression* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

⁸³ *Ibid*, 132.

⁸⁴ Edward J. Escobar, *Race, Police, and the Making of a Political Identity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

mounted, and was consolidated by the end of World War II, after the outbursts of violence in the 1940s.⁸⁵

Like Mexico City, Los Angeles grew exponentially after World War II due to government policies and investment. In the case of Los Angeles, the defense industry spurred the city's growth, but unlike in Mexico City, this industrial growth led to greater suburbanization. According to historian Greg Hise, Los Angeles' seemingly scatterbrained and disorganized post war expansion was actually a planned and organized operation, as suburban communities were planned around defense industry plants.⁸⁶ At the same time that white Los Angeles suburbanized, thus depriving the city of white, urban poor men to become boxers, Mexican immigration increased, due to the *bracero* program that lasted from 1942 to 1964. During the time of the *bracero* program, in which the U.S. and Mexican government cooperated in allowing Mexicans to migrate to the U.S. for agricultural work, the Mexican population in Los Angeles increased dramatically. In 1920, there were 100,000 Mexicans in Los Angeles, a figure that grew to 150,000 in 1950 and doubled to 300,000 in 1960.⁸⁷ When the *bracero* program ended in 1964, Mexican immigration continued to increase despite the fact that the number of visas available to Mexicans had decreased. Mexican immigration to Los Angeles continued to increase in the late 1960s and into the 1970s and 1980s, as the Mexican

⁸⁵ George J. Sanchez, *Becoming Mexican American: Ethnicity, Culture, and Identity in Chicano Los Angeles, 1900–1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993), 13.

⁸⁶ Greg Hise, *Magnetic Los Angeles: Planning the Twentieth-Century Metropolis* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 11-13.

⁸⁷ Ricardo Romo, *East Los Angeles: History of a Barrio* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1983), vii. Robert Bauman, "The Black Power and Chicano Movements in Poverty Wars in Los Angeles," *Journal of Urban History* 33, 2 (2007): 286.

economy stumbled and failed to expand at the same pace that it did during the years of the miracle.

As they did in Mexico City, the Olympics played an important role in shaping Los Angeles' image internationally. Los Angeles, however, also played an important role in shaping the Olympics when it hosted the Games in 1932 and 1984. Historians Mark Dyreson and Matthew Llewellyn contend that the southern California city "has shaped every aspect of the modern Olympic movement" and the city has "provided enduring lessons on how to use the games to market nations to the world."⁸⁸ For Los Angeles city leaders, hosting the 1932 Summer Olympics allowed them to introduce the world to a modern Los Angeles, thus branding the city as an important player on the world stage. Unlike Mexico City, Los Angeles hosted the Games without outright political or social strife and the 1932 Summer Olympics became the first Olympiad ever to make a profit. Although the Olympics held in Los Angeles were both deemed financial successes, the city projected an image of a white, Anglo-American Los Angeles that whitewashed images of the city's Mexican population and past. This Mexican population formed a core base of supporters for one of the city's longest sporting tradition: boxing.

Los Angeles enjoyed a special relationship with boxing since the onset of the twentieth century. Until the mid 1940s, boxing was the only professional spectator sport to regularly hold events in Los Angeles. The Rams of the National Football League moved to Los Angeles in 1946, while the Dodgers of Major League Baseball arrived in 1958 and the Lakers of the National Basketball Association came to Los Angeles in 1960.

⁸⁸ Mark Dyreson and Matthew Llewellyn, "Los Angeles is *the* Olympic City: Legacies of the 1932 and 1984 Olympic Games," *International Journal of the History of Sport* 25, 14 (2008): 1991.

Because of this late arrival of professional sports teams, boxing held greater importance to Los Angeles sports fans and journalists than it did in other North American cities. In the case of sports journalists, covering boxing matches was the best ‘beat’ to follow well into the 1950s and 1960s.⁸⁹ Until the 1930s, most of Los Angeles’ boxers were white ethnic immigrants or Anglo-American migrants from other parts of the United States. Occasionally, boxing card would feature African-African American, Filipino, and Mexican boxers. In general, Mexican and Mexican American boxers constituted a small percentage of boxers in California and were more likely to fight in Texas and Northern Mexico than in California.⁹⁰ The number of Mexican boxers fighting in California and throughout the United States increased in the 1930s. The changes in demographics and the popularity of boxing among Mexicans on both sides of the borders presented new opportunities for Mexicans to discuss the behaviors of the nation’s men.

Many Mexican Masculinities

Since the inception of bourgeois nationalist movements in the nineteenth century, masculinity has served as a key component in both defining and representing the nation. Historian George Mosse contended that middle-class nationalism and modern masculinity grew side-by-side, as the male body “was thought to symbolize society’s need for order and progress, as well as middle-class virtues such as self-control and

⁸⁹ Gregory S. Rodríguez, ““Palaces of Pain,” Arenas of Mexican-American Dreams: Boxing and the Formation of Ethnic Mexican Identities in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles” (PhD Thesis, University of California-San Diego, 1999), 108.

⁹⁰ During the 1920s, *The Ring*, the self-proclaimed “Bible of Boxing,” reported on boxing events from around the country. The reports from Texas and Mexico contained far more references to Mexican boxers than did the reports for California.

moderation.”⁹¹ Thus, the male body symbolized traits that would benefit national development, at least in the eyes of national elites.

Following Mexico’s independence in 1821, national elites viewed the practices of the popular classes with much suspicion and disdain. For much of the nineteenth century, Mexico was too unstable politically for elites to take action. Mexico became more stable politically with the rise of Porfirio Díaz to power in 1876. The ensuing thirty-five years, known as the Porfiriato, provided Mexican elites with the stability they needed to impose, with mixed results, a new set of behaviors for Mexico’s lower classes. Much of the attention focused on masculine activities like excessive drinking and cock fighting, both of which Porfirian elites deemed counterproductive to the construction of a productive middle class.⁹² Although a ten-year revolution and civil war put an end to rule of the Porfirian elite, many of their ideas and attitudes about the social maladies of the popular classes survived in fields such as criminology and education.⁹³ These social pathologies included violence, excessive drinking, and petty crime that seemed natural for the working class.

In Post-Revolutionary Mexico, Mexican intellectuals expressed concern about Mexican masculinity. Much of their analysis centered on the self-destructive risk-taking behavior of Mexican men and its negative effects on Mexican society.⁹⁴ In 1934,

⁹¹ George L. Moss, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996), 9.

⁹² Beezley, 13-66.

⁹³ Piccato, *City of Suspects*.

⁹⁴ In his analysis of Post-World War II masculinity in Vancouver, Christopher Dummitt divides modern men into those who define their masculinity through risk-taking (generally working-class men) and those who define it through risk-management (generally middle-class men). See Christopher Dummitt, *The Manly Modern: Masculinity in Postwar Canada* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2007), 1-28.

Philosophy Professor Samuel Ramos published *Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico*.

Ramos claimed that Mexicans suffered from an inferiority complex (in relation to the United States and Europe) that caused a series of negative behaviors among all sectors of Mexican society. This complex made working-class urban men unconfident, nervous, ill tempered, easily angered, and violent.⁹⁵ Sixteen years later, Octavio Paz established the intellectual foundations of the national stereotype of the Mexican *macho*: a hyper-masculine man marked by his penchant for violence and displaying toughness, and protective of his emotions. This essential “Mexican” wore macho masks to prevent the outside world from knowing or understanding his insecurities.⁹⁶ He was also a terrible father: “Nothing is more natural... than his indifference toward the offspring he engenders.”⁹⁷

Whereas Ramos and Paz viewed the *macho* as an essentially Mexican phenomenon - Paz viewed it as starting with the conquest of Mexico - Americo Paredes stressed the universality of the macho, arguing that it appears in many cultures at particular junctures. For Paredes, the macho was quite frequent in Jacksonian North American in the 1820s and 1830s, when North American men adopted supermanliness to cope with “feelings of inferiority in respect to European culture.”⁹⁸ The period following the Mexican Revolution was similar, as “struggle and death were accepted as daily occurrences.”⁹⁹ Paredes argued that *machismo* was a recent invention, as the term had

⁹⁵ Samuel Ramos, *Profile of Man and Culture in Mexico*, trans. Peter G. Earle (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1962), 126-132.

⁹⁶ Paz, 29-46, 65-88.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 82.

⁹⁸ Américo Paredes, “The United States, Mexico, and Machismo,” *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 8, 1 (1971): 27.

⁹⁹ Ibid., 37.

never appeared in Mexican folklore until after the Mexican Revolution.¹⁰⁰ Paredes, then, accepted Ramos' notion that Mexican masculinity was shaped by feelings of inferiority toward the United States, but rejected his claim that it was a pathology specific to Mexican society.

This macho performance of masculinity emphasized risk-taking behavior that, in the minds of Mexican elites, could prove detrimental to national development. On one hand, the risk-taking behavior could be self-destructive and stupid. On the other hand, risky behavior could be courageous and daring. The *charro* embodied these positive attributes associated with risk-taking. The charro was a dashing cowboy figure equally adept in the realm of music as he was in horseback riding. According to historian Ricardo Pérez Montfort, the *charro* “distilled conservatism,” as he stood for “the glorification of bravery, virility, and machismo in the man, as well as the self-denial and virginity in the woman.”¹⁰¹ Because of these attributes, Pérez Montfort contends that the charro became a popular and powerful archetype in Mexican cinema from the 1930s to the 1960s. Many intellectuals, including U.S. historian Anne Rubenstein and Mexican psychoanalyst Aniceto Arimóni have used the term charro interchangeably with the term macho.¹⁰² Matthew Guttman even applies the term “macho-pelado” to define the figure that “represented either Mexico’s homespun rural past... or the essential backwardness of the nation, rural and urban, which needed to be exposed and eradicated.”¹⁰³ Both terms

¹⁰⁰ Ibid., 24.

¹⁰¹ Ricardo Pérez Montfort, *Expresiones populares y estereotipos culturales en México. Siglos XIX y XX. Diez ensayos*. Mexico City: CIESAS, 2007. 319.

¹⁰² Anne Rubenstein, “Bodies, Cities, Cinema.” Aniceto Arimóni, *Psicoanálisis de la dinámica de un pueblo: México, tierra de hombres* (Mexico City: DEMAC, 2008).

¹⁰³ Guttman, *The Meanings of Macho*, 241.

refer to risk-taking men. However, the charro described by Pérez Montfort and that portrayed Mexican cinema and visual culture engaged in courageous behavior, whereas the macho described by Ramos and Paz engaged in destructive behavior. The macho was not nearly as romantic a figure as the charro.

As the 1930s and 1940s progressed, many Mexican men (especially among the elite and middle class) refrained from risky behaviors and attempted to limit the risk in their lives. For instance, Mexican congressmen participated less in dueling, as PRI “party discipline became a greater value than personal honor.”¹⁰⁴ Rubenstein has deemed this masculinity, “technocratic masculinity” and highlights its tenets by drawing contrasts between President Manuel Avila Camacho (1940-1946) and his *macho* brother Maximino. The former was self-controlled, orderly, monogamous, sober, and modest, while the latter was impulsive, unruly, promiscuous, drunk, and boastful. According to Rubenstein, this archetype of the risk-managing technocrat dominated Mexican national politics through the 1940s and 1950s.¹⁰⁵ The positive attributes associated with this masculine ideal, however, did not simply fade away. In fact, the technocratic male figure continued to be associated with Mexican modernization, as it was deemed appropriate for a rational man to lead a modernizing, rational society. In many ways, the technocrat was the anti-macho, lacking the romanticism and virility of the charro, even if his life was more stable.

Despite their positive depictions, risk-managing technocrats had to be careful not to avoid all risks and become too passive. Guttman discusses the concept of the

¹⁰⁴ Piccato, “Politics and the Technology of Honor: Dueling in Turn-of-the-Century Mexico,” *Journal of Social History*, 33, 2 (1999): 345.

¹⁰⁵ Rubenstein, “Bodies, Cities, Cinema,” 226.

mandilón, which might best come across in English as “whipped,” a reference to a man who helps his wife with ‘traditional’ female duties such as dishwashing and cooking. Within this context, Paz’s *chingón/chingada* (fucker/fucked) dichotomy highlighted the expectation of Mexican men to act decisively or risk being acted upon. In Paz’s conception, the macho is the ultimate chingón, violating everyone and everything in his path. The chingada, in contrast, is violated by the chingón, reflecting Paz’s conception of the passive role that women and homosexuals played in Mexican society.¹⁰⁶ While archetypal male technocrats were supposed to weigh their options before making a rational decision, archetypal homosexuals, more derisively known as *maricas* or *maricones*, allowed others to act upon them. The term *maricón* not only implies homosexuality, it also implies cowardice. Therefore, the technocratic Mexican male of the 1950s and 1960s needed to balance his rationality and patience with a bit of gusto and virility. The modern Mexican male needed to reflect a nation that was both modernizing and Mexican, a balance between technocrat and charro.

Actor and singer Pedro Infante proved willing and able to become a model of modern Mexican masculinity throughout the 1940s and early 1950s. Rubenstein contends that Infante’s public image perfectly balanced self-control with virility to create a modern masculine image that Mexican men and women found appealing.¹⁰⁷ In the Pepe El Toro trilogy (*Nosotros los pobres* - 1947, *Ustedes los ricos* - 1948, and *Pepe El Toro* – 1953), Infante’s starring character, Pepe El Toro balances risk management and risk taking throughout his ordeals in the neighborhood modeled after Tepito. Pepe El Toro

¹⁰⁶ Paz, 76-81.

¹⁰⁷ Rubenstein, “Bodies, Cities, Cinema,” 227.

often resorts to violence, but only after serious provocation and with much justification. He also practices sexual self-control, rejecting the advances of several aggressive female suitors. In the trilogy's final installment, Pepe becomes a boxer out of financial need, but refuses to fall victim to the excesses associated with the sport. Throughout the trilogy, Infante's masculine image is on full display, showcasing his natural talents in singing, his discipline in sculpting his body, and his ability to charm women, proof that he was every bit a Mexican man. It mattered little that Infante himself was a known womanizer whose failure to secure a divorce from his first wife annulled his marriage to his second wife, the cause of much drama after he died in a plane crash in 1957. It was of greater importance that Infante had maintained a public persona that better fit the aspirations of the Mexican elite than Rodolfo Casanova, and thus was deemed a better masculine role model.

The Rise and Fall of Chango Casanova

Given the context of sport, urbanization, and masculinity in Mexico, it is easier to understand why the story of Rodolfo Casanova appealed to so many Mexicans in the 1930s and again in the 1940s. Casanova was born in the north central state of Guanajuato in June of 1915. After his father's death, Casanova's mother moved the family to the Mexico City neighborhood of La Lagunilla in search of work. One chronicler of Casanova's life asserted that the family moved directly from Guanajuato to Mexico, whereas another biographer contended that the family moved from Guanajuato to the

eastern state of Veracruz while Casanova's father was still alive.¹⁰⁸ Apparently, Casanova's father was in the military and was killed in an uprising allied with former Mexican president Adolfo de la Huerta in 1923. Casanova grew up in the working class neighborhood of La Lagunilla and worked several jobs as a child, including a stint working at an ice-cream parlor that provided him with another nickname, "El Ex-Nevero de La Lagunilla." By many accounts, Casanova followed his brother Carlos into the world of pugilism, possibly getting his introduction to the sport by helping Carlos with his training regimen in the gym. Although Carlos was a professional boxer at this point, it was Rodolfo's punching power that impressed trainers. He made his professional debut in April in 1932 at the age of sixteen.

¹⁰⁸ Archivo General de la Nación, Ramo Propiedades Artísticas y Literarias [Hereafter AGN-PAL], Caja 980, Exp. 12692, Franco Lenoir Girón-McGregor, *Casanova: El Ídolo Caído* (No city or publisher given, 1951), 14-15 [Hereafter cited as Girón-McGregor]. AGN-PAL, Caja 775, Exp. 1631, Javier Zea Salas, *Quién fue... RODOLFO CASANOVA* (Mexico City: No publisher given, 1947), No page numbers given [Hereafter cited as Zea Salas, *Quién fue... RODOLFO CASANOVA*].



Figure 2. Rodolfo Casanova. AGN, Enrique Díaz Collection, Tema boxeadores, Caja 49-21.

Casanova embarked on a meteoric rise through the world of professional boxing. Within six months of starting his career, he defeated Speedy Dado, a Filipino with ninety professional fights in front of 20,000 fans in Mexico City.¹⁰⁹ In February of 1933, he headlined the first boxing card held at the refurbished Arena Nacional against another Filipino national, Sid Torres.¹¹⁰ Casanova impressed audiences in Mexico City and Los Angeles with his boxing skills and his lively nocturnal life. His trips to California

¹⁰⁹ "CASANOVA STOPS DADO," *Los Angeles Times*, 24 October 1932, 21.

¹¹⁰ Zea Salas, *Quién fue... RODOLFO CASANOVA*.

sparked rumors in Mexico that he had taken up Hollywood actress Mae West as a love interest. His career reached its apex in June of 1934, when he challenged Puerto Rican Sixto Escobar for the world bantamweight champion in Montreal. Unfortunately for Casanova and for Mexico, Escobar knocked him out in the ninth round. Mexicans were quick to dismiss the career of Casanova in light of this defeat. According to *Jueves de Excelsior*, “the ‘Aztec Marvel’ squandered his money and his health in cabarets... we have lost nothing. One less boxer in Mexico, which should be somewhat reassuring to the people of reasonable intelligence.”¹¹¹ Sportswriter Fray Nano also portrayed Casanova as a finished boxer but offered consolation to his readers: “Maybe the ruins of *Casanovita* will form the basis for the glory of some other Mexican, just like the ruins of Napoleon’s empire formed the basis for the Europe’s modern civilization.”¹¹² Casanova was nineteen years old.

The young pugilist’s career was not finished, however. Jimmy Fitten, Casanova’s promoter, blamed Casanova inability to “abstain from excessive libations,” but assured reporters “that he will quickly recover those marvelous talents” with a more disciplined lifestyle.¹¹³ Over the next years, Casanova traded the Mexican featherweight championship with Joe Conde and Juan Zurita. In this championship triangle, Casanova generally lost to Conde, who generally lost to Zurita, who generally lost to Casanova. Another highpoint for Casanova occurred from July to November 1936, when he traveled

¹¹¹ “Instantáneas,” *Jueves de Excelsior*, 26 July 1934, 3.

¹¹² Quoted in Zea Salas, *Quién fue... Rodolfo Casanova*.

¹¹³ G. González Yañez, “¿POR QUÉ PERDIO ANOCHE CASANOVA?” *El Universal Gráfico*, 27 June 1934, 13.

to New York State for a series of matches, including some victories at the world-renown Madison Square Garden in New York City.

Unfortunately, Casanova proved unable to properly handle the excesses of fame and he often entered the ring in terrible physical condition. While in Mexico City, Chango frequently socialized with Mexicans of all classes, frequenting the nightclubs of the middle upper classes and dancing with *ficheras*, as well as stopping by the watering holes and cantinas of the lower classes. Although he displayed an ability to rebound from failure, the constant highs and lows eventually limited Casanova's time as a competitive boxer. In 1942, the Federal District Boxing Commission stripped Casanova of his boxing license. Only twenty-seven years at the time, Chango lost his only means of making a living. Although the intentions of the Boxing Commission were beneficent, their action led Casanova to a life that alternated between stays in the mental hospital, city streets, and the houses of friends and family. His story became the basis of the classic rise and fall of the world-class boxer, a man who rose from humble origins to achieve fame and glory, only to descend into a total economic and social freefall.

Casanova's Life on the Silver Screen

The arc of Casanova's life provided a compelling storyline for a film. Starring David Silva, *Campeón sin corona* followed the career path of fictional boxer Roberto 'Kid' Terranova. At the beginning of the film, Terranova works at an ice cream stand, much like Casanova did before boxing. He draws the attention of trainer 'Tío' Rosas (based on Casanova's trainer 'Tío' Torres) after he punches out a grown man unnecessarily chastising a small child in the market. The movie quickly cuts to

Terranova's boxing career where the purses from his matches allow him to buy gifts for his mother, buy nice clothes for himself and his best friend, 'El Chupa,' and take his girlfriend, Lupita, to a fancy club. Despite his early success, Terranova encounters problems prior to his match with the English-speaking Mexican Joe Ronda (based on Scottish-Mexican boxer Joe Conde). Whereas Terranova has difficulty knowing where to sign the contract, Ronda enters the room speaking English with his North American girlfriend and his trainer, Mr. Carr, and has no difficulty in negotiating the situation. When Ronda and Terranova box, Mr. Carr instructs his fighter to talk to Terranova in English. Ronda complies, calling his opponent a "bum" and a "monkey." Terranova loses the match when he becomes distracted listening to Ronda's girlfriend yelling in English. As Terranova looks away, Ronda hits him in the body and knocks him out.

In Terranova's next fight, a blonde-haired woman in a fur coat, Susana, appears and takes an interest in the protagonist. After he wins the bout, Terranova encounters the woman back stage and accepts her invitation to a party back at her apartment. Eventually, the other guests leave and the two are left alone for a romantic encounter. Afterwards, Terranova acts differently, yelling at his mother and mistreating his friends to whom he acted very respectfully beforehand. He changes his behavior, however, when he finds out that Susana no longer wants to see him, as she is embarrassed to introduce Terranova to her friends and family. Still angry, Terranova reluctantly flies to New York City for a series of matches. He expresses his displeasure with New York, even threatening to pack his belongings and leave before his final scheduled fight. His last fight takes place against an African-American boxer in Madison Square Garden. Friends

and family listen to the match on the radio as Terranova scores a victory. Upon his return home, he is greeted by friends and family, including his girlfriend Lupita, at the airport. He returns to his mother's house for a welcoming party and gives out presents from the United States.

Terranova's life, however, takes a turn for the worse at the party. He becomes inebriated and finds out that Susana, the blonde woman, is having a party. He arrives as an uninvited guest and starts a brawl with the upper-class guests, which leads to his arrest. In prison, Terranova is allowed to leave in order to fulfill a contractual obligation to fight the English-speaking Joe Ronda again. Terranova begins the fight terribly, but eventually finds the motivation to knock out Ronda when he sees Susana in Ronda's corner. After the fight, Susana runs to look over the unconscious Ronda, spurring an expression of disgust from Terranova. He quits the sport of boxing on the spot and begins to carouse and frequent cabarets. After getting thrown to the curb from a bar, an unshaven Terranova enters a bar in time to hear the radio broadcast of a boxing match in Madison Square Garden, featuring Juan Zubieta (based on boxer Juan Zurita), whom Terranova had defeated earlier in the movie. Zubieta wins the match by knockout. In the post-fight interview, Zubieta expresses his pride in being a Mexican world champion and anonymously refers to another Mexican boxer who was better than Zubieta and who had the talent to become a world champion, but lacked faith and courage. A despondent Terranova leaves the jubilant atmosphere of the bar and embarks on a lonely walk. To his surprise, he encounters Lupita, who encourages him to come back to his friends and family. The film ends as Casanova hugs his mother in the street.

Campeón sin Corona incorporated the themes of socially upward mobility, Mexican nationalism, and in-ring violence to shape a powerful narrative about Mexican boxing. The complexity of social mobility is the most obvious trope addressed by the film. The money he makes from prizefighting allows Terranova to participate in Mexico's emerging consumer society. He immediately transforms from a man wearing ragged clothes into a man donning expensive suits and fancy hats, a practice that allowed Terranova to assert agency in his life. When he buys presents for his friends and family, Terranova becomes a mediator between this consumer culture and working-class Mexican culture. However, there are limits to Terranova's abilities as a mediator, as his success throws him into a new world of upper-crust figures with whom he shares little in common. Susana, his blonde romantic interest, has little use for him outside of their brief tryst. With her blonde hair and fur coats, she stands out at the fights she attends and shows little knowledge or concern for the sport itself. To her, a boxing match is an opportunity to observe men's bodies as evidenced by the quote by one of her friends about Terranova: "He has a really good body." In the end, she supports the *pochó*¹¹⁴ Ronda, even after his loss to Terranova, thus implying a better understanding between the Mexican upper class and North Americans.

The character of Joe Ronda also reveals much about Mexican nationalism during this time. Ronda was based on a rival of Rodolfo Casanova, Joe Conde, who was born Alejandro José Petrie Conde in the northern port city of Mazatlán in 1911 to a Mexican mother and Scottish immigrant father. Conde spent his childhood between Mazatlán and

¹¹⁴ The term *pochó* literally means "spoiled" or "rotten" in Spanish. In Mexico, it has been used historically to designate a Mexican who has either lived in the United States or uses many English words while speaking.

San Francisco.¹¹⁵ As a result, he spoke fluent English, which he reportedly used to intimidate Casanova. When asked later about his use of English as tool to defeat Casanova, Conde denied that it worked but did not deny that he tried doing so. Whether or not it worked, Conde certainly knew how to box the *El Gran Chango*, defeating him in three of four professional contests.¹¹⁶ Despite Conde's success, he never received the support from Mexicans that Casanova received, possibly because of his familiarity with English and Anglo-American culture. According to Carlos Monsiváis, "Since the times of Porfirio Díaz, the Mexican who is 'Americanized' has been an object of jest and scorn. According to popular culture, whoever renounces the 'natural condition' (dressing and behaving like one's parents and grandparents) becomes insignificant in a humorous way."¹¹⁷ Rafael Hernández-Rodríguez argues that the movie's director used English to highlight the Mexican inferiority complex: "on one hand we can see Mexican culture revealed by the speech of its people, on the other it is English that embodies the power and impenetrable center from which Mexicans have been cast out."¹¹⁸

It does not actually matter whether or not Casanova was intimidated by Conde's English or confused and frustrated by business negotiations in English. What matters more is the public perception that Casanova, a man of humble origins, could not handle the complexities of the "modern" world. Since Casanova's pugilistic career ended,

¹¹⁵ AGN-PAL, Caja 900, Exp. 8163, Adela Palacios, *Nacido Para Pelear: La Vida de Joe Conde: Caballero del Ring* (No publisher or city given, 1949).

¹¹⁶ Jaime Bravo, "Pasión y gloria de un ídolo: Joe Conde, el único que desquiciaba a Casanova," *Uno Más Uno*, 28 November 1980, 29.

¹¹⁷ Monsiváis, "Cantinflas and Tin Tan: Mexico's Greatest Comedians," in *Mexico's Cinema: A Century of Film and Filmmakers*, ed. Joanne Hershfield and David Maciel (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 1999), 69.

¹¹⁸ Rafael Hernández-Rodríguez, "Melodrama and Social Comedy in the Cinema of the Golden Age," in *Mexico's Cinema*, 115.

several observers have guessed as to why he had such trouble. One of Casanova's later financial advisers blamed the Chango's Indian background and the ignorance that accompanies rural upbringing, despite the fact that Casanova spent almost his entire life in Mexico City.¹¹⁹ Another, more sympathetic observer, lamented that Casanova simply lacked the proper "foundations" to handle the onslaught of notoriety and money that accompanied his fistic feats.¹²⁰ Casanova's life, then, reflected the difficulties for rural migrants living on the margins of a new urban environment. His story provided a real example to the lessons and warnings contained in the Golden Age Mexican cinema that taught new arrivals to the city about the dangers of succumbing to the excesses of urban life.

The Downward Spiral Continues

Casanova continued to engage in these vices following his boxing career. This behavior may have included consorting with homosexuals. Girón McGregor stated that Casanova and his drinking companions would often end their bouts of drinking by visiting a person known as *la "Yolanda,"* who looked over them "in a maternal manner."¹²¹ Girón McGregor provided the following description of "la Yolanda," which at the very least provides one Mexican's opinion about homosexuality:

La "Yolanda is a homosexual in full physical decrepitude. He has the brain of an animal forever in heat, which makes him suppose that his already decadent body still has conserved the spirit... of the effeminate boys who in that way saunter in an unsuspecting manner... and try to provoke them with disgusting and repugnant practices."¹²²

¹¹⁹ Girón McGregor, 13.

¹²⁰ Octavio Colmenares Vargas, "Proemio" in Pino Pérez, *A Solas en el Altar: Vida de Rodolfo Casanova "El Chango"* (Mexico City: Edamex, 1997), 10.

¹²¹ Girón-McGregor, 143.

¹²² Ibid.

Girón McGregor explained that La Yolanda had a different type of relationship with Casanova, that of “guardian angel.”¹²³ Apparently, when looking out for the welfare of Casanova, La Yolanda’s “negative sexual instincts were put to sleep, to be supplanted by a blind obedience, mixed with admiration and respect.”¹²⁴ Girón McGregor made it clear that Casanova never engaged in homosexual behavior, yet used Casanova apparent platonic relationship with a homosexual as evidence of the former boxer’s decayed state.

Soon after his time with La Yolanda, and less than a year before his hunger strike, Casanova re-entered the asylum. His brother, Rafael, told the government-owned newspaper, *El Nacional*, about the conditions Rodolfo lived in prior to his re-entry: “One day I went to see. They told me that he was sleeping in a house on the streets of Allende. It was a very ugly tenement. I arrived at eight at night and I pushed the door. There were men and women in bed together and, in a corner, very wasted, my brother Rodolfo, dressed in ragged clothing and thrown on a mattress pad.”¹²⁵ The former boxer was thirty-two years old at the time and his career was finished, yet Casanova remained popular among Mexican boxing fans. During this stint in the mental asylum, one journalist called Casanova “the man the Mexican fans have loved the most,” and declared, “If you ask whatever fan... about who has been the best Mexican boxer, the answer, without hesitation: the ‘Chango’ Casanova.”¹²⁶ Casanova remained the most popular Mexican boxer, partly because he had little contemporary competition. Casanova

¹²³ Ibid.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 143-144.

¹²⁵ Raúl Talán, “Rodolfo Casanova no Tiene Remedio: Continúa Siendo Víctima del Vicio,” *El Nacional*, 22 May 1947, 3(2).

¹²⁶ Antonio Ortiz, “DETRÁS de los GUANTES,” *El Universal*, 13 September 1947, 1(3).

himself commented on the dearth of Mexican boxing talent, telling *Jueves de Excelsior*, “Decidedly, pugilism has degenerated.”¹²⁷

Casanova left a mental hospital for the final time in 1969. With the help of Luis Rivera, a former sparring partner of Casanova who had once served as a chauffeur for former Mexico City Regent Luis Uruchurtu, the ex-boxer secured steady employment at a repair shop for ten years.¹²⁸ In 1974, *Impacto* wrote about Casanova’s desire to find a wife, explaining to readers that, in the 1930s, “there were many women who went mad watching a dandy in the form of Rodolfo Casanova.” The article suggested that former boxer had reconciled his womanizing past and informed readers that Casanova had “never married because he did not want to be unfaithful to whoever was his wife, because he knew that before anything, that woman is a companion to man. She must be given love, satisfaction, and comforts if at all possible, but, at the very least, she must never lack daily means of support.”¹²⁹ It appears that Casanova never found a wife and by 1979, he had left his job and returned “to his old ways.” On September 15, 1980, Mexican Independence Day, Casanova was found unconscious, lying on the sidewalk of Plaza Garibaldi, the once great boxer continued to spiral downward.¹³⁰

On November 24, 1980 former boxer passed away in Mexico City from cirrhosis of the liver. His body lay in the morgue until boxing manager Arturo “Cuyo” Hernández, notified by the Federal District Boxing District of Mexico City, identified the body for

¹²⁷ Bustamante, “EL CHANGO CASANOVA: quiere medio millón,” 21.

¹²⁸ “El cadaver de Casanova tenía una etiqueta: desconocido,” *Uno más uno*, 25 November 1980, 29.

¹²⁹ Ignacio B. Sachman Torres, “OPORTUNIDAD PARA LAS SOLTERAS: CASANOVA BUSCA ESPOSA!” *Impacto*, 1 Mayo 1974, 35.

¹³⁰ “El cadaver de Casanova tenía una etiqueta: desconocido,” 29.

authorities.¹³¹ Not a single relative of Casanova turned up to identify the body of a man who had been Mexico's most popular athlete in the 1930s and the star attraction during Mexico City's "Golden Age" of boxing. Mexico City daily *El Universal* reflected on the change of fortune for Casanova: "That's life. When you win, you have countless friends... when you go broke they all abandon you at once."¹³²

It was both fitting and ironic that Cuyo Hernández was the person who identified Casanova's body. On one hand, both had been rural migrants who came to Mexico City with their parents in the late 1910s (Hernández) and early 1920s (Casanova) and had found solace in the world of boxing. On the other hand, their lives after the 1930s could not have been more different. Hernández became the most successful manager in the history of Mexican boxing, guiding the careers of several world champions and establishing close connections to the most powerful figures in the sport in both the United States and Mexico. In contrast, Casanova spent his years after boxing in and out of mental hospitals trying to break his addiction to alcohol. Frequently found passed out in streets and in tenements, Casanova became a cautionary tale to Mexican boxers who did not discipline their urges for women and drink.

Despite the tragedy of Casanova's life, his story also brought joy to Mexican men. *Mañana* writer Ernesto Álvarez Nolasco recalled the boxer as "depraved and ignorant," a man unable to defeat his "terrible inferiority complex." Yet his sentiments also echoed Gorn's portrayal of Dempsey as symbolizing the desire to break through society's barriers. Álvarez depicted Casanova as "an innate fighter" with "a devastating punch," a

¹³¹ Ibid.

¹³² Carlos Juárez and Antonio Noria Ramírez, "Rodolfo Casanova: ¡Se fue el gran ídolo!" *El Universal*, 25 November 1980, 1(Deportes).

man who chased his opponents down in the ring with reckless abandon. In short, Casanova “gave no quarter, asked no quarter.” His charisma was instantaneous - the moment he entered the ring, he captivated audiences “by the way he took off his robe, by the manner in which he stretched his muscles before the start of the fight, by his feline movements, and by his spectacular punch.”¹³³ Casanova’s power and pugilistic talents provided Mexican men entrapped by the forces of urbanization and industrialization. He may not have completely succeeded, but at least Casanova showed that it was possible to break through these barriers. His charisma was such that even after his career had ended, he continued to fascinate Mexicans in need of pugilistic heroes.

CONCLUSION

In characterizing PRI politics and Mexican national culture of the twentieth century, Claudio Lomnitz has noted that both are steeped in the longing “for the Mexico that could have been.”¹³⁴ Rodolfo Casanova became an important figure in the Mexican popular imagination precisely because of his flirtation with greatness and eventual descent into destitution. Although many of the memories of Casanova were and still are, tinged with fatalism, they also contained a glimmer of hope within them. This same hope would return again and again, whenever a new Mexican pugilistic prospect would enter the public realm. As Mexicans achieved new heights in the world of professional boxing, Mexican fans and observers would be forced to change their fatalistic opinions of their boxing idols. The next chapter examines the life and career of Raúl Macías, who became

¹³³ Ernesto Alvarez Nolasco, “HA NACIDO UN IDOLO: RAÚL MACIAS,” *Mañana*, 9 October 1954, 37.

¹³⁴ Claudio Lomnitz-Adler, *Exits from the Labyrinth: Culture and Ideology in the Mexican National Space* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), 252.

a nationwide celebrity and achieved both in-ring success and economic stability in the 1950s.

Chapter 2: The National Idol from the *Barrio Bravo*: Raúl Macías, Tepito, and Boxing Celebrity

On November 6, 1957, Mexican boxer Raúl Macías faced Alphonse Halimi of France at Wrigley Field in Los Angeles to unify the world bantamweight championships. As Macías battled Halimi, Mexico City's normally crowded streets were quiet, devoid of the cars and taxis that normally overflowed them.¹ The city's residents were captivated, gathering around radios wherever they could: at a neighbor's house, at a beauty salon, or on a street corner. Even the patients at a tuberculosis ward of a hospital were fixated with the match.² In the working-class neighborhood of Tepito, Macías' barber and friends from the *frontón* huddled around radios near street vendors.³ Their hopes appeared justified when Macías gained an early lead on his French opponent. As the fight progressed, however, Macías wore down, partly from the blistering body attack from Halimi and partly from the energy he had been forced to exert to make weight for the fight. When the decision was announced in favor of Halimi, Mexicans expressed sadness and disbelief. Fights broke out between Macías supporters and Macías critics, in some cases leading to homicide.⁴ *El Universal Gráfico* attributed four murders in Mexico City to disputes about the outcome of the fight.⁵

¹ Julio Scherer García, "El Ratón Macías Perdió Ayer por Decisión la Pelea de su Vida," *Excélsior*, 7 November 1957, 11(A). "La Ciudad Estuvo 'Muerta' Durante Toda la Pelea," *Novedades*, 7 November 1957, 1(AA). Antonio Hernández H., "Tras La Derrota Del Ratón La Gente Iba Triste Por Las Calles De La Ciudad de México," *La Afición*, 7 November 1957, 1.

² Scherer García, "El Ratón Macías Perdió Ayer por Decisión la Pelea de su Vida," 1(A), 11(A).

³ Silvestre González, "Tepito, Histérico, Lloró Anoche," *Excélsior*, 7 November 1957, 35(A).

⁴ "La Derrota de El Ratón Causa de un Crimen Anoche Mismo," *Novedades*, 7 November 1957, 3(AA). "Otros 2 Crímenes Cometidos en Riñas por Discusiones Sobre la Derrota de 'El Ratón,'" *El Universal Gráfico*, 8 November 1957, 5.

⁵ "Ya son cuatro los Homicidios en Disputas por la Pelea del 'Ratón'; 20 millones de Francos a Halimi y \$625,000 Para Raúl," *El Universal Gráfico*, 8 November 1957, 1.

The interest of Mexicans in the Macías-Halimi match and their strong emotional response to its outcome reveal the level of fame and popularity Raúl Macías had attained in the 1950s, an era of transition for Mexican national imagery. Urbanization and industrial development increasingly displaced the dashing charro and loyal *china poblana* as symbols of an agrarian nation with more international urban culture that would come to full realization in the late 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.⁶ In the search for archetypes for national progress, the focus shifted from the anonymous figures of the *charro* and the *china poblana* to celebrities like singer and movie star Pedro Infante, whose hybrid masculinity balanced Mexico's rural and urban sensibilities, providing an ideal archetype for a society in transition.⁷ In this vein of thought, historian Tiziana Bertaccini argues that, for the 1950s, Raúl Macías “emanated a perfect image: an example of rectitude and morality for the youth, while his greatest followers went to church to light candles, asking for a victory.”⁸ According to Bertaccini, Macías' public conformity to the moral standards associated with *buenas costumbres*⁹ and his public humbleness made him an ideal Mexican idol for the time.

By examining the life and boxing career of Raúl Macías, this chapter highlights the importance of place to the process of celebrity in mid-twentieth-century Mexico. It draws attention to how Macías' home neighborhood of Tepito in Mexico City, the environment of the boxing gymnasium, and Mexican responses to his pugilistic exploits.

⁶ José Agustín, *Tragicomedia Mexicana: La vida en México de 1940 a 1970* (Mexico City: Editorial Planeta Mexicana, 2007), 146.

⁷ Anne Rubenstein, “Bodies, Cities, Cinema,” 199-233.

⁸ Tiziana Bertaccini, *Ficción y realidad del héroe popular* (Mexico City: Universidad Iberoamericana, 2001), 126.

⁹ Eric Zolov defines *buenas costumbres* as “a class- and gender-laden notion of implying ‘proper upbringing.’” See Zolov, *Refried Elvis*, 5.

In the process, it argues that Tepito aided Macías' success and celebrity in three ways. First, growing up in Tepito forced Macías to become accustomed to fighting and controlling his emotions, which provided him an advantage in learning the sport of boxing. Second, the neighborhood was host to a myriad of boxing gymnasiums that provided Macías with the opportunity to learn how to further discipline his body. Third, Tepito provided an anchor to Macías' meteoric rise through Mexican society making his life story more phenomenal, yet still relatable to non-elite Mexicans. In essence, Raúl Macías became a national sport celebrity not *despite*, but *because of*, his *Tepiteño* roots.

Self-discipline and the ability to use violence in a controlled manner contributed greatly to a boxer's success. They were the by-products of his connections to Tepito. Loïc Wacquant asserts the boxing gymnasium serves as "an island of order and virtue," that has a "*double relation of symbiosis and opposition* to the neighborhood and the grim realities of the ghetto."¹⁰ It is true that Macías developed the body in this space that would make him a paragon of responsibility and modernity in Mexico. Macías, however, was not a blank slate when he entered the gymnasium. As Michael Messner attests, "young boys bring an already gendered identity to their first sports experiences."¹¹ Tepito helped instill in Macías the emotional self-discipline necessary for boxing long before he entered a gymnasium. Thus, Macías forged the discipline of growing up in a poor and violent neighborhood with the discipline of regimental boxing training to achieve success in the ring and thus be exalted by the mass media as a glowing example for Mexico's youth.

¹⁰ Loïc Wacquant, 17. Emphasis in the original.

¹¹ Michael Messner, "Masculinities and Athletic Careers," *Gender and Society* 3, 1 (1989): 75.

Tepito continued to impact Macías once he became a celebrity. It provided a foundation that made his life story accessible to many Mexicans. Boxers' clear humble origins have made them idols in several cultural contexts. For example, Okinawan boxer Gushiken Yoko (the world light flyweight champion from 1976 to 1981) became a Japanese sporting celebrity and embraced his Okinawan roots, even though the island of Okinawa, much like the neighborhood of Tepito, was considered backward and an impediment to national progress.¹² Macías' situation is similar to that of Gushiken, as he maintained his connections to Tepito throughout his boxing career and beyond. He continued to live in the neighborhood despite his newfound wealth and clearly rooted his identity with the neighborhood. Tepito provided an anchor for his life story, one that accentuated his steep rise up the social ladder of Mexican society and reinforced his image as a 'normal' Mexican.

Tepito: The *Barrio Bravo*

Raúl Macías was born in Tepito on July 28, 1934, the seventh of thirteen children. His family had moved there from the provincial city of León, Guanajuato shortly before his birth. Macías' father worked as a cobbler and his mother as a housewife. Reflecting on his childhood, Macías remembered being a cooperative student, but one who engaged in fights at recess with bullies who had physically abused smaller students or had stolen money or food from them.¹³ Macías, like many Mexican boxers, did not deny that he had engaged in violence as a child, but provided a rationale for it. In fact, no matter how

¹² Dennis J. Frost, *Seeing Stars: Sports Celebrity, Identity, and Body Culture in Modern Japan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 192.

¹³ José Ramón Garmabella, *Grandes Leyendas del Boxeo* (Mexico City: Debolsillo, 2009), 42-43.

cooperative Macías was or claimed to be, it would have been difficult for him to avoid violence or confrontations growing up in Tepito.

Of the many neighborhoods of Mexico City, Tepito stands out for its reputation as a center of crime and vice. The people of Tepito, also known as *Tepiteños*, have long earned a reputation for being prideful, resourceful, and, at times, confrontational. This reputation dates back to the colonial era, when the barrio was known as a haven for indigenous and other marginalized peoples within Mexico City. Tepito has earned its rather notorious reputation partly because it is adjacent to the richer center of the city. Whereas most of the poor barrios of Mexico City were successfully pushed to the peripheries during the course of the Porfiriato and the twentieth century, Tepito remained. Its cluttered streets and second-hand goods acted as constant reminders to Mexican elites of their inability to construct a perfectly designed, modern city free of such nuisances as dirt and beggars.¹⁴ These attitudes had existed since the Porfiriato, when elites perceived the modern city as proof of a nation's greatness. Not only was the "ideal city" supposed to manifest economic advancement and cultural achievement, it was also to display cleanliness, comfort, and beauty."¹⁵ Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, Tepito served as a focal point for Mexican journalists looking to underscore the problems of Mexico City.

In a 1952 exposé for magazine *Mañana*, writer Antonio Ibarra expressed utter repulsion at the sights and sounds of Tepito, characterizing the Barrio Bravo as "the leper of the city," "the hell of Mexico City," and the "barrio of skinny cats and sad dogs."¹⁶

¹⁴ Ernesto Aréchiga Córdoba, "De los miserables a los nietos de Sánchez: Una brevísim historia de Tepito," *Cultura Urbana*, 12 (2006): 4-8.

¹⁵ Mauricio Tenorio Trillo, "1910 Mexico City: Space and Nation in the City of the Centenario," *Journal of Latin American Studies*, 28, 1 (1996): 79.

¹⁶ Antonio Ibarra, "¡BARRIO MALDITO!" *Mañana*, 5 January 1952, 55.

Tepito was “damned and condemned to always be miserable,” as Ibarra painted a picture where most Tepiteños were, understandably, “under the influence of alcohol and drugs.”¹⁷ Butchers in Tepito’s market supposedly allowed “hundreds of flies” to sit on their meat and merely rinsed off meat that had fallen to the ground before serving it to customers. The children were maltreated, anemic, and filled with parasites in this neighborhood that, despite the silence of its residents, screamed for the help and intervention from the more fortunate sectors of Mexican society.¹⁸

Other writers expressed revulsion at the dirt and grime that supposedly proliferated Tepito’s streets and covered the bodies of its inhabitants. Enrique De Llano of weekly magazine *Jueves de Excelsior* wrote that, wherever one looked in Tepito, there was nothing to see aside from “sadness, misery, pain, desecration, and forgotten people.”¹⁹ According to De Llano, “The market of Tepito is the market of sadness,” and he invoked images of helpless, damned people with no alternative other than to live a hapless and joyless existence under the grimy confines of the market of Tepito. Even the title of the piece, “TEPITO: Market of Pain!” summons the misery of the Tepiteño condition as the most defining characteristic of life within the gritty neighborhood. What De Llano’s depiction also makes apparent is the static nature and permanence of this squalor, as he offers no suggestions to cure Tepito’s problems nor does he provide any context as to how conditions in Tepito have changed, for better or for worse.

Similarly, an exposé for daily sports newspaper *ESTO* called Tepito a “shop window of human misery,” a condition it traced to two causes, flooding and, “our old

¹⁷ Ibid., 55-56.

¹⁸ Ibid., 57.

¹⁹ Enrique De Llano, “TEPITO: Mercado del dolor!” *Jueves del Excelsior*, 4 February 1943, 30.

endemic disease,” laziness.²⁰ The article depicted Tepito as a place filled with “unhappy inhabitants” who would benefit materially from a beautification project that supposedly would improve the neighborhood’s resistance to massive flooding. The article admitted that decent people lived in the barrio, but portrayed them as helpless to the onslaught of vice and crime that plagued the neighborhood. The theme of a poor underclass too powerless and inept to help themselves permeates much of the literature written about Tepito during this time. Such articles implicitly called upon the Mexican state to act on behalf of the poor and downtrodden.

Another theme that emerges from these exposés is the singularity of Tepito within Mexican society. To a certain degree, this portrayal of singularity reflected reality. Tepito stood out precisely because it was the poor neighborhood near the city’s center, and thus within eyesight of middle-class and elite Mexicans. In 1953, *Jueves de Excelsior* published another report on Tepito that asserted both its uniqueness and universality: “In all the great cities there always exists a neighborhood that produces the impression of wanting to segregate itself, like an ‘island’ in the middle of progress, civilization, and improvement.”²¹ Apparently, every great metropolis had a neighborhood like Tepito, which was host to a small world “of illegal activities, of clandestine commerce, narcotics, and of the enemies of hygiene, culture, and society.” The people who partook in these affairs were “craving to be forgotten by God” and abounded in Tepito in far greater numbers than in other areas of Mexico City.²²

²⁰ “La Tragedia del México Inundado: TEPITO, Escaparate del Miseria Humana,” *ESTO*, 13 June 1952, 18.

²¹ J.O., “Tepito, la Corte de los Milagros,” *Jueves de Excelsior*, 17 December 1953, 26.

²² *Ibid.*, 27.

Mexican journalists' characterizations of Tepito as a land foreign to the rest of Mexico City recalls the reporting of British journalists and writers of the early industrial era, who often compared the inhabitants of slums to the inhabitants of the "heathen" lands that composed the British empire.²³ Thus, the burden for middle-class and elite Englishmen to reform and 'civilize' applied to people living within the nation as well as to those outside it. It is important to note that middle-class and elite *capitalinos* viewed their city as an island in a sea of backwardness. It should come as little surprise that Tepito, a neighborhood primarily composed of rural migrants from the 'backwards' provinces, attracted such negative attention. *Capitalinos* simply transferred their distrust and disgust of provincial Mexico onto the much closer barrio.

In the 1950s Ernesto Uruchurtu, harnessed this capitalino fixation with delinquency and immorality to cement his political power within the city.²⁴ He closed down cabaret clubs and supported the construction of several parks and sporting complexes around Mexico City. Beautification was an important aspect of his political philosophy, one that sought to return Mexico City to its glory days when it had earned the moniker, "the City of Palaces." One of the most extensive reforms undertaken by the Uruchurtu administration was the remodeling of the markets in the Mexico City neighborhoods of La Merced and Tepito.²⁵ The project's aim was to clean up and

²³ Susan Thorne, "'The Conversion of Englishmen and the Conversion of the World Inseparable': Missionary Imperialism and the Language of Class in Early Industrial Britain," in Frederick Cooper and Ann Laura Stoler, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), 238-262.

²⁴ The fixation with delinquency and immorality was hardly new. As Pablo Piccato notes, "Throughout the early decades of the twentieth century, the better-off considered criminality to be the social issue of greatest concern." Pablo Piccato, *City of Suspects*, 2.

²⁵ Villareal, 234.

modernize these areas in order to make them safer and more palatable to the middle and elite classes.

In October of 1957, the Mexican federal government inaugurated the remodeled market of Tepito. PRI representative Roberto Herrera León celebrated the transformation of these markets from unhealthy and uncomfortable stalls “into something hygienic, into something comfortable.” The beneficiaries of these projects were a group of people “that works, that has absolute confidence and faith in the current regime,” who received help from a government asserting “its mystique of patriotism, of being faithful to the people, and of honor.” Herrera León claimed that the remodeling projects were “examples” that the Revolution continued completing one of its principal postulates: “SOCIAL JUSTICE!!!”²⁶ Although the federal government did not directly finance these projects – it was the Uruchurtu administration that provided the impetus for them – it did step in for the inauguration ceremony to remind constituents how the PRI had positively impacted their lives.

Antonio Ibarra of *Mañana* celebrated the reforms as an opportunity for Tepito to break from its filthy and vice-ridden past. In a neighborhood where thieves would have their tools blessed by priests, residents could now put on “a cleaner face, that until today we did not know.”²⁷ *La Crítica* commented that Tepito was to be “replaced by various modern markets that are the final word in technology, organization, cleanliness and architecture” and insisted that Tepito would be “erased from the map of this city.”²⁸

²⁶ Archivo General de la Nación, Fondo Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, 418.5/99, “XLIII LEGISLATURA AL CONGRESO DE LA UNIÓN: Palabras del C. Diputado Roberto Herrera León en la Inauguración de los Mercados del Segundo Distrito del D.F., el 14 de Octubre de 1957.” Emphasis in the original.

²⁷ Ibarra, “ADIOS A TEPITO,” *Mañana*, 5 October 1957, 39.

²⁸ “En TEPITO ¡ADIOS TEPITO!” *La Crítica*, 1 September 1957, 10.

What both articles draw upon is the feeling that Tepito represented the backwards and traditional Mexico of the past, and would soon be eliminated once modernization reached all sectors of Mexico. Absent is any sentiment that Tepito was a byproduct of modernization, of people marginalized by the very processes that were intended to uplift Mexico from the abyss of its backward past, a past that had prevented the nation from maximizing its potential.

Despite the wishes of Mexican journalists, Tepito remained the source of black market merchandise for residents of Mexico City. However, this fact did not prevent promoters of urban modernization from celebrating the drastic improvements that Tepito had undergone. An article in *Criminalia*, the professional journal for Mexican criminologists, characterized the era between 1935 and 1948 -- the years of Macías' youth -- as the "golden era" of crime in Tepito.²⁹ The author credited the drop of crime in Tepito to modernization, asserting, "asphalt and urbanism reduced the rigor of this crime zone." In the magazine *Sucesos para todos*, journalist Gabriel Pereyra characterized the years 1930 to 1955 as the golden age of crime in Tepito. During this time, Tepito had two zones of prostitution that were "so interesting for the anthropologist [possibly a reference to Oscar Lewis] or the tourist and so painful for the Mexican."³⁰ Pereyra observed that Tepito was increasingly deteriorating before the government intervened in the late 1950s by asserting that, prior to government intervention, the prostitutes in Tepito were becoming younger and younger. Apparently, in the 1930s many prostitutes were thirty to thirty-five years of age. In the 1940s there were many twenty to twenty-five year olds. In

²⁹ David García Estrada, "TEPITO," *Criminalia*, 31 July 1966, 380.

³⁰ Gabriel Pereyra, "TEPITO: HERMOSA LEYENDA, TERRIBLE REALIDAD," *Sucesos para todos*, 26 July 1969, 38.

the years right before the reform of the market, fifteen to eighteen-year-old girls proliferated the streets of Tepito as prostitutes. According to Pereyra, “For many, Tepito lost its flavor, its tradition that signified filth, ignorance, and all that characterizes the poor neighborhoods of the city.”³¹ These depictions of Tepito provide insight into how some Mexicans believed that their nation’s past, and the behaviors associated with this past, had held the nation back. Mexican journalists negatively associated tradition in Tepito, not with charros, mariachi music, and the Virgin of Guadalupe, but with filth and vice. Despite proclamations of Tepito’s death as a marketplace for stolen and second-hand goods, the market continued. In the late 1970s, the López Portillo administration attempted to reform the Tepito market, but to little avail.³² The market still exists, largely supported by the sale of bootleg DVDs.

Throughout Mexico City’s history, working-class and poor residents have failed to garner the respect of middle and upper class Mexicans. These attitudes extend back to the Porfiriato and even before to the colonial era. According to James Alex Garza, Porfirian elites in Mexico City believed that the urban lower classes were incapable of possessing honor.³³ This helps to explain in some part the hapless portrayal of Tepiteños, whether they were hard working, productive members of society or lazy criminals. Journalists’ presentation of the urban poor lacking agency may have stemmed from the notion that the urban poor lacked honor. Despite these depictions, the research of Pablo Piccato on nineteenth century Mexico has shown that lower-class urban Mexicans were

³¹ Ibid.

³² Alan Riding, “Mexico City Slum is Shopping Area for Contraband,” *New York Times*, 20 November 1977, 8.

³³ Garza, *The Imagined Underworld*.

very contentious and concerned about their claims to honor, regardless of what elites believed.³⁴ In this regard, boxing could have served as one potential outlet for young boys from Tepito to garner respect from the upper strata of Mexican society.

Another challenge to the honor of young male Tepiteños would have come from their peers and neighbors. Conflicts over women and personal and family honor often pitted young men in physical encounters with their peers. In fact, Tepito is probably just as famous for the aggressiveness of its people as it is for crime and its second hand market. Intense pride and a need to protect the honor that few thought they possessed made many Tepiteños quick to resort to fighting in order to settle their problems. Oscar Lewis' *Children of Sanchez*, an autobiography of a Mexican family living in Tepito in the 1950s, reveals several motivations for street fighting and the sentiments associated with these physical confrontations. The Sánchez children were not professional boxers, but they grew up in Tepito in the late 1930s, 1940, and 1950s, roughly the same time that Ratón Macías came of age in the neighborhood. In the late 1950s and early 1960s Lewis described the neighborhood as “a poor area with a few small factories and warehouses, public baths, run down third-class movie theaters, over-crowded schools, saloons, *pulquerías*... and many small shops.”³⁵ Reactionary Mexican nationalists took umbrage with Lewis' depiction of Tepito, claiming, “that the poor were less uncouth, the police less brutal, and the government less corrupt than Lewis had suggested.”³⁶ These critics

³⁴ Piccato, *The Tyranny of Opinion: Honor in the Construction of the Mexican Public Sphere* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 188-219.

³⁵ Oscar Lewis, *Children of Sanchez: Autobiography of a Mexican Family* (New York: Random House, 1961), xiii.

³⁶ Karin Alejandra Rosemblatt, “Other Americas: Transnationalism, Scholarship and the Culture of Poverty in Mexican and the United States,” *Hispanic American Historical Review*, 89, 4 (2009): 619.

believed that the book did irreparable harm to the Mexican national economy and to Mexico's image abroad, thus apparently damaging the prospects of Mexico's tourist industry and its hosting of the 1968 Summer Olympics. Despite these conservative anti-imperialist critiques and leftist critiques of the plausibility of his culture of poverty thesis, Lewis' interviews with the Sanchez family provide us with valuable insight in Tepiteño life from the 1930s to the 1950s.

As contemporaries of Macías, the Sánchez family and their testimonies provide a window into what Macías' childhood in Tepito was like. The recollections of the oldest of the Sánchez children, Manuel, reflect the need to defend honor on multiple levels. Manuel's most important childhood memories included a recollection of a fight with a class bully, Bustos, who beat upon smaller children with great frequency. One day, Manuel took umbrage with how Bustos was talking to him and, when the bully asked Manuel if he was a tough guy, Manuel remembered responding, "I'm not so tough but if you think you've got as much guts as I just because you're a big shot here, you're making a mistake, pal. I'm from Tepito and we don't take any crap from anybody." According to Manuel, he socked Bustos in the nose, bloodying the bully's face and asserted his toughness among his peers: "After that none of the boys ever bothered me because, even though I was short, I was strong and had powerful arms."³⁷ Manuel's story reveals the importance for young men in Tepito to know how to defend themselves to gain the respect of their peers. Regardless of whether or not the details are accurate, it is important to note that winning fights over bigger, stronger opponents served an important

³⁷ Lewis, 31.

role in Manuel's masculine identity formation and continued to be a vivid memory for him.

Manuel also fought to defend the honor of his siblings. When the Sánchez family moved to a new building within Tepito, Manuel would have to prove his toughness to the adolescent residents of the complex. He recalled one episode where one of the building's residents, called "Donkey" for his large genitalia, attacked Manuel's younger brother, Roberto: "One day he knocked a tooth out of my brother's mouth and that was when I took him on. The Donkey and I had a wonderful fight. ... After that we became close friends, closer than I was with my own brother..."³⁸ Manuel won the fight, but not before the Donkey bit him. His recollections stress both the honor in defending one's family as well as the honor in fighting. Manuel and Donkey gained a mutual respect for each other by refusing to back down from a fight. In many ways this reflects similar attitudes among duelers in Europe, the United States, and Mexico. For many duelers, mere participation mattered more than the result – it signified equality among peers.³⁹

At first glance, it may appear that violence described by Manuel Sanchez stemmed from outbursts of emotion over inane notions of person and familial honor. But as Manuel explained, fighting neighbors and friends actually required tremendous self-control: "I have learned to hide my fear and to show only courage because from what I

³⁸ Ibid., 36.

³⁹ For example, Robert Nye, discussing dueling in modern France, notes: "A world that recognized, at least in theory, no social boundaries in an activity once reserved for a narrow elite was a male social universe of perfect individualism and equality. Male societies governed by honor codes have always possessed this egalitarian potential." Robert A. Nye, *Masculinity and Male Codes of Honor in Modern France* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 167. For dueling in Mexico, see Piccato, "Politics and the Technology of Honor." For dueling among lower-class men in the U.S. South in the nineteenth century, see Gorn, "Gouge and Bite, Pull Hair and Scratch: The Significance of Fighting in the Southern Backcountry," *American Historical Review* 90, 1 (1985), 18-43.

have observed, a person is treated according to the impression he makes. That's why when I am really very afraid inside, outwardly I am calm ... If a guy shows weakness and has tears in his eyes, and begs for mercy, that is when others pile on him. In my neighborhood, you are either a *picudo*, a tough guy, or a *pendejo*, a fool."⁴⁰ This statement suggests that violence was not necessarily the first instinct for Manuel when faced with a physical confrontation, but rather a learned response that helped limit confrontations rather than increase them. Thus, fist fighting allowed Manuel, as a child and adolescent, to gain and maintain personal honor and respect, despite several challenges from Tepito residents.

In his memories, Manuel asserts his agency in fighting with neighbors and friends. The memories of his younger brother Roberto, in contrast, stress the inevitability of fighting and present the younger Sánchez brother as a victim of circumstance. According to Roberto, when the family moved to a new building, the rule amongst the young male residents was "new tenant... new fight." He described the ordeal of a new resident as follows: "Anyone who saw me in the courtyard could hit, pinch, or throw stones at me. If I was carrying something from the store, they would knock it down, and then I would get punished again at home. And so, as the amount of pain the human body can stand has its limit, so patience has its limits, and you can find yourself obliged to fight."⁴¹ Roberto expressed an initial reluctance to engage in fighting, but soon began to enjoy the feelings of self-reliance: "I began to like fighting. I didn't go complaining when they hit me, but would tangle with anybody immediately. Thus, I relieved my

⁴⁰ Lewis, 38.

⁴¹ Ibid., 72.

brother of the responsibility of having to fight for me. Actually, I never wanted to fight with anybody, but they kept looking for it. I had to defend myself and continued to do so all my life.” Engaging in fights not only allowed Roberto to relieve his older brother Manuel of familial duties, but also to defend the honor of his younger sisters from overly aggressive admirers.

Roberto’s testimony betrayed a general lack of confidence and feelings of underappreciation: “I don’t know why, but I have always felt less than a nobody. Never in my life did I feel that there was anyone who paid attention to me. I have been sneered at... belittled. I always wanted to be something in life, to do whatever I felt like and not have to take orders from anyone.”⁴² As Roberto wandered through several meaningless jobs, briefly served in the Mexican military, and even immigrated to the United States, he found joy and feelings of competence in physical activities: “what I’ve always liked best, what I’ve enjoyed more than anything else, are sports. The happiest moments of my life were when I was swimming, or bicycling or hunting, because, how shall I put it? I feel like I’m somebody, that I amount to something.”⁴³

While fighting was not the monopoly of men in Tepito – Manuel and Roberto’s youngest sister, Marta, recollected fighting with men and with women, usually over boyfriends – most fights usually involved men, in some degree defending or asserting their toughness and honor. Both Manuel and Roberto discussed fighting with a sense of casualness that suggests that in poorer neighborhoods like Tepito, there was little shock value in fighting. Considering that sports provided an outlet for young Tepiteño men to

⁴² Ibid., 67.

⁴³ Ibid., 216-217.

feel positive about themselves, it might provide some insight into the attraction of a violent sport like boxing to a young man. Given this context, boxing gymnasiums, then, could prove crucial in creation of masculine identities in a lower-class urban neighborhood like Tepito.

The Boxing Gymnasium

In searching for the relationship between boxing and Tepiteño identity, one need not look further than the Tepito stop on the “B” line of the Mexico City Metro. Constructed in 1999, its symbol is a boxing glove, the exact same symbol used for the boxing events in the 1968 Mexico City Olympics. The walls of the Metro stop are covered with mosaics of anonymous boxers facing off against each other. Tepito is almost always the first neighborhood that springs up when discussing boxing in Mexico, and its significance to boxing dates back to 1930s. Not only have several residents of Tepito become world-class boxers, several young men from surrounding neighborhoods have frequented Tepito’s numerous gyms in order to chase their dreams.

Raúl Macías was a fan of boxing since his early childhood. Two of his older brothers had been amateur boxers and he regularly attended boxing matches and idolized his fellow Tepiteño, Kid Azteca, from whom he learned “of the damage that success can cause to one who receives it with being prepared to endure it.”⁴⁴ Ratón Macías began training as a boxer at the age of eleven, at the Baños Gloria en Tepito. The magazine *ARENA... DE BOX Y LUCHA* once characterized the Baños Gloria, which was founded in 1926, as “the ‘*kindergarten*,’ where the inexperienced learn the ABC’s of pugilism.”⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Quoted in Cristina Pacheco, *Los dueños de la noche* (Mexico City: Plaza y Janés, 2001), 243.

⁴⁵ “LOS BAÑOS GLORIA: VENERO INAGOTABLE DEL BOXEO,” *ARENA... DE BOX Y LUCHA*, 27 May 1961, 12.

Although not as famous as the Baños Jordán, the Baños Isla, and the Baños Avenida, the Gloria served an important function by preparing novice boxers from Tepito for the competitive world of professional pugilism. Charging only one peso (US\$.08) for the right to use the gymnasium and the baths, the Gloria was a place where “the humble boxer, who looks to boxing as a way to escape poverty,” could go “to initiate his career... or lose the illusion.”⁴⁶

Proponents of boxing often contend that the sport has had a significant and positive impact on young boys in the process of becoming men. For instance, a boxing magazine celebrated the dramatic transformation of boxer Emilio de la Rosa with the byline: “They Said He was a ‘*Maricón*’ and He Became a Boxer.” De la Rosa, whose real last names were Díaz Urbina, grew up in Tepito, where he had been born in 1928. At the age of twelve, de la Rosa was following around his father all the time and avoiding playing with the neighborhood boys that were of similar age. In response, the boys began questioning his sexuality and donned him “La Rosa” (“The Rose”). Fed up with taunts, de la Rosa began training at a boxing gymnasium with one of his neighbors. Eventually, de la Rosa discovered that he had punching power and he soon began a successful career as a professional pugilist, even adopting the nickname that was designed to emasculate him.⁴⁷ The article gives a strong impression that there is a perfect correlation between heterosexuality and boxing. Clearly, in the minds of the author of the article, de la Rosa proved that he was not effeminate because he became a successful boxer. Such was the power of boxing in asserting one’s manliness within this context.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 13.

⁴⁷ “EMILIO DE LA ROSA: DECIAN QUE ERA “MARICON” Y SE HIZO BOXEADOR,” *ARENA... DE BOX Y LUCHA*, 6 May 1961, 8.

It was in the gymnasium where young men like Ratón Macías could cultivate their natural talents and become well trained, disciplined boxers. The most important aspects of the sports, such as the ability to endure pain, are learned behaviors that are gradually improved through highly regimented training techniques. On a superficial level, it may appear that these highly regulated training techniques would have given men from the middle and upper classes, who preached the benefits of self-moderation and self-control, an advantage over the lower-class men who supposedly grew up in chaotic and vice-ridden environs. If we remember the words of Manuel Sánchez, however, in a neighborhood like Tepito it was necessary to learn how to control one's fear, and to never allow adversaries to know whether or not one was actually afraid. A similar quality was necessary in boxing. According to Cus D'Amato, trainer of world heavyweight champions Floyd Patterson and Mike Tyson, "the fighter has mastered his emotions to the extent that he can conceal and control them... fear is an asset to a fighter. It makes him more faster [sic], be quicker and more alert. Heroes and cowards feel exactly the same fear. Heroes just react to it differently."⁴⁸ Thus, boxing not only requires physical control but also emotional control, a practice with which young men from neighborhoods like Tepito had plenty of experience.

Mexican trainer and boxing bureaucrat Ramón G. Velázquez spoke to the same sentiments as D'Amato and Manuel Sánchez. In his manual for beginning boxers, Velázquez stressed that there was no greater error for a boxer to make than to show exhaustion or pain in his facial expression. Doing so would almost certainly lead his

⁴⁸ Thomas Hauser, *The Black Lights: Inside the World of Professional Boxing* (New York: Fireside, 1991 [1986]), 19-20.

opponent to attack at once and try to finish the fight. According to Velázquez, control of the facial muscles was a key feature of defense and a talent that also could “be applied to practical life.”⁴⁹ People who could not control their facial expressions would be more vulnerable in their professional relationships. Velázquez asserted, “Indisputably, the man that can control his emotions and not reveal in his facial expression what he thinks or feels, has a great advantage in life and that is cultivated to a great extent by boxing.”⁵⁰ Velázquez’s sentiments echoed Octavio Paz’s observations about Mexican men and the masks they wear in public. According to Paz, in Mexico, “the ideal of manliness is never to ‘crack,’ never to back down. Those who ‘open themselves up’ are cowards.”⁵¹ Paz insisted that, as a people, Mexicans admired “fortitude in the face of adversity more than the most brilliant triumph.”⁵² Thus, Paz’s observations may help to explain why Velázquez associated the ability to control one’s emotions with personal success in Mexico.

In order to attain this physical, mental, and emotional control, boxers had to undergo, and still undergo, a rigorous training regimen on a daily basis. In 1973, world bantamweight (118 lbs.) champion Rafael Herrera discussed his training schedule with magazine *Ring Mundial*. Herrera described a regimen where he woke up every day at six in the morning to run for an hour. After a break, he ate breakfast at nine in the morning, consisting of “orange or grapefruit juice, toast, coffee with milk, butter, a raw or hard-

⁴⁹ Archivo Municipal de Guadalajara, Fondo Box, (Hereafter AMG-Box) Caja 1, Expediente 46, Ramón G. Velázquez, *ESCUELA DE BOXEO: PRIMER AÑO: Apuntes de las clases impartidas a los Socios del Club Deportiva Hacienda*, [n.d.], 3-4.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁵¹ Paz, 29-30.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 31.

boiled egg, and a vegetable salad,” along with whatever fruit he wanted to eat.⁵³ Herrera then went to the gymnasium at noon, warming up his muscles with ten minutes of shadow boxing. Afterwards, he entered the ring and sparred for either two or four rounds, depending on the intensity of the training session. Then Herrera practiced on the speed bag, the double-end bag, and finished his workout by doing sit-ups on a wooden table. After his workout, Herrera would return home and sleep for a while. When he awoke, he would eat large meal consisting of “a grilled fillet with the fat trimmed, salad, beef consommé, orange juice, toast with butter, and many fruits,” and occasionally a raw or hard-boiled egg.⁵⁴ Sometimes a doctor would inject Herrera with vitamins. In the evening, Herrera took a walk and ate fruit for his final meal before falling asleep. He then would repeat the same schedule the following day, a habit that he would continue for weeks and at times months while preparing for a boxing match.

Carlos Zárate, the World Boxing Council’s Bantamweight champion from 1976 to 1979, practiced a similarly disciplined schedule. Zárate woke up everyday at 4:30 am to run ten kilometers in fifty minutes, then ate a breakfast consisting of eggs, ham, milk, and toast with honey before resting for the duration of the morning. In the afternoon, starting at one p.m., he would train. After eating a large meal that included beef and salad and excluded bread and tortillas, Zárate would go to sleep at eight p.m. This was a daily routine for Zárate, with the only changes occurring every third day, when he would be injected with two cubic centimeters of vitamins.⁵⁵ Former world bantamweight champion

⁵³ “¡Vale la Pena Ser Campeón! Rafael Herrera ha Ganado Cuarenta y Ocho mil Pesos por Round!” *Ring Mundial*, 2 December 1973, 4.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁵⁵ Fonoteca Nacional, “Box Carlos Zárate/Entrevista,” Televisa Radio (Mexico City: XEW, [n.d. - 1977 or 1978?]).

Rubén Olivares insisted that he followed a similar regimen, but only when he was training for a fight. Olivares also insisted that that he was only eating meat and vegetables, which reflects the gastronomic sacrifices that boxers had to make as well.⁵⁶ Traditional foods such as tacos, enchiladas, and *chilaquiles*, while delicious, provided too many calories and too few nutrients for world-class athletes aiming to maintain a strict weight limit.

Macías followed a similarly disciplined schedule. After his time at the Baños Gloria, Macías left to train at the Baños Jordán, under the tutelage of Pepe Hernández and Adolfo “Negro” Pérez. Later in his professional career, Macías would train at the Baños Avenida with one of the “big three” Mexican trainers, Pancho Rosales. In an interview from 1981, Macías discussed the tremendous discipline that a boxer’s life entailed. Every morning he would wake up and run in the Desierto de los Leones National Park on the outskirts of Mexico City. He would then eat a breakfast consisting of a pair of hard-boiled eggs, toast, and coffee. At midday, after he finished his training session, he would eat 100 grams of beef, hard-boiled eggs, salad and tea. At night, Macías would go out dancing, as it had always been his passion. In fact, Macías considered dancing to be an important aspect of his training schedule, as it gave him agility and allowed him to keep his weight down. Along with playing *frontón*, which is similar to the Basque sport of *jai alai*, dance provided Macías with a way to relieve the stress associated with boxing.⁵⁷

The bodily discipline and emotional control was necessary for boxers like Zárate, Herrera, and Macías, but so was mental acuity. Joyce Carol Oates argues that boxing

⁵⁶ Fonoteca Nacional, “Entrevista a Rubén Olivares,” Televisa Radio (Mexico City: XEW, [n.d. - October 1978?]).

⁵⁷ Pacheco, 245-246.

requires such a rational and calculated performance that, at its elite echelon, it sometimes “bears more relationship to a shrewdly cerebral contest like chess than to anything like street fighting.”⁵⁸ One can gather the complexity of boxing strategy from the beginner’s manual designed by Ramón G. Velázquez. Velázquez, one of the first boxing trainers in Mexico, instructed boxing at the Club Deportiva Hacienda in Mexico from the 1920s to the 1970s. One of the original members of the Federal District Boxing Commission, Velázquez served as the international coordinator of the U.S.-based National Boxing Association (NBA) and its later incarnation, the World Boxing Association (WBA) in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Later, he would become the first Secretary of the Mexico City-based World Boxing Council in 1963 before becoming President of the organization from 1971 to 1975. From the early 1920s to the mid 1970s, Velázquez more consistently influenced boxing in Mexico City and Mexico than any other person.

Velázquez’s guide on boxing training served as an introduction to pugilistic novices. “*El Profesor*,” as he was often called in the Mexican press, offered boxing instruction that emphasized self-defense and downplayed the more violent aspects of the sport. Because it is impossible to cover the entire body, Velázquez offered four different types of defensive stances, each with its strong points and weaknesses. Each defense was designed for the orthodox boxing stance, where the boxer placed his left foot in front and right foot behind. With the first defense, the boxer held his left hand high to protect the left side of the face and left side of the torso and crossed his right arm to protect the center of the body. While this defense covered the left side and middle of the body, the

⁵⁸ Oates, “The Mystery of the Ring.”

right side remained vulnerable to opponents' left hooks to the head. In the second defense, the boxer protected his head with both hands and kept his elbows to his body. This defensive stance protected the head and sides of the body very effectively, but made the boxer susceptible to shots to the front of the body. The third and fourth defensive stances resembled the first stance, with slight modifications (in terms of the position of the hands and feet) to improve the boxer's ability to counterpunch in one case and improve the boxer's ability to attack in the other.⁵⁹ What defense the boxer employed depended on his own personal strengths and weaknesses as well as those of his opponent.

Velázquez's guide also instructed the novice to the variety of punches a boxer could employ when attacking his opponent. The guide taught punches such as the jab, a straight overhand punch thrown with the lead hand (left hand for an orthodox fighter, right hand for a left-handed fighter), designed to either prevent the opponent from attacking or to place the opponent on the defensive before attacking. Velázquez's guide also taught how to throw power punches, which were thrown with greater intensity and strength than the quick and snapping jab. Power punches included straight punches, hooks, swings, and uppercuts. For an orthodox boxer, the left hook, which is thrown from the side of the body at a ninety-degree angle, is a valuable tool for both boxing at a distance and for infighting (fighting at a close range). The swing is like the hook, but with the arm fully extended instead of being bent; the swing is a very strong punch, but very susceptible to counterpunches. Uppercuts, a hook-like punch thrown in an upward

⁵⁹ AMG-Box, Velázquez, 3-6.

direction from the attacker's stomach, are more useful in close range, and can be aimed at the opponent's chin or solar plexus.⁶⁰

Velázquez's guide also taught basic strategies for the novice boxer to use within the ring. These included faking, drawing, and clinching. Fake punches allow the attacking boxer to know if his opponent is actually protecting his body or was waiting for the attacking boxer to punch and thus expose himself to the opponent's counter attack. Drawing means setting a trap for the opponent, faking a defense stance in order to counter attack the opponent. Finally, clinching is a way of holding the opponent when the boxer has been hurt significantly by the opponent's punch. The boxer locks up the opponent's arms from the outside to prevent the opponent from punching again, at least until the referee breaks the clinch.⁶¹ From Velázquez's pamphlet, we gain a preliminary understanding of the complexity of the sport of boxing, where physical and emotional control provided the basis that enabled young men from neighborhoods like Tepito and Tacubaya to partake in a highly strategized sporting activity that often required several split-second decisions that could greatly impact the outcome of the fight. Although several of these decisions may appear to be based on instinct, they are actually heavily practiced and learned behaviors. The boxer draws upon this body of knowledge in the midst of fighting.

One of the great Mexican innovations to the boxing body of knowledge has been the so-called "Mexican Liver Punch." In Spanish, it is called "el gancho al hígado" ("the hook to the liver"). A potent punch, the liver punch is a left hook to the right side of the

⁶⁰ Ibid., 6-11.

⁶¹ Ibid., 11-13.

opponent's body, toward the back and under the rib cage. When the punch lands correctly on its intended target - the liver - the opponent is incapacitated for ten to fifteen seconds, often leading to his being counted out. In the last ten years to fifteen years North American boxers such as Bernard Hopkins and Micky Ward have employed the liver punch in their arsenal after having watched Mexican boxers. Within Mexico, Kid Azteca of Tepito is credited with popularizing the punch. Ironically, Azteca learned the punch from an American, Tommy White, who frequently fought in Mexico in the 1930s. Azteca maintained that he learned, practiced, and continued to use the punch after receiving positive feedback from Mexican audiences.⁶² Thus, Mexican boxers and trainers have been active participants in the transnational exchange of pugilistic knowledge and techniques since the arrival of the sport in the nineteenth century.

A successful transition to the world of professional prizefighting also requires the ability to manage finances. Ratón Macías benefited from the patronage of don Luis Andrade, a well-off businessman who provided him with employment in his office and even housed the boxer in his "comfortable and beautiful" house in the wealthy Mexico City neighborhood of Lomas de Chapultepec. For a boxer to have a patron was unusual; the practice was far more common among bullfighters than among pugilists. Macías worked in the office of Andrade for about twenty to thirty pesos (anywhere from two to four dollars) a month, learning the finer details of stenography, accounting, and commerce. He also lived with Andrade for a short while in the comfort and luxury of *Las Lomas*, but Macías missed his friends and family in Tepito and eventually moved back.

⁶² Fonoteca Nacional, "Entrevista a Kid Azteca," Televisa Radio (Mexico City: XEW, 22 January 1980).

Fortunately for Macías, with the financial assistance of Andrade, his family could afford to accommodate his special diet. His mother took great care not to serve the boxer foods that could fatten him, such as beans, *pozole*, and tortillas.⁶³

This training occurred almost entirely without the direct aid of the Mexican federal government. In personal interviews, boxers such as Goyo Vargas Hernández, Goyo Vargas, and Gerardo García, all testified to the lack of support from the Mexican government for boxing and for amateur sports in general.⁶⁴ The amateur boxing program, under the direction of COM (Comité Olímpico Mexicano), was the target of strident criticism from Mexican boxing fans for its inability to produce world-class amateur boxers on a regular basis.⁶⁵ The COM-directed program was thought to have suffered from both corruption and incompetence. In one example, Lupe Pintor, who won multiple world championships in the late 1970s and early 1980s, remembered that his trainer recommended he enter the program, not for its excellence in training boxers, but for the diet it provided its participants. Pintor won the trials for his weight class for the right to participate in the 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich, but COM decided to place Pintor's opponent from the finals on the Mexican Olympic Team. According to Pintor, the committee justified its decision by noting that Pintor had just turned seventeen years old, whereas his opponent was close to thirty years old and therefore more mature. It probably did not help Pintor that his opponent was the brother of an Olympic gold

⁶³ Pacheco, 245.

⁶⁴ Gregorio Vargas, Sr., Interview with the author, May 21, 2011. Gregorio Vargas, Jr, Interview with the author, March 18, 2011. Gerardo García, Interview with the author, November 21, 2009.

⁶⁵ For example, see Felipe Flores, "LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: EL BOX AMATEUR NO EXISTE" *Ring Mundial*, 19 March 1967, 39; and Miguel Alatorre Ramírez, "QUIEN MERECE IR AL TOKIO DE ENTRENADOR?" *K.O. Semanario Deportivo*, 13 September 1964, 24.

medalist boxer from the 1968 Olympic team. Soon after the disappointment, Pintor left amateur boxing and embarked on a successful career in professional prizefighting.⁶⁶

Throughout his career, Ratón Macías was forced to rely on private channels to further his pugilistic skills. With the help of his trainers and Luis Andrade, he received enough support financially to pursue his goals as a professional prizefighter.

Public Spectacle and Celebrity

Prior to joining the professional ranks of boxing, Ratón Macías embarked on a successful amateur career in which he was undefeated against Mexican competition. His only defeats occurred in the Central American Games of 1950 and the Pan-American Games of 1951. By 1952, he qualified for the Mexican Olympic boxing team and traveled to Helsinki. Macías lost to a boxer from the Soviet Union in a controversial decision in the second round of the Olympic boxing tournament, but returned, much to his surprise, to a hero's welcome in Mexico City. Shortly after the Olympics, Macías turned professional and quickly earned victories in the bantamweight division. His first major test came against Mexican Fili Nava in 1954. When Macías emerged victorious against Nava, he established himself as a national figure. The highlight of Macías' career was his match against African –American boxer Nate Brooks at the Plaza México in Mexico City's Ciudad de Deportes (City of Sports) in September of 1954. Macías defeated Brooks in front of more than 50,000 enthusiastic spectators. In the process he won the North American bantamweight championship.

⁶⁶ Garmabella, 134-136.

The enthusiasm for the Macías match against Brooks is best explained by understanding the dearth of great Mexican boxers since the so-called “Golden Age” of the 1930s. Although Juan Zurita and Lauro Salas had both been undisputed world champions, in 1944 and 1952, respectively, neither proved capable of successfully defending his world titles. In the case of Zurita, he was world welterweight champion for less than one month. Salas held his title for four months. The only other idol to emerge in this time was Enrique Bolaños of Durango by way of Tepito, who became a top draw in Los Angeles in the late 1940s. Bolaños, though, never succeeded in his attempts to win a world championship. Furthermore, none of the three had fought an important match in Mexico City for a significant period of time, making the Macías -Brooks match a novelty to fans who had waited almost twenty years since the last significant boxing event held in the Mexican capital.

Mexican boxing fans had awaited the fight with great expectations. Bosses even sent their clerical workers to the box office to buy tickets one week before.⁶⁷ The day before the match, an advertisement for Corona beer appeared in several Mexico City newspapers and featured a drawing of an African-American man (clearly Nate Brooks) and a cartoon mouse (clearly Macías) in a boxing ring. The mouse is holding a beer and says, “One moment... I’m drinking my Corona.” Underneath the drawing is the following poem:

En un ambiente de arrebató
Frente a cien mil espectadores,
Un grito acalla los rumores,
Al exclamar: ¡Echenme al “gato” ...!

⁶⁷ “Arbitrariedades de la Policía con los Aficionados al box,” *Excélsior*, 24 September 1954, 23-A.

Y ante el rival que está en la lona
 Listo a comerse al “ratoncito”
 Éste reclama: ¡Un momentito!
 ¡Estoy tomando mi “CORONA...”!⁶⁸

In an environment of passion
 In front of a hundred thousand spectators,
 A cry silences the rumors,
 To exclaim: Throw me at the “cat”...!
 And before the rival that is on the canvas
 Ready to eat the “little mouse”
 This one demands: One moment!
 I’m drinking my CORONA...!

El Universal Gráfico described the ambience as “effervescent,” as Mexicans from all over the country waited in anticipation for the bout between Brooks and Macías. The newspaper declared, “Never before, in all the history of Mexican pugilism, has there prevailed such a warm atmosphere nor has there been a Mexican boxer who has surpassed the popularity of Raúl Macías.”⁶⁹

The spectacle created by the match offers an opportunity to analyze the relationship between modernity and tradition in modern Mexico. First, the sport of boxing had an inherent tension between its ‘traditional,’ some may say barbaric, tendencies, particularly in the realm of violence, and the modern rationality with which the sport was regulated, regimented, and taught. Second, the activity was an international affair, as the boxing card including boxers from the United States and Mexico, a characteristic that Mexicans had used to define modernity since the Porfiriato. Third, this hybrid activity took place in a modern arena that was primarily designed to host the

⁶⁸ Advertisement, *Excelsior*, 25 September 1954, 3-A. Also appears in *La Afición*, 25 September 1954, 3; and in *El Universal Gráfico*, 25 September 1954, 15.

⁶⁹ “Priva un Clima Efervescente en Todo México por el Combate del Monarca Nacional Gallo, Raúl Macías y el Charolado Nate Brook,” *El Universal Gráfico*, 24 September 1954, 12.

traditional and potentially barbaric activity of bullfighting. The arena not only showcased bullfights and boxing matches, but also featured advertisements for North American products like Zenith electronics, Dewar's White Label Whiskey, and Johnson & Johnson Band-Aids [See Figures 1 and 2]. Finally, the activities outside the boxing ring further added to this tension. Street vendors and stalls lined the outside of the Toreo, with vendors offering boxing fans their choice of tacos, fruit-flavored *aguas*, and white *sombreros* often worn by rural Mexicans [See Figures 3, 4, and 5].

Press accounts of the fight stressed the wide cross-section of Mexican society that Macías attracted and depicted the variety of fans as equally enthusiastic in their support of Ratón. The morning of the fight, fans of Ratón Macías joined his family, in attending mass to pray for the well being of the Mexican boxer, whose mother prayed for her son, “with fervent and sacred maternal affection.”⁷⁰ The Mexico City fans originally booed Macías' opponent as he entered the

⁷⁰ Raúl Sánchez H. “Un día con el Ratón: En el Vestidor El Chamaco Mexicano Dijo Que Si Cohen No Viene Irá El a Buscarlo a Europa Para Enfrentarse,” *La Afición*, 27 September 1954, 6.



Figures 1 and 2. Plaza México before (top) and during (bottom) Raúl Macías - Nate Brooks Match. AGN, Hermanos Mayo Collection, Exp. 8,129.



Figure 3. Taco vendor outside of Plaza México. AGN, Hermanos Mayo Collection, Exp. 8,129, 26 September 1954



Figure 4. Ice cream and aguas vendor outside Plaza México. AGN, Hermanos Mayo Collection, Exp. 8,129, 26 September 1954.



Figure 5. Hat Vendor outside Plaza México. AGN, Hermanos Mayo Collection, Exp. 8,129, 26 September 1954.

ring. However, they eventually stopped and even cheered Brooks after the fight. This change of heart relieved Antonio Andere of *La Afición*, who was pleased to see Mexicans “elegantly” display their sportsmanship.⁷¹ Throughout the fight, Macías’ fans cheered him on with the famous Mexican war cry: Alabio, alabao, a la bim bom ba! Ratón, Ratón, Raaa, Raaa, Raaa!⁷²

Andere, who had announced the fight for Televisa, declared, “Ratón Macías not only confirmed fully his quality; not only affirmed his position as an idol; not only gave one more demonstration - the most resounding - of his ability, of his class, of his boxing

⁷¹ Andere, “MOSTRANDO SU GRANDEZA EL RATON GANO A BROOKS,” *La Afición*, 27 September 1954, 7.

⁷² Jorge Alarcón, “Escenario del Combate: El Ratón Ha Hecho Tornar El Ambiente De Los Días De Oro Del Boxeo Mexicano,” *La Afición*, 27 September 1954, 9.

intelligence and of his incredibly numerous qualities, but also broke all the precedents in terms of enthusiasm of an entire people by provoking a true insanity with his splendid triumph.”⁷³ Jorge Alarcón of *La Afición* declared that by bringing Mexican boxing back to its glory days, Macías had performed a “miracle” with his boxing talent “and his clear qualities as an unassuming kid, healthy in body and mind.”⁷⁴ Fray Nano, citing Macías’ victory and the success of American League batting champion Beto Avila of the Cleveland Indians, declared 1954, “the year of Mexico.” Nano also contended that Macías had a responsibility, not only to himself, but also to Mexico, as his pugilistic successes were important in advancing national glory.⁷⁵

The Macías-Brooks bout was not only important for Mexican pride; it was also a boon for Mexican business. The match, with an attendance of almost 54,000 people, grossed 581,815 pesos (US\$46,545.20), with Macías and his manager making 96,203 pesos (US\$7,696.24), then a record for a Mexican boxer fighting in Mexico.⁷⁶ Macías’ management and the boxing promoters of Mexico City were not the only ones who profited from Macías’ exploits. Daily sports newspaper *La Afición* set a record by selling 261,122 copies of its September 27, 1954 edition, the day following the Macías-Brooks fight, breaking its previous record by 110,804.⁷⁷ Unfortunately not all businesses fared as well as *La Afición*. It was estimated that movie theatres in the Federal District lost about

⁷³ Andere, “MOSTRANDO SU GRANDEZA,” 7.

⁷⁴ Alarcón, “Escenario del Combate,” 9.

⁷⁵ Fray Nano, “FRAY NANO en la pelea: Nada De Lo Dicho Del Ratón Resultó Exagerado,” *La Afición*, 28 September 1954, 12.

⁷⁶ Antonio Hernández, “EL RATON QUIERE PELEAR AQUÍ CON COHEN EL 12 DE DICIEMBRE,” *La Afición*, 28 September 1954, 1.

⁷⁷ “Nuevo Récord De Circulación De LA AFICION,” *La Afición*, 28 September 1954, 1.

110,000 pesos (US\$8,829.12) in business due to the airing of the Macías fight on television, more than a third of the revenue generated the day before.⁷⁸

Television played an important role in the increasing popularity of Macías. Boxing, along with wrestling, helped establish the popularity of television in Mexico, as well as Japan and the United States. In all three countries, television helped produce a boon for the two sports that, in turn, helped fortify television's place within these societies. According Shunya Yoshimi, boxing and wrestling provided a better fit for television programming in the 1950s than other sports because the ring was much smaller than soccer and baseball fields and thus required only one camera to film all the action. When camera technology improved, it became easier to film and televise other sports with larger playing surfaces.⁷⁹ Although *lucha libre* (Mexican professional wrestling) and boxing were both popular television attractions in Mexico, appealing to multiple classes, the two sports underwent vastly different fates.⁸⁰ In 1956, Lucha libre was banned from television broadcasts within the Federal District, while boxing was allowed to remain on television.⁸¹ Apparently, televised lucha libre matches were considered a danger to Mexico City youth, who might be compelled to imitate their wrestling idols.⁸² Boxing, on the other hand, supposedly appealed to more adults than wrestling and thus was allowed to remain on television.

⁷⁸ Octavio Alba, "La TV (con la Transmisión del 'Ratón' Macías) Causó Pérdidas al Cine de \$110,364.00," *Excelsior*, 28 September 1954, 11-B.

⁷⁹ Shunya Yoshimi, "Television and Nationalism: Historical Change in the National Domestic TV Formation of Postwar Japan," *European Journal of Cultural Studies*, 6 (2003): 463-467.

⁸⁰ Andere, "DAÑA O BENEFICIA?" 62. Levy, 180-186.

⁸¹ Mejía Barquera, "Televisión y Deporte," 204.

⁸² Levy, 180-186.

Television was mostly a middle and upper class phenomenon in the 1950s, but those unable to afford to buy a ticket to the match or their own television found ways to watch the match live. Originally, the Macías-Brooks fight was not to be broadcasted on television, as a way to increase live attendance and ticket sales.⁸³ However, the threat of ticket scalpers, who were charging up to 200 to 600 pesos (US\$16.00 to US\$48.00) for tickets that were originally 60 pesos (US\$4.80), concerned the Office of Public Spectacles of the Federal District.⁸⁴ Under the order of Public Spectacles, Televisa broadcasted the event live on television and with the help of the Federal District government, placed televisions in public places, particularly in working-class and poor Mexico City neighborhoods.⁸⁵ Furniture and appliance store Viana also announced that it would air the fight on fourteen televisions at its Salto de Aguas location in the center of the city.⁸⁶ In neighborhoods like Tepito, it was common for one person to buy a television and then charge his neighbors to watch popular programs and major sporting events.⁸⁷ One such person was the father of boxer and future national champion Enrique García. García's father worked at a factory in Tepito and saved enough money to buy a television. On the days of major boxing matches he would allow his neighbors to watch the match for a fee of twenty-five centavos (US\$0.02), which was much cheaper than the three pesos (US\$0.24), not including transportation costs, it cost to see the match live.⁸⁸

⁸³ For example, see Advertisement, *El Universal Gráfico*, 23 September 1954, 14.

⁸⁴ Félix Anguiano, "Espectáculos 'Persuadió' a la Empresa del Boxeo," *Excelsior*, 26 September 1954, 20-A.

⁸⁵ Advertisement, *La Afición*, 26 September 1954, 4.

⁸⁶ Advertisement, *La Afición*, 26 September 1954, 3.

⁸⁷ Levy, 180-186. Arthur Schmidt, "Making It Real Compared to What? Reconceptualizing Mexican History Since 1940" in Joseph, Rubenstein, and Zolov, 23-68.

⁸⁸ Enrique García, Interview with the author, 6 June 2010.

Most media accounts of Macías portrayed the Tepito native as the most popular Mexican boxer in history, or at least since Rodolfo “Chango” Casanova in the 1930s. Aside from their charisma, both boxers came from humble socioeconomic backgrounds and maintained their unassuming demeanors when they entered the public light, which endeared them to Mexicans of all classes. One account in *Siempre!* characterized Macías as “an authentic product of the people” whose attitude toward life was “to be faithful to his class and to his origins.”⁸⁹ The same could be said of Casanova, who, despite his forays into debauchery, was very respectful and modest in public. Both also had roots in León, Guanajuato, the city of for Casanova and the parents and older siblings of Macías.

Despite these similarities, Casanova and Macías were very different types of idols. Mexican journalists were quick to highlight the stylistic differences between the two pugilists. According to *Mañana* writer Ernesto Álvarez Nolasco, Macías was an idol to millions of Mexican men “for absolutely contrary reasons” than Casanova had been twenty years earlier. Álvarez depicted Casanova as a charismatic boxer who instantaneously won over audiences with his natural in-ring abilities and powerful punch. Ratón Macías, on the other hand, was characterized as “a scientific boxer” who studied his opponent before attacking and who “in every moment use[d] his intelligence.” Macías may have lacked Casanova’s punching power and killer instinct, but he used his serenity and self-confidence to win fans over round by round. Distinctions were also drawn between the conduct of the two idols outside of the boxing ring. Álvarez contended, “Casanova was depraved and ignorant,” a man unable to defeat his “terrible inferiority

⁸⁹ “Fiel a Su Clase: PRODUCTO DEL PUEBLO, ES HUMANO Y ES SENCILLO,” *Siempre!* 26 June 1954, 78.

complex.” Macías, in contrast, had no vices, aside from his penchant for dancing the mambo and for singing, both of which were far less self-destructive than Casanova’s predilections for sex and alcohol.⁹⁰

Macías’ manifestations of Catholicism helped solidify his public image as a humble young man who practiced a clean lifestyle. Prior to challenging for the National Boxing Association’s version of the world bantamweight championship in San Francisco, Macías attended mass with his family. At the mass, the priest instructed Macías, “The Romans, before leaving on their exploits, knelt before the Goddess Fortuna to ask for success. You, on the other hand, are more powerful because you are kneeling before the Virgin of Guadalupe, who is not a goddess, but the mother of God and powerful. A triumph by you would be a triumph for Mexico, for your *patria*, and for the glory of the Virgin of Guadalupe.”⁹¹ According to Soledad Loaeza, Catholicism served an important stabilizing function in the 1950s, as Mexican society underwent radical urbanization and industrialization and became increasingly exposed to the influences of the outside world, especially as a bulwark against nefarious communism.⁹²

Because of his positive public image, Macías earned opportunities to endorse commercial products. He publicly promoted Quaker Oats and Mexi-Cola, the latter a homegrown competitor of Pepsi-Cola and Coca-Cola. In an advertisement for Quaker Oats, Macías claimed that the product formed the basis of his diet, an amazing assertion in a culture where tortillas were the main source of carbohydrates and in a profession

⁹⁰ Ernesto Alvarez Nolasco, “HA NACIDO UN IDOLO: RAÚL MACIAS,” *Mañana*, 9 October 1954, 37.

⁹¹ Rogelio Agrego, “Imploró la Protección Divina: EL RATON MACIAS ORO Ante el Altar de la Guadalupana,” *ESTO*, 14(B).

⁹² Soledad Loaeza, “Mexico in the Fifties: Women and Church in Holy Alliance,” *Women’s Studies Quarterly*, 33, no. 3 &4 (2005): 138-160.

where carbohydrates were avoided to maintain weight [See Figure 6].⁹³ While supporting a business partially owned by North American may not have been the most patriotic action, the endorsement of Mexi-Cola was steeped in nationalist sentiment. In one advertisement, Macías stated that he bought shares of Mexi-Cola for the two reasons: First, one cent of each bottle sold went to help abandoned children and, second, “it is a Mexican business that does not pay royalties [to a foreign company] and it protects National Industry, defending the economy of our *Patria*.”⁹⁴ Whether practicing Catholicism or promoting consumerism, Macías maintained a public image steeped in Mexican nationalist sentiment.

⁹³ Advertisement, *ESTO*, 14 March 1955, 9(A).

⁹⁴ Advertisement, *ESTO*, 13 April 1955, 5(A).



Figure 6. Advertisement, *ESTO*, 16 March 1955, 9(A).

In March of 1955, Macías was well established as a Mexican celebrity. His iconic status grew further when he defeated Thai boxer Chamroen Songkitrat in San Francisco for the National Boxing Association's version of the world bantamweight championship. Not only was Ratón the recipient of massive cheers upon his arrival home, he also became the inspiration for songs. Clemente Vélez of Tlalnepantla, Mexico state wrote the following *corrido* to the tune of "Madrid" by Agustín Lara:

*¡Raúl!! ¡Macías!! ¡Ratón!
Gallazo que nos causa frenesí
Monarca eres del box,
Gran Gloria mexicana sobre el ring.*

¡Ratón! ¡Campeón! ¡Ratón!
Todo México te adora mucho a tí,
Por el valor en tantas peleas buenas que la azteca sangre de las venas
Te da para triunfar así,
Pues sales raudo de la esquina
Para irte fiero encima
Y vencer en buena lid.

Cuando te vuelva campeón tu alta valía,
Va a extenderse tu gran fama por doquier,
Y en la patria será de fiesta todo el día,
Por que eres héroe de la cabeza a los pies.

Con “mixiote un gran banquete muy ranchero,
Pues ya has llegado a la inmortalidad,
Por los triunfos hasta en el extranjero,
Que tus fuertes puños lograron allá.⁹⁵

Raúl! Macías! Ratón!
 Super-bantamweight that arouses us into a frenzy,
 You are the king of boxing,
 A great Mexican glory in the ring.

Ratón! Champion! Ratón!
 All of Mexico adores you greatly,
 For the valor that, in so many good fights,
 the Aztec blood in your veins has given you
 in order to triumph that way;
 Well you left swiftly from the corner
 In order to then go out ferociously
 And win in a good fight.

When you return as champion, your high worth,
 Your great fame will be extended everywhere,
 And in the fatherland there will be a party everyday,
 Because you are a hero from head to toe.

With barbeque, there will be a great *ranchero* banquet,
 Because you have already arrived at immortality,
 For your triumphs abroad,

⁹⁵ Archivo General de la Nación, Ramo Propiedades Artísticas y Literarias (Hereafter, AGN-PAL), Caja 1130, Exp. 21644, Clemente Vélez F., “¡Ratón!” 24 March 1955. Author’s translation.

That your strong fists attained there.

The author of the corrido framed Macías' in-ring accomplishments as national achievements, promising the boxer that the Mexican people would appreciate his work for Mexico. The language of the corrido betrays a nationalistic sentiment with references to Mexico, Aztec blood, and the patria.

Another corrido praised Macías for his contributions to Mexican pride, but also connected his accomplishments to Tepito and the pride the neighborhood should feel for its prized pugilist:

*Ya veremos al Ratón
Nuevamente en condición
De enfrentarse a quien le pongan
¡sí señor!*

*Peleará como los buenos
Pues le sobra corazón
Lo consideramos gallo
Aunque le falte espolón.*

*México con ansia espera
Y de todo corazón,
Le pedimos a la Virgen
Que le dé su bendición*

Ay, ay, ay, ay! Viva el barrio de Tepito!

*Que orgulloso debe estar
De tener en su barriada
Un boxeador popular.*

*Piensa ganar la corona
Y será campeón mundial
Y pondrá muy alto el nombre
De la Enseña Nacional.*

Y como buen mexicano

*Y de raza sin igual
Peleará con gran bravura
Hasta vencer a su rival.*

*Ten confianza Ratoncito
La corona ganarás
Y a mi México querido
Tú la Gloria le darás.*

*¡Viva el Ratón! ¡Viva el barrio de Tepito!
Que orgulloso debe estar
De tener en su barriada
Un boxeador popular.⁹⁶*

We will soon watch Ratón
Again in the condition
Of facing whoever they put in there
Yes, Sir!

He will fight like the good ones
Because he has plenty of heart
We consider him tough [literally rooster]
Although he lacks spurs [the claw-like toe of a rooster].

Mexico awaits with anxiety
And all its heart,
We ask the Virgin
That she give him her blessing.

Ay, ay, ay, ay! Long live the neighborhood of Tepito!

So proud it should be
Of having within its area
A popular boxer.

He thinks of winning the crown
And he will be world champion
And he can put on high the name
Of the National Banner.

And like a good Mexican

⁹⁶ AGN-PAL, Caja 1135, Exp. 21934, Mario Díaz Pérez, "Viva el 'Ratón' Macías," 17 August 1955.

And from a race without equal
 He will fight with great ferocity
 Until he defeats his rival.

Have confidence, Ratoncito
 You will win the crown
 And to my beloved Mexico
 You will give the glory.

Long live Ratón! Long live the neighborhood of Tepito!
 So proud it should be
 Of having within its area
 A popular boxer.

Again, the author makes nationalistic references throughout the stanzas, referring to Mexico, the Virgin of Guadalupe, and the national flag. But this author also cites Tepito, whose residents he believes should feel pride for helping produce a national treasure like Macías. So, although the author celebrates Tepito, he does so because of the role it played in helping the Mexican nation, rather than any intrinsic positive qualities

Despite losing to Billy Peacock in a non-title bout in 1955, Ratón successfully defended the NBA version of the world bantamweight championship several times in Mexico and the United States. His performances inspired more musical numbers such as “Tango al Ratón Macías” by Arturo Alcántara, which concluded with the stanza: “*Sus admiradores/ lo cargan en hombros./ Hasta llevarlo a su casa/A las calles de Granaditas./ Sus padres lo esperan/ con alegría le dan un abrazo/y su bendición.*”⁹⁷ (“His admirers/ Carry him on their shoulders./ Until they take them to his house/ On the streets of Granaditas./ His parents await him./ With happiness, they give him a hug/ And their blessing.”). The author celebrates Macías’ local roots - Granaditas was the street where

⁹⁷ AGN-PAL, Caja 1201, Exp. 26300, Arturo Alcántara, “Tango al Ratón Macías,” August 1957.

his parent lived - and the humble, Catholic origins of his family. Meanwhile, a contemporary corrido by a fan from the state of Zacatecas celebrated Macías international accomplishments, particularly his victory over Filipino Dommy Ursua in San Francisco in June of 1957:

*El Ratón Macías salió,
De su Patria al Extranjero.
Artista siempre será
Aquí y en el mundo entero.*

*México lindo y querido,
Yo salgo fuera de aquí,
A dejar allá un recuerdo
Pa' que se acuerden de mí*

*Con mi "punch" muy bien cuidado,
Con astucia y precaución,
El que quiera ser noqueado
Que se le hechen al Patón [sic].*

*A San Francisco llegué
De mi México querido,
Al regresó le llevé,
Al triunfo no discutido.*

*San Francisco California,
Tú que me viste pelear,
Este triunfo me lo llevo
Para mi Patria natal.*

*La corona yo la tengo,
De mi México será,
Si Dios quiere la sostengo,
Ni Halimi la obtendrá.*

*Ya me voy, no me despido
Porque pronto volveré
El cinturón discutido*

*A Halimi quitaré.*⁹⁸

The Ratón Macías left
His fatherland to go abroad.
He will always be an artist
Here and in the entire world.

Beautiful and beloved Mexico,
I go away from here,
To leave a memory there
So that they remember me.

With my very precise punching,
With cunning and caution,
He that wants to be knocked out
May he throw himself at the Ratón.

To San Francisco I arrived
From my beloved Mexico,
On return I took,
An undisputed triumph.

San Francisco California,
You that saw me fight,
This triumph I will take
For my native Fatherland.

The crown I already have,
For Mexico it will be,
God willing, I will keep it,
And Halimi will not obtain it.

Now I leave, I will not say goodbye,
Because soon I will return
The disputed [championship] belt
From Halimi I will take away.

At the end, the corrido's author twice refers to Alphonse Halimi, whom the European Boxing Union recognized as world bantamweight champion. Halimi and

⁹⁸ AGN-PAL, Caja 1212, Exp. 27384, Raúl Avelar Ruvalcaba, "Corrido Ratón Macías," July 1957.

Macías faced each for the undisputed world bantamweight championship in November of 1957 at Wrigley Field in Los Angeles. Travel agencies offered special tourist packages from Mexico City to Los Angeles and over 8,000 visas were granted to Mexican citizens for the weekend of the fight.⁹⁹ Los Angeles promoters hoped for a gate between US \$250,000 and US\$300,000, with Halimi guaranteed US\$50,000 and Macías guaranteed US\$30,000.¹⁰⁰ The bout was broadcasted nationwide throughout the United States, but not in Mexico.¹⁰¹ Newspaper *Novedades*, which was owned by radio and television magnate Romulo O’Fárrill, claimed that twelve to sixteen million people throughout Mexico would listen to the fight on radio.¹⁰²

In the week leading up to the fight, Los Angeles increasingly took on a Mexican character.¹⁰³ Mexicans lined up five hours before the match, dressed in “typical” attire, including white sombreros, serapes, and sandals.¹⁰⁴ Aside from the traditional Mexican ambience surrounding the fight, there were also signs of ‘sophistication’ with the heavy presence of upper class Mexican society. Comedian and movie star Cantinflas attended the fight, along with Mexican baseball star Roberto Ávila of the Cleveland Indians, Mexican movie star María Félix, singer/composer Agustín Lara, the Mexican consulate in

⁹⁹ Manuel Seyde, “8,000 Visas a Mexicanos Para el Pleito Ratón-Halimi,” *Excelsior*, 2 November 1957, 22(A). Pepe Arciga, “Nuestro Corresponsal Arciga Dice Que Si El Ratón Pelea Cuerpo a Cuerpo Perderá,” *La Afición*, 6 November 1957, 4.

¹⁰⁰ Hal Word, “NO SE SUSPENDERÁ LA PELEA,” *El Universal Gráfico*, 6 November 1957, 11.

¹⁰¹ “Datos y Cifras Sobre La Pelea Entre El Ratón Macías y Halimi,” *La Afición*, 6 November 1957, 3(Suplemento).

¹⁰² “Todo México Sintonizará hoy con XEQ Para oír la Pelea del Ratón,” *Novedades*, 6 November 1957, 4(AA).

¹⁰³ “México Traducido a Los Angeles Para ver el Triunfo del ‘Ratón’ Ante el Galo Halimi,” *El Universal Gráfico*, 5 November 1957, 10.

¹⁰⁴ “Cinco Horas Antes de Comenzar la Cola, Ensayaron las Porras,” *Novedades*, 7 November 1957, 2(B).

Los Angeles, and boxers Enrique Bolaños and Ricardo Moreno.¹⁰⁵ All expressed confidence in the Ratón's ability to emerge victorious from his match with Halimi. Before the fight started, a man dressed in a black *charro* outfit brought a rooster into the ring [Figure 4]. After presenting the rooster to Macías, the charro most likely threw the rooster into the air, giving the bird the opportunity to flap its wings for the audience, which most likely reacted with thundering approval. Based on boxing movies such as *Campeón sin corona* and *Rounds de Sombra*, the pre-match rooster celebration was a Mexican-American boxing tradition and, generally speaking, was not practiced in Mexico City.



Figure 7. Black charro ready to throw rooster in the air prior to the Macías-Halimi match. AGN, Hermanos Mayo Collection, Exp. 11, 723, Tema Boxeo, 6 November 1957.

¹⁰⁵ “Todo el País oyó por XEQ, en una Transmisión Clarísima, la Derrota de El Ratón,” *Novedades*, 7 November 1957, 2(B). Eduardo Rodríguez, “Todas Las Grandes Personalidades Que Asistieron Al Combate Anhelaban Un Claro Triunfo del Ratón,” *La Afición*, 7 November 1957, 4. “Muchas Notables Personalidades Estuvieron En La Pelea Anoche,” *La Afición*, 4 November 1957, 7. “Una Sangría Para México fué la Pelea,” *El Universal Gráfico*, 7 November 1957, 3.

After he lost to Halimi, Macías returned to Mexico City. Despite the disappointment and hysteria caused by his loss, he was greeted at midnight by television cameras and 6,000 fans at Mexico City's International Airport.¹⁰⁶ An emotional Macías was apologetic for having let his nation down, but was overwhelmed by the support Mexicans showed him, despite his failure. A teary-eyed Macías promised his fans that he would not retire from the sport of boxing and that he would bring Mexico the world championship it deserved. Upon Macías' return to Tepito, he was greeted with signs expressing the neighborhood's support for its favorite son.¹⁰⁷ Afterward, a party erupted in the courtyard of the *vecindad* where his parents and younger siblings lived, and Tepiteño residents danced throughout the night.¹⁰⁸ *Novedades* cheered the fact that win or lose, Ratón Macías brought Mexicans together, despite their diverse social and regional backgrounds. For the newspaper, it was proof that Mexicans could unite when they wanted to, placing them on a pedestal with more modern and cohesive nations in North American and Europe.¹⁰⁹

Macías would never fight a competitive match again, opting instead to pursue a career in acting and entrepreneurial endeavors. In 1964, He also became a substitute representative for the district that included Tepito in Mexico's Chamber of Deputies, a post he would hold for several years. Macías stressed the importance of educational and sporting opportunities for the constituents of his delegation and the effectiveness of the

¹⁰⁶ Ramón Inclán, "Transmitirán la Llegada del Ratón Raúl Macías," *Novedades*, 8 November 1957, 2(C). "Apoteótico Recibimiento: Unas Seis mil Personas Aclamaron a Raúl Macías," *Excélsior*, 9 November 1957, 33(A).

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 33(A).

¹⁰⁸ Antonio Cañas Sotarriba, "EN SU CASA: La Calles de Granaditas Ocupada por Varios Miles de Personas; el Padre y los Hermanos, Reciben al Ratón," *Novedades*, 9 November 1957, 1(AA).

¹⁰⁹ "Los Entusiasmos Desmedidos," *Novedades*, 8 November 1957, 4-A.

government's modernization of Tepito: "The Colonia Morelos [which includes Tepito] is not like it was before. The urbanization projects have contributed much to cleaning it up morally. With the new markets and the illuminated streets at night, what happened years ago no longer happens."¹¹⁰ Seventeen years later, Macías reflected, "The popularity that I obtained as an athlete has allowed me to promote the cause of Tepito. For the moment, as substitute deputy, we have done some positive things; I believe that if I were deputy I could do many more things for this sector that I know and love."¹¹¹ Macías would remain in Tepito for the rest of his life, working in a community center to help serve the people of the neighborhood, while also running several successful businesses. Whenever given the chance, Macías defended the character of his fellow Tepiteños, calling his home neighborhood "lovely," and "the land of God."¹¹² When he died in 2009, *La Jornada* called him, "Tepito's favorite son," who had "paralyzed the country when he conquered the world bantamweight championship."¹¹³

Though Ratón Macías and his fame had more of a consolidating effect on Mexican society, his celebrity would prove to be disruptive to the unveiling of Adolfo López Mateos as the PRI's candidate for president for the 1958 election. In the months leading up to Macías' match with Halimi, the Tepito native was a daily story for television news programs such as *Cuestión de minutos* and *Mundo de noticias*, receiving far more attention than either President Ruiz Cortines or his proposed successor.¹¹⁴ What

¹¹⁰ Beatriz Reyes Nevares, "El Ratón En El Ring De La Política," *Siempre!* 6 May 1964, 41.

¹¹¹ Pacheco, 249.

¹¹² Fonoteca Nacional, "Ratón Macías," Televisa Radio (Mexico City: XEW, [n.d.]).

¹¹³ "Murió Raúl Ratón Macías, el hijo consentido de Tepito," *La Jornada*, 24 March 2009, [n. pag.].

¹¹⁴ Mauricio Laguna Berber, "López Mateos: La auscultación de la herencia," in Carola García Calderon, ed., *Medios de comunicación del destape a las campañas electorales, 1934-1982* (Mexico City: Plaza y Valdés, 2006), 92-94.

is interesting about this situation is that López Mateos, upstaged by Macías in his public unveiling, later co-opted sports figures and sporting events more than any of his presidential predecessors and even earned the nickname, *El Presidente Deportista* (the Sporting President). Although López Mateos was an avid sportsman in his youth, it is quite possible that the popularity of Macías taught him first-hand the power of sports in uniting the Mexican people. Rather than fight the attention the Mexican public paid to successful boxers, López Mateos apparently decided to co-opt this attention, a tactic PRI presidents employed with several segments of Mexican society during its seventy-one year rule.

On July 8, 1959, Guadalajara's José Becerra, a former sparring partner of Macías, knocked out Halimi in the eighth round to win the world bantamweight championship. For the first time since 1952, when lightweight Lauro Salas beat Jimmy Carter at Los Angeles' Olympic Auditorium, Mexico had an undisputed world champion. Becerra returned from Los Angeles to encounter a "human sea" of supportive fans at Mexico City's airport and received an audience with President Adolfo López Mateos, to whom he had dedicated the fight, at the Presidential Palace at Los Pinos in Mexico City.¹¹⁵ López Mateos told Becerra, "You have triumphed as a good Mexican."¹¹⁶ López Mateos never allowed Becerra or any other Mexican boxer to overshadow him the way Macías had done two years earlier, successfully converting a boxing spectacle into a presidential spectacle.

¹¹⁵ "¡La Alegría del Pueblo por el Gran Triunfo! ¡FUE APOTEOTICO EL RECIBIMIENTO DEL CAMPEON!" *ARENA... DE BOX Y LUCHA*: "ARENA PRESENTA A: BECERRA CAMPEON," July 1959, 23. "BECERRA DEDICA SU PELEA CON HALIMI: EL SEÑOR PRESIDENTE, LIC. LOPEZ MATEOS, FUE ELEGIDO POR EL TAPATIO," *ARENA... DE BOX Y LUCHA*, 18 April 1959, 16.

¹¹⁶ "TIENES QUE HACER TODO LO POSIBLE PORQUE EL CAMPEONATO QUEDE AQUÍ," *ARENA... DE BOX Y LUCHA*: "ARENA PRESENTA A: BECERRA CAMPEON," July 1959, 29.

Conclusion

Through a combination of international athletic success, rapid social advancement, and deference for Mexican customs, Raúl Macías emerged as both a sport celebrity and national symbol in the 1950s. Macías' childhood in the rough neighborhood of Tepito prepared him for success in the boxing ring. He had experience with fighting and with controlling his emotions, two prerequisites for successful prizefighting, before he had ever entered a gymnasium. To gain and maintain personal honor in Tepito was a difficult task for the neighborhood's residents, who faced challenges on their honor from both their neighbors and from Mexican elites. For those Tepiteños whom elites deemed hapless and vice-ridden, the boxing gymnasium and the Tepito barrio both provided transitional environments that allowed rural migrants and their children opportunities to adjust and adapt to their new urban surroundings.

If Tepito served as a transitional place for Mexicans looking to assert themselves within Mexico City's industrial economy, then the boxing gymnasium was an important site for this transition to take place, especially for the neighborhood's young men. Because the boxing gym worked with and against the realities of inner city life, it provided a sanctuary that allowed poor urban Mexican males not only to escape temporarily the dangers of their neighborhood, but also to gain skills that would allow them to avoid or confront these dangers better. For Ratón Macías, the gymnasium introduced him both to trainers knowledgeable about the sport of boxing and life in Tepito, and to benefactors such as Luis Andrade, who provided Macías with experience and sound advice on how to operate a business properly. In the case of Macías, the

boxing gymnasium also served as a launching pad to the world of celebrity, as he had developed skills within that environment that made him a popular attraction to Mexican spectators. While the success attained by Macías was rarely equaled, boxers have used the gymnasium as a laboratory to prove and develop a masculinity that was consistently tested in neighborhoods like Tepito.

With the advent of television, Macías' fistic accomplishments converted him into national celebrity, a status that made him subject to several interpretations. Just as Mexicans from multiple sectors of society attempted to mold his image, so did Macías enact power over the impression he projected. For the most part, this image did not undermine tenets of mainstream Mexican popular culture, although Macías did make attempts to correct popular misunderstandings of and biases against his home neighborhood. Macías' objections did not radically transform Tepiteño reality or greatly affect attitudes towards the *barrio bravo*, but his objections did help cement his status as a Mexican national idol. His insistence on defending his neighbors proved to many that Ratón was a man of honor who did not forget his humble roots. Likewise, his success in the boxing ring served as a reminder that poor Mexicans from neighborhoods like Tepito were not hapless and weak, waiting for the Mexican state to save them from their hideous existences. Instead, they could be strong, determined people who could succeed if given the chance. His successes and the attitudes Mexicans held about them made Macías into a powerful cultural symbol in the 1950s. This symbolism consolidated the status quo of Mexican society rather than subverting it, but it did temporarily undermine the presidential candidacy of Adolfo López Mateos, who, in turn, learned to co-opt Mexico

world-class boxers rather than compete with them for attention. Future Mexican presidents, including Gustavo Díaz Ordaz, José Luis Portillo, and Carlos Salinas, would follow López Mateos' example.

Discussing the masculinity of an Australian iron man champion, R.W. Connell presents a picture of a narcissistic professional athlete with “a psychological focus on the body together with a severely constricted social world and an impoverished cultural world.”¹¹⁷ Raúl Macías, as well as his contemporaries in the ring, appeared to have enjoyed a life more fulfilling than the one experienced by Connell's iron man. Macías maintained his friendships and contacts from both Tepito and boxing, which balanced the world of fame and mass celebrity. At a time when his home address was regularly reported in the print media, Macías symbolized an optimism and mobility prevalent throughout Mexico, as many believed their nation was advancing towards a new and exalted status among the world of nations. Through his pugilistic success, Raúl Macías came to represent this advancement, as he became a highly respected and esteemed man in a society that normally frowned upon people from his socioeconomic origins.

¹¹⁷ R.W. Connell, *The Men and The Boys* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2000), 79.

Chapter 3:
A Celebration of All Things Masculine:
Mexican Boxing Magazines, 1940s-1970s

In 1967 Roger Tracy declared in *Ring Mundial* that the average man just wanted to enjoy the maximum number of pleasures that life had to offer. Of course, these pleasures varied according to each man's taste. Men, however, shared one thing in common: "What pleases all of us the most is Woman. She is the principal motor of Man. Because of her, there have been heroes, geniuses, and murderers." Tracey then declared, "Every man, every Mexican, would like to have a "harem" with "beautiful, docile, and perfumed girls."¹ Such a situation remained a fantasy for most Mexican men, but Tracy reminded the reader that a famous boxer could make that dream into reality.²

Unfortunately, this unlimited access to attractive women, along with the alcohol that usually accompanied it, had proven detrimental to many Mexican boxers, such as Chango Casanova, Toluco López, and Pajarito Moreno. Fortunately, for Mexican boxing fans, Tracy concluded, the contemporary Mexican boxer was "a true sportsman, and a gentleman. He has aspirations and knows how to take advantage of his natural [boxing] talents."

Tracey's comments highlight how Mexican boxing magazines from the 1940s to the 1970s celebrated several types of masculine behavior. In the case of Tracey, he celebrated both the aggressive sexual impulses of men and their ability to suppress these impulses when necessary. The focus on women also underscored an important element in

¹ Roger Tracey, "EL VICIO: ENEMIGO INVENCIBLE del peleador mexicano," *Ring Mundial*, 24 October 1967, 24.

² *Ibid.*, 25.

boxing magazines' treatment of masculinity: the promotion of boxers' relationships with (and control over) women, whether through celebrating their sexual conquests, their obedience to their mothers, their faithfulness to their wives, or their caring for their daughters. Whereas the culture of the gymnasium and the ring was predominantly a homosocial one, boxing magazines often displayed pugilists interacting with women in vignettes focusing on their heterosocial life outside the ring. In so doing, they promoted boxers as role models for Mexican males of multiple classes. Some of these periodicals also provided fans with opportunities to express their opinions about the actions of Mexican boxers both within and outside of the ring by publishing letters written to the magazine. As a result, Mexican boxing magazines served as forums to both celebrate and debate a wide variety of masculine behaviors.

Most studies of boxing and masculinity focus on forms of 'hard' masculinity of boxing, such as toughness and discipline. Sociologists have relied upon experiences in the gymnasium and the theories of Michel Foucault and Pierre Bourdieu to emphasize how discipline, toughness, courage, and a sense of personal honor have shaped both boxers' bodies and the culture they inhabit.³ While Mexican boxing magazines certainly celebrated the discipline and toughness of boxers, they also promoted the more adventurous and tender sides of pugilists as well. In so doing, they underscored the importance of boxers' relations with their mothers, wives, girlfriends, daughters, and sons to their personal lives and presented them as well-rounded and fully functioning members of society. With the *apertura sexual* (sexual revolution) of the late 1960s and 1970s,

³ For examples, see Woodward, Wacquant, and, especially, Tony Jefferson, "Muscle, 'Hard Men' and 'Iron' Mike Tyson: Reflections on Desire, Anxiety and the Embodiment of Masculinity," *Body & Society* 4, 1 (1998): 77-98.

magazines were also host to an emotional opening, where boxers more freely shared their own opinions on topics like sex, marriage, conspicuous consumption, and fatherhood.

This focus on the ‘softer’ side of boxers’ lives draws parallels to Michael Messner’s analysis of the “Kindergarten Commando” style of masculinity that action film star Arnold Schwarzenegger employed in his campaign for governorship of California. Messner argues that Schwarzenegger’s early films emphasized his “violent tough-guy persona,” while his later films “were humorously self-mocking and focused on care and protection of children.”⁴ Although toughness eclipsed compassion for Schwarzenegger, both traits were invaluable in his gaining the trust of skeptical voters. Likewise, Mexican boxers had to be both tough and compassionate, with a similar emphasis on the former, in order to gain the admiration of boxing fans. When boxers failed to display both qualities, readers often expressed disapproval in letters to boxing magazines.

This chapter traces how the celebrating and debating boxers’ behavior outside the ring simultaneously celebrated Mexican patriarchy. Ultimately these celebrations of masculinity helped to legitimize the rule of the Mexican president. In order to understand these debates and how they fit within Mexican society, this chapter divides into three sections. The first section probes the balance Mexican male public figures, specifically boxers and the Mexican president, had to strike between virility and self-discipline. The second section analyzes how boxing magazines celebrated boxers’ intimate lives. The final section looks at fans’ reactions to two world champion boxers who sometimes failed

⁴ Messner, “The Masculinity of the Governor: Muscle and Compassion in American Politics,” *Gender & Society* 21, 4 (2007): 461.

to exude compassion, Vicente Saldivar and Rubén Olivares. Combined, they reveal how Mexican boxing magazines defined, promoted, contested, and celebrated a variety of masculine behaviors and helped to maintain patriarchy within Mexican society.

Balancing Masculinities

As the leader of a patriarchal society, the Mexican president carried the status of a father figure over society. In order to maintain this status, however, the president had to properly perform a proper balance between self-disciplined and virile masculinities. As a result, the Mexican print media frequently printed photographs and wrote stories about Mexican presidents' involvement with sports. Starting with López Mateos, Mexican Presidents often met with boxers publicly and attended boxing matches. Miguel Alemán, Mexican president from 1946-1952, actually started the practice of using boxers as a public relations opportunity when he posed with world champion Lauro Salas' boxing gloves for a photograph in sports daily *ESTO* (See Figure 1). On one hand, Alemán's recognition brought technocratic legitimacy to Salas and his profession. On the other hand, Salas' gift of boxing gloves allowed Alemán to associate himself with a more charro aesthetic without actually engaging in the risk-taking associated with it. One wonders, however, about this photograph's efficacy in presenting a more macho image of the Alemán, as the President looks very uncomfortable and unsure handling Salas' boxing gloves. Alemán successor, Adolfo Ruiz Cortines, would not associate heavily with boxers or sports, but his successor, López Mateos definitely did.

Maybe more so than any previous President, Adolfo López Mateos took pride in crafting a virile and worldly image of himself and the Mexican nation. Zipping up and

down the streets of Mexico City, the Mexican President frequently took beautiful female passengers on excursions throughout the city for the public to see.⁵ He was also a major sports enthusiast: His drive behind Mexico City's bid for the 1968 Summer Olympics became "an obsession," and his love of sport even made its way into his 1969 obituary in the *New York Times*.⁶ Adding to López Mateos' reputation as a sportsman were his oratory skills. As an accomplished public speaker, he had little trouble projecting a worldly and polished technocratic image. López Mateos balanced these technocratic masculine traits with a more virile image based on his love of sports and cars.



Figure 1. President Miguel Alemán and Secretary of Foreign Relations Manuel Tello pose with the boxing gloves Lauro Salas used to win the world lightweight championship. The last sentence reads: "The President gladly received the symbolic present, which should serve as a stimulus to the sporting youth of Mexico." "Un Galardón que Enaltece y HONRA A NUESTRO DEPORTE," *ESTO*, 13 July 1952, 3.

⁵ Enrique Krauze, *Mexico: Biography of Power*, trans. Hank Heifetz (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1997), 663.

⁶ Zolov, 164-165. "Adolfo López Mateos, President of Mexico from '58 to '64, Dies," *New York Times*, 23 September 1969, 47.

El Presidente Deportista had little trouble garnering the cooperation of the sports print media of Mexico. López Mateos seemed a natural fit for sports-related spectacles designed to improve his public image. After all, he had boxed in his younger years, including at the Club Deportivo Internacional in 1928.⁷ He publicly met with José Becerra and Vicente Saldívar after both boxers won world championships and was portrayed as a powerful, self-controlled man meeting with young adults who embodied Mexico's ability to produce fit, strong men. When *La Afición* highlighted the President's excitement and energetic response to the Saldívar – Ramos fight, it helped to counteract his technocratic personality traits with a feisty and passionate impression of the President with which Mexicans of all classes could identify. Daily newspaper *Novedades* provided this interpretation of the events:

Without formality, without previous announcement, like two common and normal citizens, Adolfo López Mateos and Gustavo Díaz Ordaz arrived to take their ringside seats to enjoy their favorite spectacle and show the whole world, the genuine democracy, the political maturity of a people considered violent, disrespectful, vehement, and loud. The boxing public, considered indecent and stupid, yesterday gave a demonstration of civic education, of the respect for citizenship, of which deserved to be dressed in the coattails for great ceremonies... It was all cheers and applause for the most important figures of our national life.⁸

The press also played a role in assuring its readership that the Mexican public identified with and adored the Mexican president. In November of 1964, one month after the Saldívar-Ramos fight, López Mateos returned to the Toreo at Cuatro Caminos as the boxing community of Mexico City paid homage to the outgoing President in his final

⁷ “ADOLFO LOPEZ MATEOS, BOXEADOR DEL CLUB DEPORTIVA INTERNACIONAL,” *ESTO*, 17 September 1963, 5(A).

⁸ “AMBIENTE DE LOS DIAS GRANDES... Los do Presidentes y una Emocionada Multitud, Vivieron una Grata Jornada,” *Novedades*, 27 September 1964, P. 29.

month in office. The editors of *ESTO* entitled their article, “The Sincere Applause from His People: LOPEZ MATEOS, MOVED BY THE PUBLIC HOMAGE” and depicted a nation’s citizens heaping love and affection onto their leader, occasionally emphasizing that this public display of affection was sincere. In a showcase of “presidentialism,” *ESTO* described the interaction between López Mateos and Cuban immigrant boxer José “Mantequilla” Nápoles prior to Nápoles’ main event match. Apparently, Nápoles approached the Mexican President and handed him a letter that declared the Cuban’s “admiration and respect for the great statesman, humanitarian, and sportsman” -- López Mateos.⁹ Attending boxing matches not only reinforced López Mateos more macho characteristics, it also allowed the Mexican President to participate in mass spectacles that showcased his popularity and power. In short, boxing matches also helped to display the power inherent in disciplined masculinity.

⁹ “El Sincero Aplauso de Su Gente: LOPEZ MATEOS, MOVIDO POR EL HOMENAJE PUBLICO” *ESTO*, 15 November 1964, 2(A).



Figure 2. Adolfo López Mateos (standing with hands raised) and Gustavo Díaz (seated to the left of López Mateos) at a boxing card at the Toreo of Cuatro Caminos. AGN, Hermanos Mayo Collection, Exp. 19,622.

Unlike López Mateos, many Mexican boxers in the 1950s had a difficult time in presenting a balanced and favorable masculine public image. According to Rafael Barradas Osorio, who became Secretary of the Federal District Boxing Commission in 1952, “The Boxing Commission has tried to protect boxers who in general are individuals of humble origins, lacking education, lacking cunning, who are easily tricked by people in whom they blindly place their trust and they are taken advantage of because of their ignorance and the ease with which they are unjustly exploited.”¹⁰ By the mid 1950s, it became obvious that many Mexican boxers passed their time outside the ring “in a scandalous manner.” Boxers were regular clients at Mexico City cabarets like Swing

¹⁰ Rafael Barradas Osorio, *El Box Fuera del Ring: Lo Blanco y Negro del Boxeo Profesional en México* (Mexico City: Rafael Barradas Osorio, 1989), 7.

Club, El Dandy, and Guadalajara de Noche. Unfortunately, Barradas Osorio concluded, “Many good Mexican fighters who could have become world champions were knocked out by vice, by that false zeal for fun that leads them to alcoholism and to be toys of prostitutes manipulated by the mafia of gamblers.”¹¹

One such boxer who fell into this trap was Raúl Solís, a boxer from the Yucatán who lost a boxing match in Mexico City in 1955 to Ernesto Figueroa due to poor physical condition. Mexico City newspapers expressed disgust at Solís’ performance. *Ovaciones* called it a “ridiculous farce.”¹² *El Universal Gráfico* hinted that Solís may have been paid, in boxing terms, ‘to take a dive.’¹³ An investigation by the Federal District Boxing Commission found that Solís spent a great deal of time at with the *ficheras* at Cabaret Arcadia in Mexico City. Cabaret customers could dance with these attractive, young women after buying a ticket, or *ficha*. Rumors persisted that Cabaret clients did more than dance with the *ficheras*. Solís became enamored with one specific *fichera*, which drew the attention of a nefarious group of gamblers. This faction of gamblers bet against the heavily favored Solís and paid his favorite *fichera* to give him “special treatment” the night before the fight. Despite Solís’ initial protests, the two consummated their relationship that night and the Yucatecan boxer showed up for his match in less than optimal condition the following day.¹⁴

Amid these anxieties Adolfo López Mateos assumed the Mexican presidency in December of 1958. As a former boxer and avid sportsman, López Mateos sought to

¹¹ Ibid., 16.

¹² “RIDICULA FARSA DE SOLIS ANTE FIGUEROA,” *Ovaciones* 18 July 1955, 4-5(2).

¹³ “OIMOS,” *El Universal Gráfico*, 19 July 1955, 9.

¹⁴ Ibid., 15-16.

address the issues that he felt were plaguing boxing. Two months after becoming President, he encouraged Mexico City mayor Ernesto Uruchurtu to name journalist/novelist/screenwriter Luis Spota President of the Federal District Boxing Commission. Over the previous decade, Spota had developed a reputation as a muckraker and critic of inequality in Mexican society. At the same time, he also developed relationships with the movers and shakers of the Mexican political scene. Spota critiqued Mexican society in a way that did not desecrate the Revolution, the President, or the Virgin of Guadalupe. Despite his connections, Spota maintained an air of credibility. *Ring Mundial* had endorsed Spota's candidacy for the post ten years earlier, portraying him as a President who would not be compromised or corrupted by the internal dynamics of the business of boxing, much to the benefit of Mexican boxing fans.¹⁵ Spota's detractors questioned his knowledge and experience with boxing, but they did not question his intelligence or his integrity.

One of Spota's first moves was to make literacy a requirement for obtaining and maintaining a boxing license. The writers of *Arena*, who generally portrayed Spota as unrealistic and naïve, asked facetiously if boxing journalists would now be required to know how to box. Many boxing journalists treated the literacy requirement as silly, as they believed the Boxing Commission was blocking Mexican men from making a living.¹⁶ They did not believe that the Boxing Commission needed to make up for the failures of the public education system. Throughout his tenure as Boxing Commission

¹⁵ "DECIMOS," *Ring Mundial*, 20 November 1948, 3.

¹⁶ In the case of boxer José Luis Cruz, *ARENA* writers complained that in the two months that it took Cruz to become literate, he could starve from not working. "ERUDITO DE LA LENGUA JOSE LUIS CRUZ: en dos meses sabrá leer," *ARENA... DE BOX Y LUCHA*, 8 August 1959, 2.

President (1959-1986), Spota maintained an antagonistic relationship with several Mexican boxing periodicals, while his journalistic connections allowed him to receive quite favorable treatment from daily newspapers *Excelsior* and *El Universal* and sports daily *ESTO*. Despite the antagonism between Spota and Mexican boxing magazines, both favored extolled the ideal of masculine self-discipline.

Boxing Magazines and Mexican Masculinity

Mexican boxing fans had several options when choosing a boxing magazine in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s. Most were weeklies dedicated to covering boxing and professional wrestling equally, usually fifteen pages per sport. They occasionally featured interviews, usually not of great depth, and never published letter from the readership. These periodicals included *Box y lucha*, *K.O.: Semanario Deportivo (K.O.)*, *ARENA... DE BOX Y LUCHA* (hereafter, “ARENA”). The writers for these periodicals expressed the majority opinions printed and only interviewed boxers, managers, and promoters on occasion. Direct quotes from these figures were rare and direct quotes from fans never appeared. Based on the advertisements in them, it is clear that these publications had a national audience and writers frequently wrote of “Mexican boxing,” as a fixed entity without regional variations.

On the other hand, there were weekly periodicals dedicated strictly to the sport of boxing, such as *Nocaut... Sólo Box* (hereafter “*Nocaut*”) and *Ring Mundial*. These magazines featured more in-depth coverage of the sport, featuring detailed interviews with Mexican boxers that revealed a great deal of personal information, and letters from the readership. The original *Ring Mundial*, which ran from the 1940s into the first half of

the 1950s, featured advertisements from businesses in Mexico City, Tijuana, and Los Angeles. These advertisements ranged from boxing supplies, adult-themed “nocturnal clubs,” to ballroom dance lessons. *Nocaut*, which began publication in 1972 did not feature the high-end advertisements of the original *Ring Mundial* and aimed at a broader audience. The second epoch of *Ring Mundial*, which started in 1964 under different ownership from the original magazine of the same title, balance the sensibilities of its predecessor and *Nocaut*. Both *Nocaut* and *Ring Mundial* featured fan letters from Mexico City, the Mexican provinces, and from abroad, including California, Nicaragua, and Puerto Rico.

Besides reporting on boxing, these periodicals sometimes catered to heterosexual male readers with titillating pictures of semi-nude women. Although the original *Ring Mundial* of the 1940s did not publish such photos, it did feature advertisements for adult-theme nocturnal clubs and cabarets like “Babalu,” “Waikiki,” and “Remember.” Babalu advertised regularly in the magazine and billed itself as “the fashionable nocturnal center” that awaited the reader after boxing matches and invited him to spend time “in the company of pretty women.”¹⁷ At times, the magazines published articles and pictures on female nocturnal entertainers. In the early 1960s, *K.O.* ran two segments named “*Luces Poblanas*” and “*Guadalajara de noche*.” The former featured pictures and write-ups of cabaret dancers, sometimes from the city of Puebla. One article mentioned that for Mexican revue to return to its glory days, it needed new faces, “feminine ones of course,” like that of “the super-atomically beautiful Anita Cuba.”¹⁸ The same article featured

¹⁷ Advertisement, *Ring Mundial*, 19 January 1946, 14.

¹⁸ Miguel Vázquez S. “Luces Poblanas,” *K.O.: Semanario Deportivo*, 23 March 1963, 3.

another cabaret dancer in a bikini with the caption, “¡¡¡Chiquitiiiiitaaa!!!” *Guadalajara de noche* covered the nightlife by informing the reader which acts were playing at which nocturnal clubs, such as the Borinquen, whose “Afro-Cuban dances give their multiple admirers goosebumps.”¹⁹ Although other magazines did not report on the cabaret scene as *K.O.* did, they did try to appeal to a similar sensibility. In the mid 1960s, the second epoch of *Ring Mundial* briefly published a weekly series of photographs of topless women with no captions to reveal who the women were or what they did.

The overwhelmingly male readership of boxing magazines cannot only be determined by numerous articles geared specifically for heterosexual men. Letters from boxing fans published in boxing periodicals also highlight this fact. The vast majority of reader letters published in *Ring Mundial* and *Nocaut* came from men. At times, women did write in, usually to offer innocuous support of their favorite boxer, although occasionally women wrote insightful letters criticizing the boxing commission or a particular boxer. On a couple of occasions, letters sparked controversy, as male respondents questioned whether women should be reading and writing to boxing magazines. One male fan from Ensenada, Baja California wrote to *Ring Mundial* to chastise three women who had written to the magazine to express their support of Mexican national bantamweight champion Chucho Castillo in his match against world bantamweight champion (and Mexican) Rubén Olivares. He accused the three women of spreading gossip. With Olivares’ victory, the male writer claimed that the women “were left with nothing to do except wash dishes, iron, [and] clean.”²⁰ A fan from Vera Cruz

¹⁹ Pepe el Preguntón, “Guadalajara de Noche,” *K.O.: Semanario Deportivo*, 30, March 1963, 24.

²⁰ Oscar Granados, “La Esquina del Fan: SEÑORITAS ¡A LAVAR PLATOS!” *Ring Mundial*, 29 July 1970, 36.

agreed with this sentiment and reprimanded the three women for “creating gossip and scandals,” when “they should have been in the kitchen making beans and not concerning themselves with activities for men (*en cosas de pantalones*, literally, “into things for pants”), which included the bout between Castillo and Olivares.²¹ Support for the three women came, from all places, the public jail in Mazatlán, Sinoloa, where one prisoner chastised the reader from Ensenada. According to the imprisoned boxing aficionado, “The right to comment is not exclusive to men,” and calling the women gossips “only reflects his lack of morals and respect.”²²

Boxing magazines may have celebrated multiple masculinities, but they generally promoted the benefits of self-discipline to their readers. The self-controlled lifestyle also meant that boxers were supposed to control their violent urges outside the ring. In December of 1967, *Ring Mundial* scribe “Yazto” boldly proclaimed: “if you see a fighter, or ex-fighter, ferocious in the street, you can be sure that he is... A coward... A *MARICON!*”²³ Competent boxers did not cause public disturbances outside the ring, only those with in-ring cowardice caused problems with the public. While the honorable and manly boxer saved his violence for the ring, the cowardly *maricones* “sowed terror in their *barrio*” by attacking old men, young boys, sometimes even women.²⁴ In the eyes of Yazto, these barrio bullies turned into “timid sheep” once they entered the boxing ring.

²¹ Ricardo Aguilar Fernandez, “La Esquina del Fan: MUJERES ¡NO CABEN HABLANDO DE BOX!” *Ring Mundial*, 26 Agosto 1970, 46.

²² Jesús Angulo Pérez, “La Esquina de Fan: LES LLAMO MITOTERAS,” *Ring Mundial*, 9 September 1970, 46.

²³ Yazto, “Una regal que nunca falla: Tímida oveja en el Ring... UN TIGRE EN LA CALLE,” *Ring Mundial*, 26 December 1967, 9.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 6.

Honorable boxers, on the other hand, only fought in public when absolutely necessary, sometimes running away to prevent starting a ruckus.

Yazto's comments touch on two key points on the relationship between boxing and Mexican masculinity. First, the author positioned self-control as the most important of masculine traits. The author found no problem with in-ring violence. In fact, he disparaged those who did not heartily engage in fighting within the ring. Outside the ring, however, boxers needed to control their aggressive impulses and behave like good citizens. They were not to take advantage of their in-ring talents against a vulnerable population. Second, the article disparages the excesses of *macho* masculinity, almost equating it with homosexuality. By associating the excessive violence of the macho with cowardice and possibly homosexuality, the author placed this more 'traditional' form of masculinity below the technocratic model preferred by members of Mexico's political, economic, and educational elite. In the mind of this journalist, excesses made machos less masculine than more self-disciplined men.

This promotion of self-control extended into the domestic sphere. In the October 4, 1958 issue of *ARENA*, the magazine inaugurated a series of articles designed to showcase another side of boxers' lives. The first article declared the magazine's intent to display boxers' affinity for a "healthy, puerile, and home-loving" life.²⁵ The article advised its readers, "We will learn to see in these beings a person, a human who is equal to anyone of us." Following this introduction was a series of photos of boxer Ernesto Figueroa and his unnamed wife and newborn daughter. Most of the pictures centered on

²⁵ "¡He Aquí un Reportaje Distinto...! ERNESTO FIGUEROA," *ARENA... DE BOX Y LUCHA*, 4 October 1958, 16.

Figueroa caring for his daughter. The photographs showed Figueroa kissing his daughter, giving her a bath, combing her hair, changing her diaper and applying baby powder, and feeding her with a bottle. The caption for the picture highlighting diaper-changing stated, “This is a brawler? As Ripley says: incredible but true.”²⁶ The captions accompanying the photographs in this article and in ones to follow stressed the polarities between life inside and outside of the boxing ring and the boxer’s ability to balance the two successfully. Thus, *ARENA* intended to show to its readership that boxers could achieve a balance between the aggression required in the boxing ring and the emotional control required to be a responsible father outside of it.

The following week *ARENA* published an article on José “Joe” Becerra. It began by admitting that the stereotype of the rough, scandalous, and partying boxer had some merit, but that there existed many boxers like Joe Becerra who disproved that this was true for all boxers. The article touted Becerra’s ability to transform radically from a quality boxer to a quality son. Outside of the chaos of the boxing ring, *ARENA* noted, “Becerra likes the tranquil, calm life, and enjoys the solitude and stillness of his apartment” in Mexico City.²⁷ The article also praised Becerra for wanting to earn a great deal of money, “not to waste it, but to offer it to his parents, for whom he feels a true adoration.”²⁸ The pictures of Becerra showed the young pugilist cooking, listening to records and writing letters to his parents in Guadalajara to keep them informed. With Becerra, *ARENA* showcased a different masculine role than it did with Ernesto Figueroa, that of the responsible son who did not cause his parents extra worries. Although the two

²⁶ Ibid, 17.

²⁷ “JOE BECERRA: HOGAR, DULCE HOGAR,” *ARENA... DE BOX Y LUCHA*, 11 October 1958, 14.

²⁸ Ibid., 15.

articles focused on two distinct types of male-family relationship, they both espoused personality traits that reflected technocratic masculinity purposefully critiqued stereotypical traits of *charro/macho* masculinity.

ARENA also printed articles on boxers' participation in family ceremonies and religious rights of passage. Despite the strong secular leanings of the Mexican government, Catholic ceremonies still played an important role in the lives of secular and Catholic Mexicans. On the one hand, extreme Catholic beliefs were discouraged among the promoters of PRI-ista technocratic masculinity. On the other hand, anti-Catholic beliefs in the 1950s and 1960s had certainly quelled since the heyday of Plutarco Calles and the anti-Catholic Socialist Education policy of the 1920s and 1930s. Manuel Ávila Camacho's admission in 1940 that he was a practicing Catholic ended a string of twenty years of agnostic/atheist Mexican Presidents and represented reconciliation between the Mexican federal government and the Catholic Church. The Virgin of Guadalupe remained a strong nationalistic symbol. The Mexican media always praised boxers for seeking her protection and guidance before and after boxing matches.

The boxing periodical took advantage of these Catholic ceremonies to promote the technocratic masculine ideals present in Mexican boxers. *ARENA* photographed and covered the baptism of the first son of lightweight José Luis Cruz. The article promoted Cruz's ability to rise from poverty to provide for his infant son the type of childhood he never enjoyed. In the process, it promoted boxing's ability to uplift society's lower classes.²⁹ The magazine sent a reporter and photographer to the wedding of boxer Lalo

²⁹ "JOSE LUIS CRUZ: BAUTIZA A SU HEREDERO," *ARENA... DE BOX Y LUCHA*, 23 September 1961, 10.

Guerrero in 1962. The published article applauded Guerrero for owning several cars, an apartment building, maintaining steady employment as a mechanic for National Diesel, and for “fulfilling the commitments and duties” of a disciplined and productive man.³⁰ *ARENA* celebrated the boxer’s ability to transform the sport and build a successful life after he finished his boxing career. Cruz and Guerrero were two successful providers in different stages of their boxing careers, a fact *ARENA* underscored while analyzing their participation in Catholic rites of passage.

ARENA praised boxers and boxing officials involved in less virile occupations for their technocratic merits. One article published in 1961 featured Enrique López a boxer in the 1930s who later became a women’s hairdresser. The article depicted López as skillful in both occupations and noted that, as a hair stylist, he exhibited skill with the scissors and with the ability to converse with his female clientele.³¹ *ARENA* also published an article on boxing judge who also worked as a banker. The vignette asserted stressed the job’s great responsibility and busy schedule, both of which were alleviated with the help of his “pretty and efficient” secretary.³² *ARENA* also highlighted the happiness of his employees, all of whom were female. Two photographs featuring the banking boxing judge and his female staff followed with the captions that included the statements, “He is the boss” and “He is an excellent boss.”³³ A final picture of male and female co-workers made no reference as to who was in charge.

³⁰ “¡LALO SE CASO!” *ARENA... DE BOX Y LUCHA*, 9 June 1962, 6.

³¹ “UN CASO INSOLITO: DE BOXEADOR A PEINADOR DE MUJERES,” *ARENA... DE BOX Y LUCHA*, 8 April 1961, 10-11.

³² “PERSONAJES DEL BOXEO: POR AFICION FERNANDO GUEVARA ES JUEZ,” *ARENA... DE BOX Y LUCHA*, 4 March 1961, 10.

³³ *Ibid.*, 11.

In both cases, *ARENA* asserted the masculinity of the men by stressing their competency in their non-boxing related profession and their power over women. The magazine underscored López's mastering of not only cutting and styling women's hair, but also of mastering the art of conversing with his anonymous clients. With the banker/boxing judge, the boxing periodical consistently reminded the reader that it was the man who held control in each situation, over women who also remained nameless. *ARENA* frequently, but not always, left women nameless in these photo shoots and articles. From the beginning, the magazine had announced that its intent was to show the readership that Mexican boxers could live peacefully outside the ring and be conscientious members of society. The 'amazing' part of these vignettes was not that women were conscientious homemakers or dedicated wives or doting mothers. What *ARENA* found laudable was that men from a profession as violent as boxing could transform themselves into stable figures in the domestic sphere. In essence, the men were the 'stars' of these vignettes, while women were relegated to the supporting cast or 'extra' status.

ARENA stopped publishing articles that centered on boxers' activities outside the ring around 1962. In 1964, *Ring Mundial*, a new boxing magazine that had taken the name of a boxing periodical from the 1940s and 1950s, started a new series called "*Las/Los Estrellas en el Hogar*" ("Stars in the Home"). The first "Star" was José "Huitlacoche" Medel of Tepito. The article featured pictures depicting the domestic life of Medel and his wife and children as harmonious and happy. The feature specifically pointed out that Medel affectionately cared for his children and that he fought to provide them with a better upbringing than he had. In return, "the boss was spoiled at home," as

Medel's children were beginning to realize that their father had a very tough job, at least according to the article.³⁴

While *ARENA* aimed show to non-boxing Mexicans that Mexican boxers could live peacefully outside the ring, *Ring Mundial*'s series on boxers in the home appears to sought to instruct boxers how to act outside the ring. The series often featured pictures of boxers reading the magazine in the peace and quiet of their own home. Whether or not Mexican pugilists actually read the magazine does matter as much as that *Ring Mundial* fashioned itself as a magazine read by both boxers and boxing fans. The pieces in *ARENA* expressed shock and surprise at how well boxers adapted to home life, as to show an uninitiated audience. *Ring Mundial*, however, used a more matter-of-fact tone with its captions. One article on Tepito boxer Chucho Hernández featured a picture of Hernández helping his son ride his bicycle. The caption underneath emphasized, "the ferocious combatant... totally changes when he encounters his descendents."³⁵ Another article about "El Cuervo" Salinas and his family featured a picture of the boxer combing his daughter's hair and noted, "the fiery battler changes totally with his kids; he is an exemplary father."³⁶ In return for his help around the house, which included helping in the kitchen, Salinas was "the object of some special attention" from his (anonymous) wife.³⁷

³⁴ "Las Estrellas en el Hogar: UN CAMPEON EN LA INTIMIDAD," *Ring Mundial*, 6 December 1964, P. 41.

³⁵ "LAS ESTRELLAS EN EL HOGAR: CHUCHO EL BOMBADERO DE TEPITO," *Ring Mundial*, 16 January 1965, 38.

³⁶ "Los Estrellas en el Hogar: El Cuervo Salinas en Familia," *Ring Mundial*, 25 April 1965, 36.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 36-37.

Mexican boxers could also be domestic stars by behaving like proper sons and brothers. One segment in the series praised one boxer for being “a good son and an affectionate brother,” who also underwent a radical change between the boxing ring and his mother’s presence.³⁸ According to this series of articles, there existed a divide between the savage and natural world of the boxing ring and the ordered and modern world of the family home. In the case of Memo Téllez, *Ring Mundial* praised the young pugilist for being “religious by choose and a fighter by instinct.” The magazine highlighted the disciplined lifestyle of Téllez: “His life is totally ordered. Boxing, church y reading in his home. He does not create problems for parents or his managers.”³⁹ Being a good son or brother also meant helping the family financially. As was the case with José Becerra in *ARENA*, *Ring Mundial* praised boxer José González for building a house, thereby creating wealth and assets for his family “with affection and with hope.”⁴⁰

In an age that prized party discipline over personal honor, it should not come as a surprise that boxing magazines prized the cooperative behavior of boxers in their families. This focus on cooperation, however, was not strictly a phenomenon in post-Revolutionary Mexico. In the United States a shift in masculine ideals occurred in the 1920s and 1930s from the Victorian ideals of a self-controlled, assertive, and virtuous masculinity to a new set of ideals that emphasized a personable, cooperative, and self-effacing masculine type. The former set of ideals better fit a production economy, while

³⁸ “LAS ESTRELLAS EN EL HOGAR: EL ‘TORITO’ MOTA CON SU FAMILIA,” *Ring Mundial*, 14 February 1965, 38-39.

³⁹ “Las Estrellas en el Hogar: EL MISTICO TELLEZ, EN FAMILIA,” *Ring Mundial*, 14 Marzo 1965, 38.

⁴⁰ “LAS ESTRELLAS en el Hogar: ¡JOSE GONZALEZ CONSTRUYE EL SUYO,” *Ring Mundial*, 21 February 1965, 38.

the latter set better matched a consumer economy.⁴¹ This shift reflected a change among the upper crust of U.S. society, who regularly read magazines like *American Magazine* and *Esquire*. This change would mirror the change among Mexican political and economic elite to technocratic masculine ideals in the 1930s. The technocratic masculinity pushed by Mexican boxing magazines combined aspects of both masculine types, emphasizing both the self-control and cooperativeness of Mexican boxers within the domestic sphere.

Despite this emphasis on cooperation, *Ring Mundial* still insisted portraying men as the heads of families whenever possible. Throughout the series of *Estrellas del hogar*, the magazine stressed the position of fathers and husbands as *jefes* (bosses) of the home. Thus, they reinforced the middle-class patriarchal values of what Mexicans called *buenas costumbres*, in which the father remained the premier authority figure and undisputed head of each family.⁴² Therefore, a boxer like Jaime Pérez could be “an exemplary husband” who helped his wife around the house, but he also supervised his wife while she made his food.⁴³ Likewise, “Chaparro” Reyes, as “the boss of the house,” lived a domestic life “without violence or danger.”⁴⁴ According to these magazines, the ideal Mexican man controlled his household, but never had to resort to violence to do so. The instructive tone of the *Estrellas en el hogar* reflected a boxing magazine that aimed to teach boxers and members of the working-class, the men most ‘susceptible’ to the

⁴¹ Tom Pendergast, “‘Horatio Alger Doesn’t Work Here Any More’: Masculinity and American Magazines, 1919-1940,” *American Studies* 38, 1 (1997): 56-58.

⁴² Zolov, *Refried Elvis*, 27-28.

⁴³ “LOS ESTRELLAS EN EL HOGAR: JAIME PEREZ ¡UN HOMBRE FELIZ!” *Ring Mundial*, 18 April 1965, 39.

⁴⁴ LAS ESTRELLAS EN EL HOGAR: LA OTRA CARA DEL ‘Chaparro’ Reyes,” *Ring Mundial*, 8 May 1965, 37.

excesses of charro/macho masculinity, how to perform masculinity along more technocratic lines.

Ring Mundial frequently employed the term “exemplary” (*ejemplar* in Spanish) to described these well-adjusted boxers. The exemplary man not only controlled his household; he actually enjoyed the domestic life. In fact, he preferred it to socializing and drinking with his friends. Based on the photographs published, the exemplary man was also very affectionate with his family. Not only did he hug and kiss his children, he also combed their hair, changed their diapers, and played with them. In discussing the dynamics of the Mexican middle class family in the 1950s and 1960s, Eric Zolov portrays the ideal Mexican father as a stern and benevolent authority figure.⁴⁵ Matthew Guttman, however, in his study of a working-class Mexico City neighborhood, found Mexican fathers to be very affectionate toward their children and very willing to do ‘non-masculine’ activities.⁴⁶ In *Estrellas en el Hogar*, middle-class writers praised working-class Mexican men for their affection towards their children, wives, nieces and nephews, and grandmothers. Middle-class Mexican men may or may not have practiced such displays of affection, but they did praise the behavior, which required a dramatic change in behavior from the boxing ring.

The exemplary Mexican man could be religious, but not overly religious. Boxers were praised for giving thanks to the Virgin of Guadalupe, an act that also had nationalistic overtones, and for attending the holy sacraments of family members. An overly religious disposition did not quite fit the tenets of technocratic masculinity, with its

⁴⁵ Zolov, *Refried Elvis*, 27-28.

⁴⁶ Matthew Guttman, *The Meanings of Macho*.

focus on self-control and moderation. In 1966, *Ring Mundial* published an interview with the pious Memo “Frailecito” (Little Monk) Téllez (a former “Star of the Home”) that showcased the clash in worldviews between the technocratic, formally educated interviewer and the devoutly Catholic pugilist, who also taught Catholic Catechism to young children. The interview took place in a church, where Téllez had a different personality than he did in the boxing ring: “There his movements, his gestures and his voice, have something of the majestic solemnity of holy objects.”⁴⁷ Thus, the interviewer continued the common theme in magazines of the boxer transitioning smoothly from the chaos of the ring to the peace and order of everyday life.

Once the interview began, however, the dynamic changed. When asked about the number of fights he had had, Téllez claimed not to remember, much to the frustration of the interviewer. The interviewer then tried to jog Téllez’s memory by asking the boxer how he started to box. Téllez responded, “Those things do not worry me particularly. The past is past. The future is what must interest humans. We should learn to live as brothers of...”⁴⁸ The interviewer then interrupted Téllez, which earned him “a look of scolding.” The topic then switched to Téllez’s next opponent, Miguel Castro, with whom Téllez shared a manager. When asked whether or not he was concerned that their manager would play favorites, Téllez responded, “No, that does not worry me. He is an honest man that lives in the fear of God. And above all, he loves all of us like the brothers that we are, no only in the love of God, but as comrades in sport.”⁴⁹

⁴⁷ “EL FRAILECITO TELLEZ QUIERE SER CAMPEON: ¡QUE DIOS LO PERDONE!” *Ring Mundial*, 25 June 1966, 3.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 4.

The next question, without much transition, focused on what sort of strategy Téllez planned to use in his next match. The boxer replied that it was up to his manager to decide and he would obey. Téllez then quipped, “Does that answer your question?” The interviewer replied that he wanted to know more about what Téllez thought of his opponent. The boxer responded, “Miguel Castro is a clean boy, decent and sportsmanlike. He is a true Christian. We are friends.” The interviewer then retorted that Téllez was not successfully selling the fight, as it appeared that the fight would lack any substantial action, being between Christian friends. Téllez stunned the interviewer with his response: “When I am in the ring, I come up with the idea that I am fighting in ‘The Crusades,’ that I am trying to annihilate the infidel, that I am fighting for a divine cause.” This reply seemed to convince the interviewer that Téllez would aggressively fight Castro. After a couple more questions, Téllez ended the interview by telling the interviewer to kneel, as the priest had just entered the church and was about to start mass.⁵⁰

Téllez, in the interview, violated a few taboos of technocratic masculinity. As a young man, he had drawn praise for his self-control outside the boxing ring. In some ways, he epitomized buenas costumbres. In fact, in 1961 *ARENA* complemented Téllez as a musician because he did not play rock’n roll, “only romantic melodies.”⁵¹ When encountered with Téllez’s zealous religiosity, however, the interviewer for *Ring Mundial* seemed lost as to how to conduct an interview with the boxer. Téllez’s Crusade/infidel quote clearly moved beyond the acceptable lines of moderate religious piety tolerated by

⁵⁰ Ibid., 4.

⁵¹ “EL MULTIFACETICO MEMO TELLEZ: NUEVA SORPRESA: ¡TAMBIEN ES CANTANTE!” *ARENA... DE BOX Y LUCHA*, 15 April 1961, 12.

priista technocratic masculinity. In a later issue of *Ring Mundial*, writer Joaquín Bueno asked boxer Jorge Rosales if he was Catholic. Rosales responded, “Yes, I am Catholic, Apostolic, and Tapatío [from the city of Guadalajara].” Bueno quipped, “You are not going to tell me that you belong to the PAN [National Action Party],” the PRI’s main political rival.⁵² To appear overly Catholic could mean to appear insufficiently *priista* and, in the contemporary cultural environment, insufficiently Mexican.

The Mexican cultural environment of the 1950s and 1960s extolled the masculine virtues of the cooperative ‘company man’ and the obedient member of the PRI. Within their own houses, however, men of all social classes were bosses, which served as another source of masculine honor. The masculine ideal in boxing magazines emphasized cooperation among men and control over women. Heading a household and controlling it in a peaceful manner was a hybrid of the both technocratic and macho ideals. The power that Paz associated with macho masculinity had long been a factor in elite Mexican masculinity. In discussing dueling among Mexican Porfirian congressman, Pablo Piccato states, “men who lacked proper control over their wives did not deserve to engage in duels.”⁵³ Therefore, periodicals like *Ring Mundial*, *K.O.*, *Nocaut*, and *ARENA* glorified a man in touch with sexuality, religion, and domesticity, but did not succumb to any of their excesses.

The Sexual Revolution

The 60s and 70s were a time of changes for Mexican masculinity and for boxing magazines as well. The Cuban Revolution made Che Guevara and his “Revolutionary

⁵² Joaquín Bueno C., “ERA MUY VAGO... Pero Siempre le Cumplí a mi Jefa,” *Ring Mundial*, 20 November 1966, 9.

⁵³ Piccato, “Politics and the Technology of Honor,” 344.

Man” a rival masculine template to the Mexican President for Mexican men to emulate. Furthermore, the 1968 Tlatelolco massacre damaged the image of the Mexican Presidency and the Mexican head of state was no longer viewed as a “benevolent father figure.”⁵⁴ In their study of women participants in the 1968 student movement, Frazier and Cohen have shown the inter-gender relationships changed during the late 1960s, men and women began to enjoy more platonic relationships in addition to romantic ones. Although many women did not see themselves as feminists, they did challenge patriarchal structures in Mexican society. In the end, however, inequality and patriarchy remained, albeit in an altered form.⁵⁵ While the changes in gender norms most greatly affected college-educated population and particularly those involved in the student movement and Mexican counterculture, these changes eventually permeated over to other sectors of Mexican society, particularly in the 1970s.

With the changes in the mainstream in the 1960s and 1970s, Mexican men were more open in expressing themselves in the media. Boxing was no exception. In the past, boxers like Ratón Macías, Chango Casanova, and Kid Azteca could only express themselves very narrowly. They either professed to uphold the tenets of disciplined living or they expressed their regret for not doing so. Basically, boxers were placed into two categories. The first were the men who successfully entered a disciplined life and avoided the temptations of women and drink. The second category included the men who fell victim to their vices and proved unsuccessful in living productive lives outside the

⁵⁴ Elaine Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifices: Gender, Power, and Terror in 1968 Mexico* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 153.

⁵⁵ Leslie Jo Frazier and Deborah Cohen, “Defining the Space of Mexico ’68: Heroic Masculinity in the Prison and ‘Women’ in the Streets,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 83, 4 (2003): 617-660.

ring. Through the 1940s, 1950s, and throughout much of the 1960s, boxers never expressed their drinking or sexual habits or preferences. It was generally assumed that they lived disciplined lives until they underperformed in a match, which case Mexican journalists immediately blamed on the offending pugilist's inability to curb the excesses in his life. By the mid 1960s, however, this dichotomy faded and both boxers and journalists began to discuss sex and alcohol consumption more candidly, as well as exposing more of their own personality quirks.

Mexican athletes were not alone in this regard. From the mid 1960s to the early 1970s in the United States, athletes like boxer Muhammad Ali and football player Joe Namath projected overly confident self-images and freely boasted of their athletic abilities, a sharp contrast to icons from the previous generation as Rocky Marciano (boxing) and Johnny Unitas (football), both of whom maintained humble public personas.⁵⁶ Athletes from Ali's generation were among the first Americans to come of age during the time of television.⁵⁷ It is quite possible, then, that aside from the radical changes occurring throughout the world, that the generation of athletes that came of age in the mid to late 1960s was far more comfortable expressing themselves in the mass media. The boxers of Mexico's second Golden Age had grown up watching the fights of Ratón Macías, Toluco López, and José Becerra, or they at least had heard them on radio. They had grown up with television, radio, and a widely expanded print media that allowed them to find out details about their boxing idols' lives. When their opportunity for

⁵⁶ Michael Oriard, "Muhammad Ali: The Hero in the Age of Mass Media," in *Muhammad Ali: the People's Champ*, ed. Elliott J. Gorn (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 9.

⁵⁷ Randy Roberts, "The Wide World of Muhammad Ali: The Politics and Economics of Televised Boxing," in *Muhammad Ali: The People's Champ*, 24.

fame arose, many of these boxers were quite eager to share their opinions and personal details. Boxing magazines continued to celebrate masculinity, but they did so with an expanded set of acceptable attitudes and behaviors.

A prime example of this new openness was boxer Octavio “Famoso” (“Famous”) Gómez from Tepito. Gómez never became a world champion, but he fought several times in Los Angeles against many top-tier boxers. More importantly, he presented a very confident and gregarious self-image to the Mexican public. In early interviews, Gómez displayed his sense of self-deprecating humor and his ability with wordplay, sometimes to the confusion of interviewers. The nickname “Famoso” stemmed from Gómez’s contention that there was a time when he was not even famous in his own house.⁵⁸ Gómez’s persona also combined cosmopolitanism with virility. In one interview, he expressed his desire to live in Italy in order “to learn the techniques of the... Italian gigolos.”⁵⁹

When his career began to wane in the early 1970s, Gómez started practicing yoga, which he later credited for his resurgence in the mid 1970s. He believed it helped him develop the patience to control his anger, sex drive, and fear.⁶⁰ An article in *Ring Mundial* credited yoga for developing his “amazing physical form” and “incredible agility.”⁶¹ Yoga may not have become a standard training technique for other boxers, but it did provide Gómez with a different path to self-control. Gómez also experimented with other

⁵⁸ Antonio Aznar, “OCTAVIO GOMEZ: ‘NO SOY FAMOSO EN MI CASA,’” *Ring Mundial*, 27 August 1966, 4.

⁵⁹ El Chato Pérez, “EL FAMOSO SE CONVERTIRA EN PELEADOR,” *Ring Mundial*, 27 October 1968, 20.

⁶⁰ Siete Rounds con el ‘FAMOSO GOMEZ,’” *Ring Mundial*, 8 September 1975, 9-11.

⁶¹ “FAMOSO PRONOSTICA: Yo sé Cómo Derrotar a Olivares, Chacón y Alexis!” *Ring Mundial*, 8 June 1975, 11.

forms of preparation. In one interview, he questioned the long-held notion of abstaining from sexual relations twenty to thirty days before a fight. According to Gómez, sex made him stronger and more balanced mentally. It also allowed him to experience “the beautiful and the sublime of nature.”⁶² Until the late 1960s, Mexican periodicals rarely discussed sex in relation to boxing. Any references to sex were made in regard to the self-destructive behavior of machos and never in regard to married boxers. Gómez, however, discussed sex in terms of monogamy and directly criticized *machista* behavior. In the later years of his career, Gómez advocated a balance in life between self-discipline and enjoyment. In an interview with *Ring Mundial*, the boxer was asked what was the success to his longevity as a boxer. Gómez responded that “Because I don’t smoke, I don’t drink, and I live an ordered life in the style of Rafael Herrera [a boxer known for his very serious personality and disciplined training schedule].” The interviewer responded that many observers thought that Gómez lived exactly the opposite, to which he responded, “Well, it is a combination of two lives, right? But without exaggerating one or the other, of the good with the bad... because we can’t be complete saints or completely bad people - just simply human beings.”⁶³

Toward the end of his boxing career, Gómez became interested in a career in comedic acting. He expressed his desire to change public perceptions of boxers. In his opinion, the average boxer was “happy, cheerful, witty, chatty, wholesome, and a very good sport.”⁶⁴ Despite the fact that Gómez often socialized with the hedonistic and free-

⁶² “Siete Rounds con el ‘FAMOSO’ GOMEZ,” *Ring Mundial*, 8 September 1975 9.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 9-11.

⁶⁴ “GOMEZ: Arriba del Ring: UN CRUCIGRAMA: Abajo: UN POLIFACETICO,” *Nocaut... Sólo Box*, 21 December 1973, 19

spending Rubén Olivares, he continued to present himself as a positive role model to Mexican youth. Rather than abstain completely from “vices,” Gómez chose to enjoy his pleasures in moderation and projected this image publicly. He projected a multi-dimensional self-image that celebrated his work as a good boxer, occasional journalist, and actor in cinema and theatre revues. As an actor, Gómez continued to plan to travel the world in order to “search for new experiences for my career as an actor.” According to Gómez, “I will search in Europe and the United States for all the great comics of the world and for videotapes, books and personal diaries. I will study their details and their jokes and I will return with a total hodgepodge of them all. I will come to Mexico and I will make the people laugh. I feel very content making people laugh, knowing that all are content and happy, that they like to live the ‘good life’ without worries.”⁶⁵

Gómez was not the only boxer from Tepito to embrace an alternative identity. Julio “Ringo” Romero earned the nickname *el boxeador hippie* (the hippie boxer) from *Ring Mundial* in 1974. Although Romero had earned the nicknamed Ringo for his nose, he admitted to liking the nickname because he loved “modern music” and was “an admirer of the Beatles, and of their fashion, so if they compare me with one of them, that’s not going to bother me.” Romero admitted that he enjoyed going to *tardeadas* (afternoon parties) “where rock groups play” and that his favorite rock band was the Mexican group Náhuatl. He ended the interview early because he wanted to go home to listen to “la hora de los Beatles” (the Beatles hour) on the radio.⁶⁶ What the interviews with Gómez and Romero reveal is by the mid 1970s, alternative modes of masculine

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ “Un chavo ‘de la Onda Gruesa’: ‘RINGO’ ROMERO: EL BOXEADOR HIPPIE” *Ring Mundial*, 14 April 1974, 12.

identity had entered the Mexican mainstream. Whereas, in the 1960s, a reference to hippies in the mainstream Mexican media would be ensconced in negativity and worry, now it was often delivered in jest or without much commentary.

Another Tepiteño boxer who voluntarily presented different facets of his masculinity was Enrique García. After becoming Mexican national featherweight champion, García told *Nocaut*: “I work in what I like the most and I like my work. I live well. I have always lived well, although now, the truth is I am living better than ever. This is because I am a complete man. The complement for a man that is in the most ample sense of the word is ‘to have a child, to have planted a tree, and to have written a book.’ I have the child! I am writing the book, and but I have not planted a tree - although I am teaching boxing to many young boys from the barrio. Teaching them to love sport and consequentially to avoid vices. The thing is I’m doing something a thousand times better than planting a tree... any stupid and illiterate gardener can plant one and cultivate it.” In the process, García proved that it was not just the urban middle-class and elites who were disdainful of rural life, although he did express his awareness of the dangers of urban life for Mexico’s youth. Much like Gómez, García was quite open about emotional issues: “A man must cultivate love. All of us men must cultivate it passionately. Love is a symbol of peace... A form of love is work... Another form of love is friendship. But it is difficult to encounter a true friend...”⁶⁷

García was not the only boxer to discuss his feelings about love. *Nocaut* asked Salvador Martínez Carrillo about his definition of love. He replied, “A beautiful feeling

⁶⁷ “La dicha de llegar a la cima de la fama y popularidad, pero... Enrique García ¿ES FELIZ?” *Nocaut... Sólo Box*, 5 November 1972, 5.

that keeps humanity united but that unfortunately has not been extended to the warfronts.” When asked about his opinion on marriage, he replied, “Matrimony is the formula that contributes to the goals of the homeland and consequently to the continuing high costs of living.” This opinion reflected the Echeverría’s administration’s emphasis on population control, particularly through birth control. On the subject of children, Martínez Carrillo stated, “I think children should not come immediately after marriage, to allow the married couple an opportunity to establish a narrower dialogue and to try on the possibilities of living together in the present... I think that one or two years [is necessary].” When asked on his opinion on whether women should be involved in politics, “Why not? There are women sufficiently prepared and specialized. We should leave prejudices and complexes back in the Quaternary era, the Stone Age, when men controlled women with blows. That a woman can govern also does not mean that men will lose their masculinity.”⁶⁸ Although his answers were by no means typical, they did reflect the expansion of acceptable opinions in regard to gender and familial relations.

Sometimes women were asked their opinions about the sport. Angelina Estrada, the mother of Tepito boxer and one-time WBA bantamweight champion Rodolfo Martínez, told *Nocaut* about how her son became involved in the sport: “My husband (R.I.P.) Alfonso Martínez was a big fan of boxing and like a good Tepiteño, he was good with his fists. It was he who supported Rodolfo in every moment and taught him how to defend himself, because at thirteen years old everyone was beating up on him in the neighborhood. I remember well that he went to the gymnasium to train with Mr. Salas, a

⁶⁸ Ibid., 13.

good friend of Alfonso.” She also mentioned, “I never wanted him to become a boxer. I always wanted him to finish a professional track at the Poli [Instituto Politécnico Nacional - National Polytechnic Institute]. I would have liked for him to become a Diesel Engineer. Now I am resigned, and I follow his career step by step.” As far as watching her son fight, she admitted, “I like following his fights on television. Before I resisted but it made me more nervous to listen to the applauses and yells in the living room, so now I watch it and I am his most fervent admirer.” Discussing her son’s success, he mentioned, “Of course I would like for him to become champion of the world, because he made a promise to his father before he died and now he is obsessed in accomplishing it. In case he wins the title, I would not want him to fight much after thirty years of age.”⁶⁹ *Nocaut* photographed Martínez’s mother (Angelina Estrada) holding his head and kissing him, describing the kiss as “affectionate, clean, and pure,” thus reaffirming the veneration of traditional maternal values in this era of gender role expansion.⁷⁰

This expansion of emotional expression also wandered into the realm of self-indulgence. Ricardo Arredondo of the state of Michoacán represented the most ostentatious example of playboy masculinity. An interview with *Nocaut* featured Arredondo photographed in a hotel suite shirtless but with pajama bottoms. Arredondo discussed his preference for Scotch and his abilities to attract women: “I have always been a lover. Like everything in life, one has to continue to improve. I am always looking of beauty and talent and, in the romances I have had, I have found it.” He

⁶⁹ Fidel Rodríguez, “El turno es para el gallo de Tepito: RODOLFO MARTINEZ: A LOS IDOLOS los Esperan en Casa,” *Nocaut... Sólo Box*, 17 April 1974, 3.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 4.

continued, “The perfect women, where is she? I am sure that I will conquer her if I ever find her.”⁷¹ Arredondo’s lifestyle did not exactly endear him to Mexican fans. Later, after losing his world championship, Arredondo insisted that he was not a “play boy,” saying that people “confuse a ‘romance’ with luxury with that word.” He continued, “I have never been... a stuck-up guy. I have always been the same.”⁷² Arredondo insisted that his relationship with women would change some: “Women will occupy a predominant part of my life, but without the whirlwind of before. With time, many things are learned.”⁷³ Thus Arredondo attempted to adjust his public persona from that of playboy to that of a serious and responsible man who was still virile.

With the changes wrought by the sexual revolution, readers encountered a wider variety of acceptable masculine behaviors in boxing magazines than they had previously. Boxers no longer just discussed their families, hobbies, and marriages. They expressed their views about sex, women’s rights, birth control, rock and roll, and love. The newfound opportunities to express feelings reflect a genuine shift in the portrayal of boxers as men. Despite this shift, however, boxing magazines continued to prize masculine qualities over feminine ones and to value the opinions of men over the opinions of women. Furthermore, the magazines continued to highlight both self-discipline and violence in projecting positive masculine images of Mexican boxers, while also portraying them in a compassionate light.

The Fans Respond

⁷¹ “ARREDONDO ROMPE CON PATRONES... “SI ALGUIEN PUEDE COMPRAR MI CONTRATO ESE SOY YO,” *Nocaut... Sólo Box*, 16 October 1974, 19.

⁷² “COMO SE PLANEA UN BOXEADOR DIFERENTE: ‘NO SOY UN PLAY BOY,’” *Nocaut... Sólo Box*, 3 April 1975, 26.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 28.

Vicente Saldívar and Rubén Olivares, two of the most successful boxers Mexico has ever produced, were Mexico City natives who won multiple world championships and were the highest-paid boxers in Mexico during their perspective peaks (the mid 1960s for Saldívar, the late 1960s - early 1970s for Olivares). Yet, they occupied opposing poles on the self-discipline spectrum. Saldívar served as a taciturn exemplar of self-discipline, whereas Olivares publicly displayed an affable personality while pursuing a hedonistic lifestyle. Both boxers enjoyed great popularity, with Olivares being more popular than Saldívar, but they also received criticism from boxing enthusiasts who did not agree with how they balanced fame, violence, and compassion.

The “All-Powerful Mathematician”

Born in Mexico City’s working class *Colonia Obrera* neighborhood in 1943, Vicente Saldívar was “a good little boy, quiet and respectful.”⁷⁴ His early years were relatively uneventful, as his family enjoyed a steady, but modest, existence. Vicente’s father, an avid follower of boxing, took him to a couple of boxing cards at the various Mexico City arenas.⁷⁵ According to one biographical account, Saldívar, however, only cared about one thing as a child: soccer. There he transformed from a quiet and respectful boy into “a rabid battler eager to score a goal.”⁷⁶ After completing *secundaria* (the U.S. equivalent of ninth grade), Saldívar worked at a printing press. With his newfound money and independence, he began to frequent boxing gyms to watch idols such as Raúl Macías and Ricardo Moreno train for many hours a day. Finally, a trainer

⁷⁴ “Saldívar es uno de los más Grandes Campeones Mundiales, y UN TIGRE: NADIE BOXEA MEJOR,” *Ring Mundial*, 2 July 1966, 2.

⁷⁵ “LA VIDA DE UN CAMPEON,” *ARENA... DE BOX Y LUCHA*, 4 September 1965, 6.

⁷⁶ “Saldívar es uno de los más Grandes Campeones Mundiales, y UN TIGRE: NADIE BOXEA MEJOR,” *Ring Mundial*, 2 July 1966, 2.

and amateur referee convinced Saldívar to stop watching and to start boxing. Within two years, Saldívar advanced far as an amateur, winning two golden gloves tournaments (1959 and 1960), a Federal District championship (1959), and the Mexican national championship in 1960. The highlight of Saldívar's amateur career came when he qualified for the Mexican Olympic boxing team for the 1960 Summer Olympics in Rome.⁷⁷

Vicente had a meteoric rise on the Mexican professional boxing scene, avenging his only defeat with a knockout, and defeating Mexico City-based Cuban Ultiminio “Sugar” Ramos in October of 1964 for the undisputed world Featherweight (126 lbs) championship, in front of Mexican President Adolfo López Mateos and President-elect Gustavo Díaz Ordaz at the Plaza de Toros, Naucalpan in the State of Mexico. Saldívar successfully defended his title eight times before briefly retiring in 1967. Of all his defenses, his first match with Welshman Harold Winstone remains the best remembered among Mexicans and drew the most attention from the Mexican media. This bout, held in London in September of 1965, was the first satellite broadcast in the history of Mexican television. Saldívar came out of his retirement in 1969 and won the World Boxing Council version of the world featherweight championship in May of 1970. Seven months later, Saldívar lost his title. He tried unsuccessfully to regain his title in 1973, then retired for good shortly afterward.

Saldívar's 1964 fight with Ramos fight drew a who's who of Mexican society. Both President López Mateos and President-Elect Gustavo Díaz Ordaz attended the fight,

⁷⁷ “LA VIDA DE UN CAMPEON,” *ARENA... DE BOX Y LUCHA*, 4 September 1965, 6.

as did the Governor of the State of Guanajuato and Comedic legend and movie star, Mario Moreno, better known as Cantinflas.⁷⁸ Prior to the fight, the ex-Governor of the state of Mexico, Ingeniero Sánchez Colín, commented, “Ultiminio is an experienced man, but Saldívar is an intelligent young man. I think our man will win.”⁷⁹ According to sports daily, *La Afición*, López Mateos “applauded and shouted... yes, friends, shouted with the same enthusiasm as a spectator wishing for the victory for the Mexican Vicente Saldívar.”⁸⁰ Saldívar’s victory spurred massive celebrations throughout Mexico City. More importantly for Mexican boxing, Saldívar retained his title for three years before retiring as champion in 1967. Fighting extensively in the United States and in Europe, Saldívar gained an international reputation and established himself as one of the greatest featherweights in the history of boxing.

⁷⁸ “PERSONAJES EN LA GRAN FUNCION: ¡PRESENTES LOPEZ MATEOS Y DIAZ ORDAZI!” *ARENA... DE BOX Y LUCHA*, 3 October 1964, 7. Francisco Lazo, “Vitores al señor Presidente: ¡TODOS DESEABAN QUE GANARA SALDIVAR!” *ESTO*, 27 September 1964, 7(A).

⁷⁹ Ibid.

⁸⁰ Raúl Sánchez H., “¡El Gallo no... el Sarape sí!... el Fanático López Mateos se Entusiasmó Como Nunca Ayer en el Toreo,” *La Afición*, 27 September 1964, 2.



Figure 3. Vicente Saldívar (boxer on left) and Ultiminio Ramos (boxer on right). AGN, Hermanos Mayo Collection, Exp. 19,622. 26 September 1964.

Saldívar's most important defense came September 9, 1965 against Welshman Harold Winstone in London. Thanks to the Early Bird/Pájaro Madrugador satellite and the sponsorship of the Cuauhtémoc Brewery and Banco Comercial, Mexicans watched the first satellite television broadcast in their nation's history. Even President Díaz Ordaz watched Saldívar's unanimous decision victory in his office on a portable television. The live broadcast captivated enough Mexicans that an editorialist for newspaper *Excélsior* lamented the "millions and millions of pesos" that the nation lost, "thanks to the absolute inactivity that reigned during the time of the fight."⁸¹ Others, however, felt that the fight called not only for a celebration of Mexican technological prowess, but also of the discipline and hard work of Saldívar. Adolfo López Mateos, now the head of the

⁸¹ Miguel Guardia, "Triunfo y Agonía: De Saldívar a Saucedo," *Excélsior*, 9 September 1965, 7(A).

Organizing Committee for the 1968 Olympics, focused on the events that transpired within the ring, “Mexican sporting youth must... follow a line of conduct that permits them to be true champions, like Vicente Saldívar, whose trajectory in sport, first as an amateur and later as a professional, has been every inch an example.” The head of the Mexican amateur sporting confederation, General José de Jesús Clark Flores, provided further adulations: “Vicente Saldívar fought bravely, like a good Mexican, with the desire to give glory to his country.”⁸²

The comments by López Mateos, Clark Flores and ex-Governor Sánchez Colín highlighted how Vicente Saldívar successfully combined the tenets of two prevalent masculine ideals of Post-Revolutionary Mexico. Saldívar’s in-ring bravery and desire for Mexican national glory fit well within the *charro* masculine ideal, which emphasized the daring nature and bravado of Mexican men. On the other hand, Saldívar’s reliance on his intelligence and disciplined training regimen better fit the technocratic masculine ideal, which stressed the importance of controlling urges and curbing excesses. Thus, he provided Mexican boxing periodicals with a hybrid masculine ideal for others to follow. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s, Mexican sports periodicals, especially boxing magazines, depicted Mexican men as successfully combining macho and technocratic masculinities into an idealized Mexican masculinity that centered on virility and self-control. To accomplish this portrayal, Mexican boxing magazines emphasized the technocratic characteristics of boxers and stressed the bravado of non-athletes, especially

⁸² José Manuel Zaragoza, “La familia del deporte amateur organizado opinó: Vicente Saldívar Debe Servir de Ejemplo a la Juventud Mexicana. – Adolfo López Mateos,” *La Afición*, 8 September 1965, 2.

Mexican presidents. In this light, Vicente Saldívar appeared to be the ideal masculine symbol for a modernizing Mexican nation.

Vicente Saldívar was not just a world-class boxer. He also served as a model of technocratic masculinity. Diligent in his training, Saldívar refrained from the excesses associated with boxing and fame in general. Saldívar's supporters often praised the pugilist for his clean living and the excellent example he set for young Mexican men. As one Saldívar fan from the state of Guanajuato put it, "Never in the history of pugilism has there existed a champion as authentic and clean as Vicente Saldívar. Let's hope Vicente's clean record serves as an example for all the aspiring pugilists and that the stormy lives of the 'Toluco' and the 'Pájaro' are forgotten by all."⁸³ Another supporter of Saldívar from the state of Queretaro proclaimed, "Without a doubt Vicente Saldívar has been the best fighter of all time and his successful defenses of the championship demonstrate this. Vicente is worthy of admiration thanks to his clean and honest life that will serve as an example for the youth of the country."⁸⁴

The Mexican media served Saldívar well and positioned him in situations to display his technocratic masculine merits. After winning the world featherweight champion in September of 1964, *ARENA* photographed the pugilist (before his championship match) on his way to the Villa de Guadalupe, a basilica dedicated to the Virgin of Guadalupe in the north of Mexico City. The first picture, entitled "Charro's Sombrero," displayed Saldívar in a charro outfit, complete with black sombrero and

⁸³ Federico Ortiz, "LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: SALDIVAR: Un gran Campeón," *Ring Mundial*, 3 March 1966, 22.

⁸⁴ Salvador Orellana, "LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: SALDIVAR: Un Gran Campeón," *Ring Mundial*, 19 March 1966, 22.

pistol. Only tacos were missing in a picture that associated the boxer with two of Mexico's strongest and most persistent national symbols. The caption to the photograph added that dressing as a charro was something Saldívar had enjoyed as a child and was "a typical custom." Other photographs depicted Saldívar praying at the altar, displaying his strong faith in God, and asking "if heaven would help him conquer the title."⁸⁵ The article also stressed that Saldívar's trainer, Adolfo "Negro" Pérez, an "unassuming man, who knows the miracles of faith."⁸⁶ This man provided guidance to a rising young star that kept perspective of his place in the world through his relationship with God and the Virgin.

ARENA related Saldívar's humility in the Basilica with his ability to maintain connections with the people from his humble neighborhood, especially his family. The magazine announced that Saldívar never forgot the people from his past and printed the claim, "In this he will never change. He is an exemplary boy."⁸⁷ After his victory over Ultiminio Ramos, *ARENA* sent a photographer and a writer to cover the post-fight celebration at the home of Saldívar's parents. The ensuing article portrayed Saldívar's father as a lifelong boxing fan, who had instilled a love of boxing into his son, a love that paid off major dividends. His mother had difficulty hiding her excitement and pride for having a world champion for his son. For his part, Saldívar performed the role of the "good son," who "had carried out his duty," by making his mother proud. Photographs and captions depicted Saldívar's neighbors filling the streets to cheer the champion in a

⁸⁵ "SALDIVAR EN LA VILLA: UNA PROMESA A LA VIRGIN," *ARENA... DE BOX Y LUCHA*, 3 October 1964, 3.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

festive atmosphere. The end of the article reinforced Saldívar's technocratic masculine credentials: "The children now have an authentic sporting idol: Vicente Saldívar. With him, everything has been clean. With him, everything has been exemplary. He is the model of a true sportsman: clean, strong, honest, unassuming, modest."⁸⁸

Saldívar contributed to this image of technocratic masculinity. In a 1970 interview with *Ring Mundial*, entitled, "Vicente Saldívar: The Boxer, The Man," Saldívar played up his intellectual pursuits and his appreciation for the fine arts. Interviewer Jacobo Moret described Saldívar as exceptional: "He is not only champion of the world, but also an example of discipline, professional responsibility, and material ambitions." The article featured photographs of Saldívar at an art museum dressed in a suit. The interviewer portrayed Saldívar as a man of two passions: boxing and reading. The champion discussed his fondness for Bernal Díaz del Castillo's account of the conquest of Mexico and his desire to read *One Hundred Years of Solitude* by Gabriel García Márquez. In addition, Saldívar expressed his fondness for fine art, but admitted that he lacked the "sufficient capacity to analyze it."⁸⁹ The world champion did not discuss in particular what artists he admired, but he did mention his appreciation of musical composers like Beethoven, Bach, and Chopin.

The conversation then switched to social and global issues. When asked about 'the drug problem,' Saldívar appealed to the authority of the books on psychology that he had read. Saldívar associated drug use with feelings a rebellion, which he felt were caused by "a lack of communication between parents and children." Saldívar also

⁸⁸ "EL BARRIO Y LA CASA: ¡DE FIESTA!" *ARENA... DE BOX Y LUCHA*, 3 October 1964, 14.

⁸⁹ Jacobo Moret, "VICENTE SALDIVAR: EL BOXEADOR, EL HOMBRE," *Ring Mundial*, 23 September 1970, 4.

believed that the youth of the United States were living in an “anarchic, chaotic state” mainly caused by the Vietnam War, as young Americans did not understand the point of the war. The world champion also expressed his admiration of Muhammad Ali, who he called, “every inch a man,” who was fighting “to establish a different concept, an equality among men regardless of their color, religion, or political creed.” Saldívar also expressed his sympathies for the Black Panther and Chicano movements, as well as his belief that African-Americans and Mexican-Americans faced similar problems in the United States.

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The topic then switched to boxing, which Saldívar presented in a very professional light. According to him, boxing was not particularly brutal. Boxers performed their best in the ring to earn the maximum amount of money they could get. Boxers were like any other group of professionals and not “devoid of elemental humanitarian beliefs.”⁹¹ Saldívar, however, believed that the contemporary Mexican boxing scene pandered to fans’ desire to see a quick finish, which promoted the more violent aspects of the sport over other aspects like the display of “ability, skill, technique, and other aesthetic values.” Moreover, the world champion discussed his relationship with Mexico. Saldívar insisted that he only fought for himself and his family and not for the Mexican nation. Further emphasizing his professionalism, he stated, “If I fought for Mexico, I would donate my wages to an institution of beneficence and you know I will not do that.” Saldívar insisted that he loved Mexico and that the best way to show his

⁹⁰ Ibid., 4.

⁹¹ Ibid., 4.

love was to act respectfully in foreign lands. By acting and dressing appropriately, Saldívar believed he was better serving his country than by fighting for it in the ring.

Mexican boxing fans never adored Saldívar as they did Ratón Macías, despite the positive coverage he received in the Mexican media. *Ring Mundial* discussed the phenomenon when Saldívar planned his first comeback in 1969. The article's headline declared boldly that Saldívar "NEVER was an IDOL."⁹² The author hypothesized that the Mexican people did not embrace Saldívar because he boxed in a style too technical, too studious, and too calculating for the average boxing fan to enjoy. Saldívar was not just a strategic boxer, he was "an all-powerful mathematician" in the boxing ring. The article's author declared that lost his chance to become a boxing idol "the day he renounced the *barrio*" in favor of "dollars and pounds sterling."⁹³ Despite his professional dedication, Saldívar forgot his roots, ungratefully leaving behind his past for the riches and benefits of higher social strata. In the author's eyes, this alienated him from Mexican boxing fans from the lower rungs of the social ladder.

This sense of alienation reflected the opinion of one dissatisfied boxing fan from Mexico City who wrote to *Ring Mundial* about an encounter he had with Saldívar in 1970. The fan described the boxer as "extremely vain and pedantic" and questioned his in-ring boxing skills.⁹⁴ The unhappy boxing enthusiast asserted that Saldívar was the worst kind of human being, "because educated people are always gullible," and questioned whether or not Saldívar was as educated as he claimed to be. Critical of

⁹² H. Del Águila, "El Retorno de Vicente Saldívar: ¡NUNCA Fue un IDOLO!" *Ring Mundial*, 2 July 1969, 33.

⁹³ Ibid., 35.

⁹⁴ Alejandro González, "La Esquina del Fan: SALDIVAR: UN PEDANTE," *Ring Mundial*, 25 November 1970, 47.

Saldívar's people skills, the letter concluded, "he is unpleasant and I think he will always be that way." By all accounts, Saldívar was a reluctant public figure who preferred the private life to the public spotlight. This dissatisfied fan found Saldívar's lack of public persona off-putting and interest in showcasing his educational progress pretentious, or at least behavior unbecoming of a boxer.

While the sentiments expressed in the letter border on the extreme, they were not completely out of line with popular sentiment. A fan from Mexico City expressed concern that Saldívar, after his win in London over Winstone, was not fighting frequently enough within Mexico. The letter writer hoped "that before accepting another lucrative contract, [Saldívar] understands that his fans come first."⁹⁵ At the time of the writing of this letter, Saldívar had defended his title only one time outside of Mexico and that was after three title defenses within Mexico. Still, there persisted the feeling that Saldívar had not done enough for the Mexican people. A year later a boxing fan from Monterrey wrote to *Ring Mundial* wondering why Saldívar had not defended the title against fellow Mexican Mario Díaz. The letter also claimed that, upon winning the world championship, Saldívar had promised to defend his title only against Mexican challengers.⁹⁶ Clearly, some Mexican boxing fans felt Vicente Saldívar had not given enough back to the country and neighborhood that made him who he was.

Even Saldívar's supporters admitted their champion lacked the full backing of the Mexican people. One fan from Puebla expressed his disgust with Mexicans' negative

⁹⁵ Luis Henríquez López, "LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: SALDIVAR EN MEXICO," *Ring Mundial*, 18 September 1965, 23.

⁹⁶ Héctor Serrano, "LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: VICENTE ESTA ENSOBERBECIDO," *Ring Mundial*, 6 November 1966, 28.

reaction to Saldívar's title defense against Mitsunori Seki in 1966. Entitled, "‘Malinchistas’: Leave the Champion Alone!" the letter chastised "the bitter and bad Mexicans who want our champion to fail."⁹⁷ Another fan from Mazatlán expressed his disappointment with boxing fans and journalists for their critiques of Saldívar's performance versus Seki. Making matters worse, these dissatisfied fans and journalists were Mexicans. But the letter's author knew what type of Mexicans: "MALINCHISTAS."⁹⁸ The fan seemed convinced that in his next match Saldívar would showcase "that great courage that characterizes the bronze race." After this display, "the Malinchistas will have to shut up." While these letter showed strong support for the world champion, they also reveal that this support was not universal among all Mexican boxing fans. Their need to defend their boxing hero against what they perceived to be unpatriotic Mexicans exhibits the degree to which Saldívar lacked unanimous support from Mexican boxing fans.

Saldívar's clean-cut image may have hurt his popularity. A fan from the state of Tlaxcala expressed the very sentiment in a letter to *Ring Mundial*. Responding to a previous letter published in the magazine that proclaimed that only clean-living boxers qualified as true idols, the letter's author compared the contemporary popularity of Saldívar with the popularity of Chango Casanova in the 1930s and 1940s and found a great deal of difference. According to the fan from Tlaxcala, "The people loved Casanova because he was an underdog [de abajo], drunk, irresponsible, womanizing, and

⁹⁷ Luis Jiménez Y., "LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: 'MALINCHISTAS': ¡DEJEN AL CAMPEON!" *Ring Mundial*, 18-19. The term "malinchista" refers to someone willing to sell out the country. It comes from Malinche, the indigenous woman who was the lover of Hernán Cortez and served as his interpreter during the conquest of Mexico.

⁹⁸ José Luis Salcido, "LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: Todos Contra SALDIVAR..." *Ring Mundial*, 23 October 1966, 23.

finally because the majority identified with his way of being, thinking, and acting.”⁹⁹ He also believed that Ricardo Moreno became popular and famous for his drinking exploits and violent behavior in public. Finally, the fan discussed Raúl Macías, who, like Saldívar, lived a clean and straight lifestyle. Macías, however, had charm that fans found appealing, a trait that Saldívar unfortunately lacked.

Saldívar was not alone in this predicament. Rodolfo Martínez of Tepito held the WBC version of the bantamweight (118 lbs.) championship in the mid 1970s and also had difficulty garnering the adoration of the Mexican public. In an interview with *NOCAUT, Sólo Box*, Martínez explained, “I am not an idol because I am not a drunk... the Mexican public surely wants to see me scandalized or thrown from the doors of a cantina... No thanks, I do not want their affection.” Martínez claimed that he did not want to run around with a group of friends that he had to financially support or get drunk in order to earn their approval. If this was part of being an idol, he would rather not be one.¹⁰⁰ In addition to leading an unexciting life, Martínez won his world championship in controversial fashion over fellow Mexican Rafael Herrera. Two fans from Mérida, Yucatán doubted whether the Tepiteño was “a worthy champion... He is cold [personality-wise] and has neither the punching power nor the charm of other fighters” from Mexico who became world champions.¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Carlos L. Moctezuma, “LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: ELLOS SI FUERON IDOLOS,” *Ring Mundial*, 19 March 1968, 11.

¹⁰⁰ “UN MUCHACHO BUENO, ENTRE LOS CHICOS MALOS DEL BOXEO: RODOLFO MARTINEZ,” *NOCAUT, Sólo Box*, 21 April 1975, 5.

¹⁰¹ Miguel Mendoza and José Ramírez, “¡EL NOCAUT! DE LOS LECTORES: ¿A DÓNDE VA NUESTRO BOXEO?” *NOCAUT, Sólo Box*, 10 April 1975, 21.

Like Martínez, Saldívar faced accusations of having a cold personality and lacking charm. Fans and sportswriters expressed their sentiments that Saldívar had turned his back on his roots in order to further advance socially in Mexican society. Saldívar received criticism for his lack of support for sparring partner Chucho Saucedo, who fell into a coma following his fight on the undercard of the Saldívar-Winstone fight in London and never boxed again. One fan from Monterrey admitted that Saldívar had “no obligation to help Saucedo,” but that the champion should provide financial assistance “for humanity’s sake.”¹⁰² Like the *Ring Mundial* article that critiqued Saldívar’s relationship with his barrio, this letter implied that the world champion had forgotten those who had helped him and that he lacked a sense of sentimentality. Saldívar thus came across as overly calculating and rational to his detractors. Whereas his supporters viewed Saldívar’s success as an example of one man conquering excessive urges and attaining control over his body and emotions, these detractors saw a champion further alienated from society. In their eyes, when Saldívar turned his back on his neighbors and his fellow boxers, he also was turning his back on Mexico.

Saldívar died suddenly from a heart attack at the age of 42 in 1985. In remembering him, the media focused on two themes. One was his dislike for fame and his coldness. Macías was quoted as saying that Saldívar had distanced himself from the community of ex-boxers and that the former world championship was concerned about people using him for his fame.¹⁰³ One news reporter noted that a few years earlier Saldívar had told him, “I’m barely forty years old and I have no present and no future.

¹⁰² José Quintana J., “LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: Saldívar y Saucedo,” *Ring Mundial*, 9 April 1966, 22.

¹⁰³ “‘Fue uno de los mejores monarcas de todos los tiempos’: José Sulaimán,” *Uno más uno*, 18 July 1985 (29).

Sometimes I detest and hate what I was.”¹⁰⁴ The other theme, however, was Saldívar’s responsible behavior and dedication to his family. One observer who had known Saldívar since his days as an amateur boxer noted, ““He was almost a boy and yet even then he had that feeling of responsibility. He always took good care of himself.”¹⁰⁵ Saldívar’s family asserted his dedication to his loved ones. His ex-wife stated, ““He was a good husband, a good son, and even better father,” while his oldest son insisted, “My father was very good... He was very calm, he never denied me anything.”¹⁰⁶ Thus, Saldívar’s family echoed the sentiments of the articles from *ARENA* and *Ring Mundial* that underscored how boxers took care of their loved ones in an effort to portray Saldívar in a compassionate, positive light.

“A Swinger in and out of the Ring”

In terms of in-ring accomplishments and out-of-ring personality, Ruben Olivares may well have been the most important Mexican boxer during the Golden Era of the late 1960s and 1970s. He grew up in the working-class Mexico City neighborhoods of Tacubaya, Doctores, and, finally, Bondoquito. According to Olivares, his parents managed properties before finally starting their own company in Bondoquito. The Olivares were not a poor household, although many of their neighbors were. As a child, Rubén found himself frequently in trouble and established a reputation as one of the toughest bullies in his school. He turned to boxing to stay out of trouble and quickly flourished in the

¹⁰⁴ Miguel Reyes Razo, “Tuve de Todo, Pero eso fue Ayer, Decía Vicente Saldívar,” *Excelsior*, 20 July 1985 (5-A).

¹⁰⁵ “El Zurdo de oro,” *Excelsior*, 18 July 1985 (3-D).

¹⁰⁶ “Malú: ‘dejó un buen ejemplo a sus hijos,’” *Uno más uno*, 19 July 1985 (29).

gymnasium.¹⁰⁷ He first entered the spotlight when he won the Federal District Golden Gloves championship as an amateur in 1964. Soon afterwards, he turned professional and quickly made a name for himself with his punching power and brash attitude. Olivares shamelessly touted his exploits, prompting some of his detractors to compare him negatively to Cassius Clay/Muhammad Ali. One fan specifically noted, “We Mexicans already have a Cassius Clay” and recommended that Olivares talked less and fought more.¹⁰⁸ Another anti-Olivares boxing fan asserted that Olivares talked more “than a broad,” echoing the sentiment of others that Olivares acted outside the boundaries of mainstream Mexican masculinity.¹⁰⁹

Olivares, however, was very popular among Mexican fans for his success in the boxing ring (he was world champion four times and in two different weight classes) and for his public celebration of Mexican working-class culture. In 1968, *Ring Mundial* characterized him as “a figure feared in many parts of the world... The kid has shown in the ring marvelous boxing skills, a tremendous punch, and a Spartan determination. That is what is making him an idol. The public is already discovering in him the future great of Aztec boxing.”¹¹⁰ Another Mexican journalist described him as “the classic guy from a lower-class neighborhood who expresses himself with the wit and language typical of a kid from the working-class.”¹¹¹ When he won the world championship in August of 1969, the residents of Bondoquito celebrated for “hours of collective madness and [felt] more

¹⁰⁷ Luis Manuel Ortiz T., “ ‘Seré Campeón, aunque me bajen muerto’: CONFIA RUBEN EN SU PUÑO DE ORO,” *Novedades*, 21 August 1969, 1(Suplemento de jueves).

¹⁰⁸ Francisco Crispín, “LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: OLIVARES, ¡OTRO ‘CASSIUS CLAY’!” *Ring Mundial*, 29 September 1968, 42-43.

¹⁰⁹ Jorge Caldera, “LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: OLIVARES HABLADOR,” *Ring Mundial*, 7 May 1969, 38.

¹¹⁰ “¡Cuatro Mexicanos! Medel, Castillo, Olivares y Pimental Tras un Mismo Objetivo ¡Lionel Rose! Y el Título Mundial Gallo,” *Ring Mundial*, 4 August 1968, 3.

¹¹¹ Mario Erasmo Ortiz, “Rubén Olivares es: UNA MOSCA TSE-TSE,” *Ring Mundial*, 18 June 1967, 6.

satisfied than if all their civic problems had been resolved.” The same observer noted, “Rubén Olivares, a very humble boy, with a difficult and aggressive disposition, through boxing has channeled those instincts and thanks to this transformation, we have a world champion instead of one more juvenile delinquent.”¹¹²

In Los Angeles, Olivares drew attention for his freewheeling ways. Dan Hafner of the *Los Angeles Times* frequently celebrated Olivares’ bravado and his mirthful personality. Reflecting on Olivares’ first trips to Los Angeles, Hafner recalled him as “a fun-loving youngster barely out of his teens... He had a smile that stretched from ear-to-ear and he had thunder in both hands. He was a shopkeeper’s delight, eagerly buying up everything in sight. If he didn’t need it himself, he had a friend in Mexico City who did.”¹¹³ Hafner frequently contrasted Olivares out-of-ring clowning with his in-ring tenacity, calling the boxer “a fun-loving playboy outside the ring, but inside he is an angry assassin.”¹¹⁴ In both Mexico and the United States, Olivares proved quite capable of capturing attention for his exploits in the boxing ring and out of it.

Olivares became a very popular attraction in Los Angeles throughout the 1970s. In 1970, Hafner argued, “Outside the heavyweight ranks there is no more valuable property in boxing.”¹¹⁵ His three fights with fellow Mexican Chucho Castillo between 1970 and 1971 grossed over a million dollars total.¹¹⁶ The Olivares-Castillo trilogy pitted two boxers of contrasting personalities: Olivares “the swinger,” who won the first and

¹¹² Bill Llano, “LA DINAMITA DE OLIVARES,” *Impacto*, September 3, 1969, 31.

¹¹³ Dan Hafner, “Title, Family Settle Olivares Down ---Some,” *Los Angeles Times*, 27 Nov 1969, 6(E).

¹¹⁴ Hafner, “Olivares Batters Rose to Win Title on KO in Fifth,” *Los Angeles Times*, 23 Aug 1969, 1(C).

¹¹⁵ Hafner, “Olivares: A Swinger In and Out of the Ring,” *Los Angeles Times*, 29 March 1970, 8(C).

¹¹⁶ Hafner, “Olivares Batters Castillo to Regain Bantam Title,” *Los Angeles Times*, 3 April 1971, 3(E).

third fights and Castillo “the recluse” who emerged victorious from the second match.¹¹⁷ While Olivares exuded no ill will toward his opponent, Castillo did not care for Olivares’ antics, telling the U.S. media before their first encounter, “Winning the title is not important... I’m only interested in beating Olivares. It is all I live for. Olivares is a loudmouth and not a deserving champion. In Mexico I am the popular one. I will beat Olivares and then the title will truly belong to my country.”¹¹⁸ Castillo characterized his more humble personality as being more in line with “normal” Mexican social mores, and thus more authentically Mexican. In fact, before the third match, Castillo provided this statement as his stock reply to reporters: “Let Olivares make like Cassius Clay [Muhammad Ali],” a reference to Ali’s recent loss to Joe Frazier and a possible allusion to Olivares ‘unauthentic’ Mexican personality.¹¹⁹ Hafner reported on Olivares’ supreme confidence after defeating Castillo in the third match: “ ‘I said I was the real champ,’ he said as he grabbed a bottle of 7-Up in his dressing room and ripped the cap off with his teeth, ‘and tonight I proved it.’ ”¹²⁰

Mexican boxing fans often compared Olivares to Muhammad Ali because of his outspokenness and supreme confidence in his abilities, but New Jets quarterback Joe Namath was probably a more apt comparison. Simply put, Olivares was more likely to wear a fur coat on the sideline of a football field like Namath than to convert to Islam and challenge the political and societal status quo like Ali. Olivares public endorsed the

¹¹⁷ Dwight Chapin, “Olivares --- The Good-Life Champ,” *Los Angeles Times*, 19 April 1970, 1(B).

¹¹⁸ Hafner, “CHUCHO A DEDICATED FIGHTER: Castillo Motivated by Hatred of Olivares,” *Los Angeles Times*, 13 April 1970, 3(D).

¹¹⁹ Hafner, “Challenger Olivares Pick Over Castillo in Bantam Battle,” *Los Angeles Times*, 2 April 1971, 1(E).

¹²⁰ Hafner, “Olivares Batters Castillo to Regain Bantam Title,” *Los Angeles Times*, 3 April 1971, 3(E).

Mexican president throughout the peak years of his pugilistic career. Recalling when he dedicated the match in which he won his first world championship to president Gustavo Díaz Ordaz in 1969, Olivares exclaimed, “Imagined if I had failed him!” The boxer from La Bondonjito characterized Díaz Ordaz as “the most important man in Mexico” and “a great fan of boxing.”¹²¹ These endorsements of Díaz Ordaz came within a year and two years, respectively, of the Tlatelolco massacre of 300 university students two weeks before the 1968 Summer Olympics in Mexico City and reflect a lack of engagement (publicly) with the political left. Olivares may espoused a lifestyle that undermined traditional Mexican moral values, but he did not attempt to challenge Mexican society or its political leaders. Most likely, fans viewed this deference as a positive quality. By respecting Mexican political leadership, he was showing that fame had not alienated him from Mexican society.

The Castillo trilogy proved to be the high point of Olivares’ career. In 1972, he lost his world bantamweight championship to Mexican Rafael Herrera in Mexico City. In a rematch with Herrera in Los Angeles later that year, the crowd, the largest ever to see a boxing card at the Forum, “jeered and whistled” at Olivares as he lost to Herrera for a second time.¹²² After losing to Canadian Art Hafey in Mexico in September of 1973, Olivares received a favorable decision in winning the March 1974 rematch. In response, *Ring Mundial* expressed concern that Olivares was “nothing more than an instrument of California businessmen, that are exploiting to the maximum the box-office charisma of

¹²¹ “Biografía - El Campeón: DE BONDOJITO A LA GLORIA!” *Ring Mundial*, 15 April 1970, 14.

¹²² Hafner, “HERRERA DEFEATS OLIVARES; PINDER WHIPS CASTILLO,” *Los Angeles Times*, 15 Nov. 1972, 1(B).

the Púas, who at the end of the fight looked resigned. He felt that he had lost.”¹²³ The magazine insisted, “Naturally, we always celebrate the triumphs of our boxers, but passion does not blind us.”¹²⁴ As Olivares entered the twilight of his career and his pugilistic abilities declined, boxing fans became more critical of his behavior outside the boxing ring.



Figure 4. From left to right: Chucho Castillo, George Parnassus, and Rubén Olivares. AGN, Hermanos Mayo Collection, Exp. 26,254.

Olivares' fortunes changed for the better when he won the WBA world featherweight championship in July of 1974, making him the first Mexican to win world titles in two separate weight classes. His first defense came four months later when he faced Alexis Argüello of Nicaragua at the Forum. Some fans were more skeptical about Olivares' chances against the Nicaraguan. One enthusiast expressed doubt about

¹²³ “Oficialmente el Triunfador fue Olivares, Pero... ¿USTED CREE QUE GANO?” *Ring Mundial*, 17 March 1974, 8.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

Olivares' ability to win as well as his impact on boxing: "I do not know what will happen if, after so much criticism, Olivares goes and beats Alexis Argüello and continues being champion. I presume that drinking in excess will be idolized and seeing the ease with which the champion combines fun and boxing, drinking and the fights, many will try to imitate him and boxing will be the loser." He continued, "as a Mexican, it would please me if he succeeded, but I have no illusions. The Púas looked very bad in his last fight."¹²⁵ Another fan agreed, "Olivares is in decadence, but he was the best Mexican boxer of all time."¹²⁶ A boxing enthusiast from Matamoros, Tamaulipas contended, "that the pugilist from Bondonjito is not going to last long with the tremendous Nicaraguan knockout artist" partly because "in his recent fights, Rubén Olivares has appeared slow, flat, and fat... If the Púas had been training thoroughly and had not been living the live he lives, the result would be different."¹²⁷

Although Argüello knocked him out in the thirteenth round, Olivares put forth a noble effort and received praise from fans. One fan from Michoacán insisted, "Although he lost to Argüello, it was demonstrated in Los Angeles that our Rubén Olivares is a valiant person. A great champion that if he had lived an ordered lifestyle would be practically invincible."¹²⁸ Another fan from Monterrey congratulated Olivares "for his valiant fight" versus Argüello: "Although he lost by knockout, he still demonstrated that

¹²⁵ Juan E. Benavente A., "La Esquina del Fan: ¿Qué Pasará con Olivares?" *Ring Mundial*, 3 Noviembre 1974, 31.

¹²⁶ Jerónimo Ramírez, "La Esquina del Fan: EL PUAS EN DECADENCIA," *Ring Mundial*, 3 Noviembre 1974, 31.

¹²⁷ Humberto Botti Trejo, "La Esquina del Fan: Argüello Noqueará a Rubén," *Ring Mundial*, 10 Noviembre 1974, 31.

¹²⁸ Raúl Ventosa García, "La Esquina del Fan: Olivares es un Valiente," *Ring Mundial*, 14 December 1974, 31.

he is a great boxer.”¹²⁹ To these fans, Olivares had shown his willingness to absorb and mete out punishment despite insurmountable odds. Three months later, a fan from Chiapas questioned, “why many Mexican do not support Olivares, being the only Mexican boxer to have won two world titles and who more than anyone gave our pugilism and our country a good name in the boxing world, with his sensational fights and his great achievements. He is a man who in every fight fights with all his heart.”¹³⁰ In early 1975, *Nocaut* noted that *el Púas* was the most popular Mexican boxer abroad because “The joking, ‘irresponsible’ Olivares is a total man in the ring.”¹³¹

After Olivares surprisingly knocked out WBC Featherweight champion Bobby Chacón in 1975, one fan from Mexico City wrote a letter to Olivares in *Ring Mundial*: “I have always believed in you and your abilities as a boxer. For this, I pointed you out as the favorite to defeat Bobby Chacón. But the lesson that you offered at the Forum was superior to what all of us expected, because of your speed, elegance, force, and very brilliant form. You are a great champion, Rubén! All of Mexico admires and cheers you, but do not get too proud.”¹³² A fan from Oaxaca hailed Olivares as “the best of the professional boxers Mexico has had.” He was particularly impressed with Olivares’ performance versus Chacón that allowed him to win a fourth world championship: “the Púas no only established a difficult record to equal, but also demonstrated to everyone, especially his detractors that, pound for pound, he continues being the best pugilist there

¹²⁹ Felipe Salas García, “La Esquina del Fan: EL PUAS ES UN VALIENTE,” *Ring Mundial*, 22 December 1974, 31.

¹³⁰ Elmer Velázquez D., “La Esquina del Fan: APOYEN A OLIVARES,” *Ring Mundial*, 2 February 1975, 31.

¹³¹ “Nominación Unánime: ¡¡RUBEN OLIVARES!!” *Nocaut... Sólo Box*, 9 January 1975, 19.

¹³² Guillermo Mendoza V., “La Esquina del Fan: ¡ASI SE BOXEA, RUBEN!” *Ring Mundial*, 6 July 1975, 31.

is in the world... and the best Mexico has produced.”¹³³ Olivares’ manager, Cuyo Hernández, however, viewed the victory over Chacón as a negative for Mexico: “What I believe is bad is that he becomes conceited for having won a world title for the fourth time and he boasts about being a drunk guy: that is no good, not an example for the youth.”¹³⁴

Hernández’s warning would come to fruition three months later when Olivares defended his championship against lightly regarded David Kotey of Ghana. It was obvious to both the Los Angeles and Mexico City media that Olivares was not taking his opponent seriously enough. According to a report in the *Los Angeles Times*, Olivares drank three to four beers daily and refused to abstain from sex while training. In addition, neither of the two wives and none of the seven children he supported accompanied him on the trip.¹³⁵ One week before the fight, a hung-over Olivares told a Mexican interviewer he was the “equal... to the newspapers vendors there in *Mexicalpan* that express shock about everything.” Olivares inform the reporter that he would not discuss his drinking habits, because “we drank ourselves stupid last night and I have a hangover...” When the reporter told Olivares that he needed to be more professional, Olivares called him “cocky” and told him, “I’m going to fight, not confess my sins.” When the interviewer reminded Olivares that he was a world champion and a

¹³³ Manuel María Pérez Velasco, “La Esquina del Fan: OLIVARES, EL MEJOR DE TODOS,” *Ring Mundial*, 13 July 1975, 31.

¹³⁴ Ignacio B. Sachman Torres, “DE REY DE COPAS A MONARCAS DE PLUMAS: SEGÚN EL CUYO, OLIVARES NO ES BUEN EJEMPLO PARA LA JUVENTUD,” *Impacto*, 2 July 1975, 67.

¹³⁵ Jack Hawn, “THE PLAYBOY CHAMPION: Wives and Dolls Part of Olivares’ Training,” *Los Angeles Times*, 18 September 1975, 1(E).

representative of the Mexican nation, and that he should serve as a model for the youth, Olivares responded, “Don’t come at me with sermons! I’m a fighter and not a saint.”¹³⁶

Olivares lost the bout with Kotey and his world championship. Many Mexican enthusiasts viewed this defeat as a proper come-uppance for the playboy from Bondonjito. A fan from Torreón, viewed Olivares’ loss to Kotey as a positive for Mexican society: “Those who made Olivares an idol and come wind or high water, maintained that he could have the intimate life that he wanted... now have realized their error. In boxing, which is a very demanding sport, preparation cannot be neglected, nor can a healthy lifestyle be set aside.” The fan asserted, “He has been maintained for two years artificially, helped by those who exploited his name for box-office gains. He was champion because the champion was a stiff named Chacón.” He also found it “curious” that Mexican boxing fans held up Olivares “as an example of a highly-gifted and invincible pugilist, damaged by drink and nocturnal parties. What happened had to occur. The example that he finally gave, sadly, was without a doubt, positive.”¹³⁷

It was not just the Kotey defeat that spurred Mexicans to express their displeasure with Olivares. Olivares may have lived a different lifestyle than Saldívar, but he also received heavy criticism for his lack of compassion. Throughout Olivares’ career, boxing enthusiasts expressed dismay at his lack of shame and outlandish behavior. A fan from the state of Veracruz called Olivares, “that shameless person who did not want to attend the function given in benefit to the debts of [recently deceased boxer] Toluco López

¹³⁶ “LOS MEXICANOS ESTAN HECHOS PARA PELEAR Y TRIUNFAR,” *Nocaut... Sólo Box*, 11 September 1975, 18.

¹³⁷ Gerardo M. González, “La Esquina del Fan: EL EJEMPLO DEL PUAS,” *Ring Mundial*, 26 October 1975, 31.

because ‘they did not pay for the tickets.’ He continued, “A common person without human qualities, without sentiments, an inveterate and abusive drunk that took advantage of the smallest thing for publicity, does not deserve to be taken into account.” He went on, “I hope that his family is never in the same circumstances as the family of Toluco, because I will be the first in throwing a stone in place of giving them a coin.” He added, “What shame, Rubén Olivares, and you were champion of the world, the man who [President] Mr. Luis Echeverría put up as an example for our youth.”¹³⁸ A fan from Mexico City criticized Olivares for thinking “that he is the center of the universe. Well, it turns out that he is a thug who despises the public and does not realize that thanks to them he has come to possess all that he has: fame and fortune.” The fan expressed his desire that Olivares “understands that he owes that public and that his way of being is not admirable under any concept.”¹³⁹ Another fan wrote to *Nocaut* to discuss his “bad fortune of the Mr. Rubén Olivares in the airport... The common and rude guy” apparently held up lines at the airport, as Mexicans flocked to see the world champion. According to the letter’s writer, “I am extremely bothered to live in the same country” as Olivares and expressed his desire to inform *Nocaut* that he “would like you to publish that not all of us are in favor of this conceited and pedantic fighter and that his attitude of walking around the airport with a bottle in hand, instead of being [celebrated]... should be punished.”¹⁴⁰

¹³⁸ Anónimo, “¡EL NOCAUT! de los Lectores: ¡OLIVARES ME AVERGUENZA!” *Nocaut... Sólo Box*, 27 April 1973, 26.

¹³⁹ Pedro Juárez T., “¡EL NOCAUT! DE LOS LECTORES: OLIVARES ES UN CREIDO,” *Nocaut... Sólo Box*, 5 December 1974, 16.

¹⁴⁰ Ramiro Fernández Loera, “¡EL NOCAUT! DE LOS LECTORES: ¡QUE VULGAR ES OLIVARES!” *Nocaut... Sólo Box*, 2 July 1975, 14.

Mexican fans critiqued Olivares for his lack of self-discipline and his perceived ungratefulness. His playboy lifestyle may have alienated him from his fans because it disrupted gender norms. Historian Bill Osbersby has argued that in the United States celebration of the playboy lifestyle complicated the notion that production was a masculine realm and consumption a feminine realm.¹⁴¹ Olivares' self-indulgent behavior alarmed Mexican fans who believed he owed Mexico his best performances in boxing matches. His four world championships signaled to other fans that he was performing well enough for Mexico. Others viewed this success as a bad lesson about self-control for young Mexicans. Olivares' masculinity that combined hedonism with pugilistic success is probably best summarized by Dan Hafner when he called Olivares "A swinger in and out of the ring," a characterization that both excited and concerned Mexican boxing fans.¹⁴²

Conclusion

From the 1940s to the 1970s boxing magazines showed Mexican boxers as virile men who also functioned in and contributed to Mexican society. Although preferences may have changed in the mid to late 1960s, boxing magazines, especially *Ring Mundial*, continued to promote self-discipline and compassion as desirable masculine behaviors. *Ring Mundial* and *Nocaut* also provided reader forums that allowed boxing fans to comment on the behaviors of Mexico's most famous pugilists. While fans and boxing writers debated the importance or meaning of various behaviors, they all help establish

¹⁴¹ Bill Osgerby, "The Bachelor Pad as Cultural Icon: Masculinity, Consumption and Interior Design in American Men's Magazines, 1930-1965," *Journal of Design History* 18, 1 (2005): 100.

¹⁴² Hafner, "Olivares: A Swinger In and Out of the Ring," 8(C).

the boxing magazine as a medium for celebrating the diversity and power of masculinity and relegated femininity as a passive identity.

Chapter 4:
Mexico, California, and the World Boxing Council:
Migration, Nationalism, and the Regulation of Sport

In February of 1963, Mexico City hosted the first ever World Boxing Convention. With the approval of President Adolfo López Mateos, Federal District Boxing Commissioner Luis Spota invited boxing bureaucrats from Asia, Europe, Latin America, and the United States to the Mexican capital in order to reform the sport from a global perspective. The Convention ended with the creation of the World Boxing Council (WBC), the first global boxing sanctioning body. Part of the convention involved the creation of the Union of Latin American Professional Boxing. Following his election as Union president, Spota called Latin America a positive force “that influences, whether they [most likely the United States and Europe] want it to or not, the destinies of the world... these are the years of our continent’s great awakening... to not take us into account is not only clumsy, but foolish and dangerous.”¹ Spota’s combative rhetoric epitomized his nationalist stance toward the more powerful nations of the boxing world, especially the United States, since he first became commissioner in 1959. Ironically, within twenty years of its creation, the WBC became so cooperative with U.S. boxing interests that *Sports Illustrated* erroneously credited a U.S. boxing promoter with “bankrolling” the WBC since its inception.²

This chapter traces the transformation of the WBC from an instrument of Mexican economic nationalism into an organization known for its cooperation with U.S. boxing

¹ Ramón Bravo, “Luis Spota fué Nombrado Presidente de la U.L.A.B.P.,” *El Universal*, 12 February 1963, 13(A).

² “How the WBC and WBA Rose to Power,” *Sports Illustrated*, 16 March 1981, n. pag.

interests. It argues that, despite this change in operating philosophy, the leaders of the WBC maintained that they protected the integrity of Mexican boxing. Luis Spota's attempts to change the dynamics of the international boxing industry reveal how the ideologies of Mexican internationalism and economic nationalism could function cohesively and without contradiction. Spota's attempts at protectionism, however, failed, and the WBC nearly fell apart as a result. When it was revitalized in 1968, the WBC developed a more cooperative relationship with U.S. boxing interests, specifically those in California. Whereas the WBC originally touted its ability to promote the wellbeing of Mexican boxers by flaunting its ability to fight and sometimes control U.S. boxing interests, it later asserted its nationalistic credentials by advocating its ability to promote the wellbeing of Mexican boxers by cooperating with U.S. boxing authorities and promoters. This shift in philosophy also reflected the changing of the definition of Mexican boxing from the sport that happened within the borders to Mexico (albeit a contested notion) to one involving Mexican boxers, regardless of where they boxed.

Despite its goal of internationalism, the WBC was - and remains - a very nationalist institution. Claudio Lomnitz has characterized Mexican revolutionary nationalism as "obsessed with national betrayal and the erosion of national institutions" and has drawn several parallels between it and modern anti-Semitism in Europe.³ Instead of Jews, however, it was the technocratic, cosmopolitan, and elite *científicos* of the Porfiriato who became the "fetish that concentrated all the negative value" of unrestrained capitalist development.⁴ Aspects of modern anti-Semitism such as

³ Claudio Lomnitz, "Anti-Semitism and the Ideology of the Mexican Revolution," *Representations* 110, 1 (2010): 24.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 21.

“obsession with betrayal, veiled foreign intrusion, and anti-intellectualism” allowed the Mexican government to mobilize the masses to purge political rivals. While Luis Spota employed a rhetoric incorporating many of these ideas (national betrayal, foreign intrusion, protecting a national institution) to justify many of his actions, his detractors used a similar vocabulary (betrayal, anti-intellectualism, and protecting national institutions) to discredit him. After the WBC developed a more cooperative approach with the United States, its leaders continue to assert their nationalist credentials to ward off such verbal attacks. The WBC may have changed operating philosophies, but many Mexican boxing enthusiasts still expected that it would continue to protect Mexican boxing against foreign elements.

Luis Spota and the Policies of Adolfo López Mateos

In February of 1959, Luis Spota (1925-1985) was named the president of the Federal District Boxing Commission in Mexico City. A best-selling novelist, journalist, and screenwriter, Spota had written about the underbelly of Mexican society, exposing corruption at all levels. Now his focus was the sordid sport of professional prizefighting. During his presidency, which lasted nearly twenty-six years, Spota instituted several changes domestically. He made literacy compulsory for obtaining a boxing license, provided boxers with a pathway to insurance and benefits through their inclusion in the *Instituto Mexicano de Seguro Social* (IMSS), and founded a national association of Mexican boxing commissions. Spota also attempted to change the international dynamics of the boxing industry, at one point banning Mexican nationals from boxing in

California and later starting his own international boxing regulatory agency, the World Boxing Council (WBC).

Spota applied economic nationalist measures to prevent the United States from underdeveloping boxing in Mexico.⁵ Following World War II, Mexico had turned to economic protectionism as its terms of international trade turned unfavorable. Even economic liberals supported the move to protectionism as temporary cure in order to alleviate growing trade imbalances. Although these protectionist policies echoed many of the sentiments espoused by the Import Substitution Industrialization (ISI) model promoted by CEPAL (Economic Commission of Latin America), Mexican intellectuals often traced the roots of economic nationalism in Mexico to the Revolution of 1910-1920.⁶ It was another Latin American revolution, led by Fidel Castro in Cuba, that cemented these policies in the 1960s in Mexican state nationalism. Presidents López Mateos and Gustavo Díaz Ordaz refused to liberalize the economy and instead opted for “unsustainable renewals” of protectionism, out of fear of the impact of Cuban Revolutionary rhetoric on the Mexican populace.⁷ The same policies also proved ineffective in promoting the boxing industry within Mexico. [POSSIBLE REWRITE]

Aside from being known as the *presidente deportista* and as an economic nationalist, López Mateos was also known for his ambitious foreign policy. According to Blanca Torres, the López Mateos administration expressed “a greater desire to magnify

⁵ For the application of Dependency Theory and underdevelopment applied to sport in a Latin American nation, see Alan M. Klein, “Baseball as Underdevelopment: The Political-Economy of Sport in the Dominican Republic,” *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 16, 2 (1989): 109-110.

⁶ Susan Gauss, “The Politics of Economic Nationalism in Postrevolutionary Mexico,” *History Compass*, 4, 3 (2006): 567-569.

⁷ Arthur Schmidt, “The Political and Economic Reverberations of the Cuban Revolution in Mexico,” *History Compass*, 6, 4 (2008): 1153.

[Mexico's] presence abroad."⁸ During his presidency, López Mateos visited more nations than any previous Mexican president, with extended visits to South America, Europe, and Asia.⁹ In the process, he earned the moniker, 'López Paseos.'¹⁰ Sport played a pivotal role in López Mateos' foreign policy as well. Upon hearing the news that Mexico City had won the right to host the Olympics, he announced the following to the Mexican public:

It is a worldwide acknowledgement of the strength of the Mexican people in maintaining and raising their international standing in the world of sport, and also of their economic and political stability, which is undoubtedly based on their unswerving doctrine of pacifism and friendship towards all people of the world.¹¹

Although he presented the WBC's founding as an example of Mexico extending its influence abroad, Spota used the WBC to protect the Mexican boxing industry against U.S. boxing promoters, who increasingly employed Mexican pugilists and paid them higher wages than Mexican promoters. In this sense, the founding of WBC perfectly fit the presidency of Adolfo López Mateos, who nationalized the electrical industry in 1960 and who obsessed over capturing the bid for the 1968 Summer Olympics.¹²

California and Mexican Boxing

Professional boxing in California dates back to the second-half of the nineteenth century, yet no law regulating the sport existed until it was banned in 1914. In November of 1924, the state's citizens legalized professional boxing and wrestling in a general

⁸ Torres, 13.

⁹ Ibid., 145-162.

¹⁰ Krauze, 658. José Agustín, 182. *Paseo* is Spanish for trip or excursion.

¹¹ Campos Bravo, 'Reconocen el Esfuerzo del Pueblo Mexicano,' *El Nacional*, 19 Oct. 1963, in Brewster and Brewster, 753.

¹² Zolov, "Showcasing the 'Land of Tomorrow,'" 164.

election. January of 1925 marked the inception of the California State Athletic Commission, which oversaw public exhibitions of both sports. Despite efforts by the Church Federation of California and William Randolph Hearst to ban the sport, boxing enjoyed popular support. The California boxing industry, however, experienced several problems in the 1920s and 1930s, as fixed fights, in-ring deaths, and canceled shows angered fans and prompted politicians to investigate the sport.¹³ From a public relations standpoint, the greatest disaster occurred in 1927, when Los Angeles boxing fans spent over \$70,000 in non-refundable tickets for a world welterweight (147 lbs.) championship match that never took place. Although the incident prompted the State Athletic Commission to institute a refund policy, it did little to promote a positive public image of boxing within the state of California.¹⁴

Boxing remained predominantly working-class and white in Los Angeles until the 1920s. There were Mexican-American boxers like Aurelio Herrera, who boxed from 1898 to 1909, who had successful and competitive careers boxing throughout the Golden State.¹⁵ By the mid 1920s, Mexican-American boxers such as Joe Rivers and Mexican boxers such as Bert Colima and Baby Arizmendi became star attractions in Los Angeles. Frequently in attendance was Mexican actress Lupe Vélez, who regularly attended Southern California boxing matches in the 1920s and 1930s. Vélez's ethnicity and gender separated her from other celebrities who attended boxing matches, such as Clark

¹³ California, Legislature, Assembly, Committee on Boxing and Wrestling, *Report of the Assembly Committee To Investigate and Report Upon Boxing and Wrestling in California, and Needed Legislation in Relation Thereto* (Sacramento: California State Printing Office, 1933), 5-6. [Hereafter cited as Committee on Boxing and Wrestling, *Report*]

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 21-24.

¹⁵ Gregory S. Rodríguez, “ ‘Palaces of Pain,’ ” 1-11.

Gable, Charlie Chaplin, and Al Jolson.¹⁶ By the early 1930s, several of Mexico City's best pugilists began appearing in California boxing rings, among them Kid Azteca and Rodolfo "Chango" Casanova.¹⁷

The 1940s marked a transition for boxing in California. The outbreak of World War II presented a conundrum for the U.S. boxing industry. Most of the nation's young men were drafted into military service, simultaneously leaving boxing without some of its major stars and emptying the recruiting grounds of the sport. In a news bulletin for the Nation Boxing Association of America (NBA), president Abe Greene described the situation: "While in many sections of the country there is a quickening of interest in boxing because men in war industries have more to spend, there is a very substantial drain on the talent on these boxing shows. Now with the eighteen and nineteen year old boys being called up even the newer talent will become scarcer."¹⁸ Because many NBA world champions had entered military service, the organization introduced "duration" champions, who would be considered world champion throughout the duration of the champion's military service. When the original world champion returned, he would fight the duration champion in order to determine who really was the champion in that weight class.¹⁹ This shortage of pugilistic talent provided Mexican boxers with more opportunities to fight in the United States.

¹⁶ Ibid., 84-87.

¹⁷ Bill Potts, "AZTECA, CASANOVA HERE," *Los Angeles Times*, 30 June 1933, 9(A).

¹⁸ California State Archives, Department of Professional and Vocational Services, (Hereafter CSA, DPVS-AC), Correspondence with National Boxing Association, 1941, Folder F2206, Official Bulletin, National Boxing Association of America, No. 4 - 1942-1943, 28 October 1942.

¹⁹ CSA, DPVS-AC, Correspondence with National Boxing Association, 1941, Folder F2206, Official Bulletin, National Boxing Association of America, No. 5 - 1942-1943, 10 December 1942.

One manager who took advantage of the situation was George Parnassus. An immigrant from Greece, Parnassus had worked as a restaurant dishwasher in California, then became a restaurant owner in Arizona, and eventually began managing boxers in both states. Parnassus successfully guided Filipino boxer Ceferino García to a world championship in the 1930s. Having married a woman from the northern Mexican state of Sonora, Parnassus turned his attention to Mexican boxers in 1942. His first Mexican client was a Juan Zurita of Guadalajara, famous in Mexico in the 1930s for his classic lightweight fights with fellow Mexicans Rodolfo Casanova and Joe Conde. Zurita was no longer considered competitive on the elite level, yet under Parnassus' aegis, he received an opportunity for the world lightweight championship in March of 1944. Zurita won the title, but lost it later that month. Despite the brevity of his reign, Zurita, under the management of Parnassus, could claim to be the first undisputed world boxing champion from Mexico and he would retire with far more substantial earnings than his peers.

After managing Zurita, Parnassus guided the career of Enrique Bolaños, who was born in state of Durango but grew up in the Mexico City neighborhood of Tepito. Under Parnassus, Bolaños became a major attraction in Southern California in the late 1940s. His championship matches against Ike Williams in 1948 and 1949 grossed US\$128,030 and \$US90,582, respectively.²⁰ The former accounted for eighty-seven percent of the gross revenue from the boxing shows held in Southern California for the month of May

²⁰ CSA, State Athletic Commission (Hereafter CSA-SAC), Revenue Reports, May 1946-1953, Folder F3920:237, Detailed Monthly Report of California Boxing and Wrestling Clubs, Southern Boxing, Month of May 1948. CSA, SAC, Revenue Reports, July 1946-1953, Folder F3920:241, Detailed Monthly Report of California Boxing and Wrestling Clubs, Southern Boxing, Month of July 1949.

1948. After managing Bolaños, Parnassus helped Lauro Salas become the main Mexican attraction in California. Salas won the world lightweight championship in May of 1952, but never approached Bolaños' popularity. His victory over Jimmy Carter for the world championship grossed US\$26,717, far less than Bolaños' gates.²¹ Throughout the 1950s, Salas proved to be a fairly popular and reliable attraction throughout Northern and Southern California, drawing between US\$20,000 and US\$30,000 gates for his fights.

Parnassus' success in managing Mexican boxers earned him both admirers and enemies. On one hand, he helped his clients attain levels of wealth and notoriety previously unknown to Mexican pugilists. On the other, his success with Mexican boxers in Los Angeles meant that fewer fans within Mexico could watch their favorite boxers. As World War II came to a close, members of the Mexico City boxing community hoped that the return of young North American men from Europe and Japan, would allow boxing promoters within the United States to rely more on local talent for shows and not rely as much on Mexican boxers.²² Ideally this would have allowed the Mexico City promoter, Salvador Lutteroth, and his matchmaking ally, Miguel De la Colina, opportunities to show fighters like Enrique Bolaños in Mexico City. Unfortunately for Mexico City boxing fans, Mexican boxers continued to fight in Los Angeles and avoided Mexico City. Boxing magazine *Ring Mundial* blamed "the pseudo-matchmaker" Colina and "the caricature of Stalin in our pugilism" Lutteroth for destroying "that which was a magnificent business."²³ The fact remained that fewer North American white ethnics

²¹ CSA, SAC, Revenue Reports, May 1946-1953, Folder F3920:237, Detailed Monthly Report of California Boxing and Wrestling Clubs, Southern Boxing, Month of May 1952.

²² "Decimos," *Ring Mundial*, 9 March 1946, 3.

²³ "DECIMOS," *Ring Mundial*, 3 April 1948, 3.

were entering the boxing professional, something that was not lost on Mexican observers. In 1954, Antonio Andere told the readers of *Siempre!* that nine out of ten new boxers in the United States were African-American, revealing some Mexican recognition that the sport's lack of white ethnics contributed to the demand for Mexican boxers in the United States.²⁴

While elements within the Mexico City boxing industry believed that Parnassus was destroying boxing within Mexico, others portrayed him as performing a nationalistic service. Journalist and baseball announcer Pedro "El Mago" Septien found it "very extraordinary" that members of the Mexico City boxing community felt animosity toward Parnassus. It required "a very backward mentality to suppose that Parnassus represented a danger to Mexican boxing, as the readers well know that he is the manager that has done the most for *Azteca* boxing in many years." Septien complimented Parnassus on his handling of both Zurita and Bolaños, the first forgotten in Mexico and deemed burnt out, only to become world lightweight champion in 1944, and the second a recipient of several opportunities to win a world championship. Both were able to enjoy the riches they made from their ring exploits, unlike boxers like Chango Casanova, who spent his post-boxing career penniless and friendless.²⁵ Septien thus underscored the contested nature of the term, "Mexican boxing," as he interpreted it as meaning the actual boxers, whereas others, including promoters and fans, often viewed it as signifying the boxing that took place in Mexico. This was especially true before the advent and wide

²⁴ Antonio Andere, "DEPORTES: Box," *Siempre!*, 8 May 1954, 68.

²⁵ El Mago Septien, "DESDE RINGSIDE," *Ring Mundial*, 18 June 1949, 11.

dissemination of television, which allowed Mexican fans to watch boxing from all over the world.

Boxing magazine *Ring Mundial* was one entity that highlighted the positives of Mexican boxers traveling to the United States by offering very sympathetic portrayals of boxers who had boxed abroad. An interview with Mexican boxer Luis Torres about his experience in Los Angeles sheds light on the benefits for Mexican pugilists when they boxed in the United States. For Torres, fighting in Los Angeles not only allowed him to earn US\$2,500, it also gave him “the opportunity to get to know California.” The trip was Torres’ first outside of Mexico, and it allowed him to meet Enrique Bolaños and actor Gary Cooper. Torres even declared that discrimination against Mexicans did not exist in California. Instead, Torres claimed, “In California, they love Mexicans very much” and he noted that everyone called him “Mr. Torres” during his stay. Of course, the monetary aspect was also important. Torres claimed that, in Los Angeles, a person could make in one year what he could not make in five years in Mexico. Torres also had positive words for Parnassus. He excused the manager for the fact that he only received 2,500 of his US\$6,000 purse, citing that Parnassus’ received one-third of the purse and U.S. taxes take out another share. Although Torres lost his match in Los Angeles, he refused to blame Parnassus, about whom he claimed to have nothing to complain.²⁶ Torres’ recollection of his time in Los Angeles shows that Mexican boxers went to California as a choice. Not only did they leave for the chance to earn more money, but they also did so for the opportunity to travel abroad, a luxury often unavailable to people

²⁶ Luis Torres, as told to Jaime Rodríguez, “Habla Luis Torres: ‘EN CALIFORNIA SE GANA EN UN AÑO LO QUE AQUI NO EN CINCO,’” *Ring Mundial*, 6 November 1948, 12.

from their socioeconomic class. Also, as professional athletes, they were subject to treatment not afforded to the average Mexican immigrant, their increased social status making them popular and desirable to many people in California.

The state of the California boxing industry, however, was not as rosy as Torres and other described it. Corruption and incompetence infiltrated the sport's regulation within that state. In 1945, California Governor Earl Warren addressed the State Athletic Commission with his concerns over the integrity of the boxing industry in California. A self-professed boxing fan, the future Supreme Court Chief Justice expressed worry about newspaper reports on fixed fights, which he felt were damaging the well-being of the business of boxing. Warren wanted the Athletic Commission to rid the sport of any connections with gamblers, who were clearly those most responsible for the fixing of fights. Furthermore, Warren wanted the deeply divided State Athletic Commission to unify and stop splitting California into "Balkan States," that set their own rules and regulations.²⁷ In response to Warren's suggestions and concerns, commission member Tony Estenza replied, "We have no police power and receive no salary, of course... The [San Francisco] Chronicle is about right in what it said this morning: we are the scum of all the appointive commissions of the State. After a Governor goes over his list and makes appointments to all other commissions and has some left over they are eligible for the Athletic Commission."²⁸ Warren's meeting with the Athletic Commission highlighted two oft-repeated critiques: that the Commission was overly balkanized, allowing different

²⁷ Office of the Secretary of State, California State Archives (CSA), Department of Professional and Vocational Standards - Athletic Commission (DPVS-AC), Hearings and Minutes, 1945, Folder F2191, MEETING OF STATE ATHLETIC COMMISSION: REMARKS OF GOVERNOR EARL WARREN, 24 April 1945.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

regions of the state to have different rules and that commission members were politically appointed volunteers.

Yet Warren's concern was more than just political wrangling. The ineptitude and dishonesty of the State Athletic Commission occasionally had dire consequences. In October of 1945, Mexican national Alberto Morales Silva died after suffering head injuries in his first professional fight in Los Angeles. After fighting competitively for three rounds, Morales Silva was knocked out in the fourth and final round and had to be carried to the dressing room. Quickly revived, he was deemed healthy by the Ocean Park Arena's physician. On the way back to the hotel, however, Morales Silva fell asleep and never awoke. He was pronounced dead the following day at Los Angeles General Hospital. A participant in the *bracero* program, Morales Silva came to the United States to perform agricultural work, and was, by law, forbidden from earning money in any other capacity, yet he was still able to secure a boxing license in California.²⁹ The Commission allowed a bracero to break federal law and an arena physician deemed a man who would soon lapse into a coma in good health. The coroner's report, however, deemed Morales Silva's death "accidental" and attached "no blame to anybody connected with the boxing match."³⁰ The chairman of the State Athletic Commission, upon finding out that no one was deemed responsible for the death of Morales Silva, deemed the situation, "just one of those unfortunate accidents."³¹

²⁹ CSA, DPVS-AC, Hearings and Minutes, 1945, Folder F2191, Assistant Chief Inspector's Report, 18 October 1945.

³⁰ CSA, DPVS-AC, Hearings and Minutes, 1945, Folder F2191, Verdict of the Coroner's Jury, 18 October 1945.

³¹ CSA, DPVS-AC, Hearings and Minutes, 1945, Folder F2191, BEFORE THE STATE ATHLETIC COMMISSION, STATE OF CALIFORNIA, In re: ALBERTO M. SILVA, Reporter's Transcript of Proceedings, 12 November 1945.

The Morales case was but one example of incompetence and corruption. In 1949, the California State Assembly published a report on boxing by the Committee on Public Morals, in response to a dramatic increase in in-ring deaths. In the report, the Committee declared itself “unanimous in its opinion that the California Athletic Commission was not negligent in the administration of its duties insofar as the deaths of any of the deceased is concerned,” although it did find areas where the commission needed to improve.³² The report provided suggestions for increasing the in-ring safety of boxing and highlighted flaws within Athletic Commission organization. For instance, the Commission’s Assistant Secretary regularly failed to notify a specific Commission inspector about meetings for the inspectors.³³ Like other inquiries into the Athletic Commission, the report highlighted the irregularities within California’s governance of boxing, but did little to bring about actual change. In fact, the years following the Committee on Public Morals reports proved to be some of the most corrupt and scandalous in the history of boxing regulation in California.

Surprisingly, Mexican boxers may have benefited from irregularities and corruption. In a November, 1944 fight between Jerry Moore and Juan Zurita, rumors swirled that Moore was to going to lose the fight on purpose. When the chief inspector for the Athletic Commission received word of this rumor, he and the fight’s promoter warned both fighters about performing to the best of their abilities. The fight, which ended when Zurita knocked Moore out in the sixth round, received positive press

³² California, Legislature, Assembly, Interim Committee on Public Morals, *Report* (Sacramento: Assembly of the State of California, 1949), 7. [Hereafter cited as Interim Committee on Public Morals, *Report*],

³³ *Ibid.*, 18.

coverage the following in San Francisco newspapers.³⁴ This incident was not the only time that a North American boxer may have been ordered to lose to a Mexican boxer in the United States. In 1946, Los Angeles matchmaker Babe McCoy called Georgie Hansford before his match with Enrique Bolaños in San Antonio, Texas and told him to “make it good for four rounds,” as Bolaños was in line to fight NBA world lightweight champion Ike Williams in Los Angeles later that month.³⁵ Nine years later, McCoy would try to convince Italian-American boxer Gil Cadilli to Mexicanize his name, because he needed a Mexican boxer to promote to California audiences.³⁶ By the mid to late 1940s, Mexican boxers had become important sources of income for California boxing promoters, managers, and matchmakers. As such, they sometimes received preferential treatment in an otherwise brutal business.

The corruption in California was not unusual but rather pervasive across the United States. In the 1950s, the U.S. boxing industry was dominated by the International Boxing Club (IBC). The IBC grew out of the declining fortunes of boxing promoter Mike Jacobs and world heavyweight champion Joe Louis in the late 1940s. Jacobs dominated boxing promotion throughout the 1930s and 1940s, while Louis had remained world heavyweight champion since 1937 and was nearing retirement. Taking advantage of this opportunity, the president of Madison Square Garden and an associate who had stakes in other major sporting arenas including Chicago Stadium and the Detroit Olympia, founded the IBC. With the help of gangster Frankie Carbo, an associate of Bugsy Siegel and a

³⁴ CSA, DPVS-AC, Correspondence, 1944, Folder F2195, D.J. Shields to J.M. Genschlea, 20 November 1944.

³⁵ Governor’s Committee on the Study of Boxing and Wrestling in California, *Report* (Sacramento: 1956), 126. [Hereafter cited as Governor’s Committee, *Report*]

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 124.

member of Murder, Inc., the IBC promoted eighty per cent of all championship boxing matches in the United States between 1949 and 1953 and maintained a heavy presence in the sport throughout the decade. Carbo wielded significant influence on the West Coast and Los Angeles in particular, as he was associated with Babe McCoy. Carbo and McCoy were probably the two most prolific fixers of fights in the 1950s, until McCoy received a lifetime ban by the California State Athletic Commission in 1956.³⁷

Shortly before Spota's attempts to reform the sport, authorities in California tried to correct these problems. In fact, McCoy's lifetime suspension was the end result of a 1956 report by the Governor's Committee of the State of California (also known as the Cox Report) that found no less than seventy-two violations and abuses within the boxing industry. These violations included "the illegal use of blank contracts," "the acceptance of gratuities and favors by members of the State Athletic Commission from licensees," "the use of criminal means to influence the result of matches," "the licensing of persons who have criminal records," "the existence of situations where the fighter never saw his contract, never endorsed his checks, never saw the commission form of sign-off sheet, and never received his share of the purse in the presence of the inspector," and "threats of violence to force the sale of boxers' contracts."³⁸ The report recommended that the Athletic Commission investigate further into the dealings of several well-known players on the California boxing scene, including Babe McCoy and Cal Eaton of the Olympic

³⁷ Steven A. Riess, "Only the Ring Was Square: Frankie Carbo and the Underworld Control of American Boxing," *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 5, 1 (1988): 40-45.

³⁸ Governor's Committee, *Report*, 9-11.

Auditorium in Los Angeles and managers such as Harry Kabakoff, Jimmy Fitten, and the man who benefited the most from the report, George Parnassus.³⁹

The person who came under the closest scrutiny was McCoy, whom the report characterized as “truly representative of all that is wrong with boxing today.”⁴⁰ He was the matchmaker for the Olympic Auditorium in Los Angeles through 1940s and 1950s. Through his close connections with gangsters like Frankie Carbo and Mickey Cohen, McCoy regularly fixed fights, and frequently filled out contracts in pencil. Along with Olympic Auditorium promoter Cal Eaton, McCoy was considered to be “virtually in absolute control of the boxing business” in Southern California during his fifteen years as a matchmaker.⁴¹ Eaton once warned a State Athletic Commission official, “You think you’re working for the commission - you’ll find out who you’re working for.”⁴² In fact, McCoy and Eaton’s wife, Aileen Labell Eaton, boasted of their abilities to control official commission matters, such as the decision to not recognize the Raúl Macías - Chamroen Songkitrat bout of 1955 as a world title match, after they lost the rights to promote the match.⁴³ McCoy also had a contact in San Francisco whom the Cox Report characterized as “one of the many individuals in the boxing business who considers that anyone who treats a boxer fairly is a ‘sucker.’”⁴⁴ McCoy’s contact had been arrested on felony sex charges in 1953, but the case was dropped after the ten-year-old boy involved in the case refused to testify at the last minute.

³⁹ Ibid., 11.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 109.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid., 51.

⁴³ Ibid., 133.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 144.

The Cox Report did not focus on Mexican boxers with any specificity, but it did provide evidence that they were entering a perilous business climate in the form of the California boxing industry. The Olympic Auditorium was the popular boxing venue for Mexican and Mexican-American boxing fans, and featured more Mexican boxers than other outlets in Los Angeles. George Parnassus was cited in the report as someone whose case should be reviewed by the State Athletic Commission, but he was not subject of intense scrutiny in the report, which focused more heavily on McCoy and the Eatons. On the other hand, the Report recommended that Harry Kabakoff, who also dealt extensively with Mexican boxers, have his managerial license revoked and “should not be permitted to have any further contact with boxing in California,” for various infractions and regularities in the way he conducted business.⁴⁵ Although Parnassus did not have obvious underworld contacts and did not engage in overt unethical business practices, he had several contacts and peers who did.

On the whole, the Cox Report deemed California regulation of boxing to be “pitifully inadequate.” A sport with several connections to the American underworld and that relied upon the easily manipulated population of urban poor male youth was governed by politically appointed volunteers, who displayed “incompetence, partiality, venality, and ... general indifference.”⁴⁶ It created a situation where, in 1956, over thirty-two percent of California’s 728 licensed boxers and over twelve percent of its 234 licensed managers had criminal records. The offenses ranged from drunk driving, narcotics and burglary to pimping, rape, and murder.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Ibid., 136.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 29.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 105.

After the publication of the Cox Report, important changes occurred in Los Angeles boxing, the most significant being Al McCoy's banishment from the boxing business. For his replacement as matchmaker at the Olympic Auditorium, Cal and Aileen Eaton selected Parnassus, who initiated a brief boom in Los Angeles boxing in the late 1950s. Several Mexican boxers, including José "Toluco" López and Mauro Vázquez, proved to be attractions along the lines of Salas, attracting gates over US\$20,000. Two boxers, however, stood out among the rest of Mexican nationals boxing in California. Raúl "Ratón" Macías and Ricardo "Pajarito" Moreno both proved to be massive box office attractions in California in the mid to late 1950s, attracting more spectators than most U.S. boxers and drawing larger gates in California than they could in Mexico.

Before boxing in California, Ratón Macías had proved himself to be a major draw in Mexico. His September 1954 match versus African-American Nate Brooks in Mexico City, drew close to 54,000 spectators and grossed US\$46,000 at the box office, smashing Mexican records for attendance and gross receipts.⁴⁸ In March of 1955, Macías traversed to San Francisco and won the NBA version of the world bantamweight championship in a headlining match that drew 5,694 people and grossed US\$28,792.⁴⁹ As the NBA world champion, Macías became a more popular draw. His June 1957 fight with Filipino Dommy Ursua in San Francisco drew 12,769 people and totaled \$74,238 in gross receipts, accounting for over fifty-four percent of total attendance and seventy-seven

⁴⁸ Antonio Hernández, "EL RATON QUIERE PELEAR AQUÍ CON COHEN EL 12 DE DICIEMBRE," *La Afición*, 28 September 1954, 1.

⁴⁹ CSA, SAC, Revenue Reports, March 1954-1960, Folder F3920:234, Detailed Monthly Report of California Boxing and Wrestling Clubs, Northern Boxing, Month of March 1955.

percent of total gross receipts for boxing shows held that month in Northern California.⁵⁰

When Macías fought European champion Alphonse Halimi in a world title unification bout in Los Angeles in November of 1957, the gross receipts were astronomically larger than they were for the record-setting Brooks fight in Mexico City with one-third the attendance. With an audience of 18,382, the fight grossed US\$191,151 at the box office and accounted for thirty-nine percent of total attendance and almost sixty-nine percent of total gross receipts for boxing shows held that month in Southern California.

The percentages for total attendance and total gross receipts would have been higher for the Macías-Halimi had it not been for yet another Mexican boxer, Ricardo Moreno, whose fight that month with Ike Chestnutt in Los Angeles drew 9,344 people and US\$52,467 in gross receipts.⁵¹ Moreno, who came to California as a less-established boxer than Macías, proved to be a greater attraction, despite frequent losses. With his entertaining fighting style, Moreno drew 12,810 fans in a loss to Mexican journeyman José Coterio in San Francisco in March of 1957. The fight totaled US\$79,403 in gross receipts.⁵² In April of 1958, Moreno fought Hogan “Kid” Bassey of Nigeria for the world featherweight championship in Los Angeles. The fight attracted 20,852 spectators and earned US\$196,401. To understand Moreno’s role in attracting the large crowd, it is necessary to look at the attendance and receipts for the public training sessions each boxer held. Bassey, the world champion, drew 1,442 people to his training session, which earned US\$721 in gross receipts. Moreno, the challenger, drew 5,762 spectators to

⁵⁰ CSA, SAC, Revenue Reports, June 1954-1960, Folder F3920:240, Detailed Monthly Report of California Boxing and Wrestling Clubs, Northern Boxing, Month of June 1957.

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² CSA, SAC, Revenue Reports, May 1954-1960, Folder F3920:238, Detailed Monthly Report of California Boxing and Wrestling Clubs, Southern Boxing, Month of May 1957.

his session, which earned US\$2,881. The training sessions and the fight accounted for sixty-four percent of the total attendance and almost eighty-nine percent of the total gross receipts for boxing shows held in Southern California that month. Unfortunately for Mexican boxing fans, Bassey knocked out Moreno in the third round. Moreno would headline in California one last time in December of 1958 against Davey Moore. After he knocked out Moreno in one round, Moore defeated Bassey for the world championship in March of 1959 in a match that only drew 7,976 people and earned just over US\$60,000 in gross receipts.⁵³ George Parnassus promoted all of these fights, and the change from Moreno to Moore meant almost \$US140,000 less in gross receipts, despite the fact that Moore was a much better boxer than Moreno.

At the end of 1960, former Macías sparring partner José Becerra would better the attendance figures of Macías and Moreno, but only after he conquered the world bantamweight championship. When Becerra challenged Alphonse Halimi for the undisputed world bantamweight championship in Los Angeles, the fight drew 14,504 spectators and earned US\$139,262 in gross receipts.⁵⁴ Becerra emerged victorious and as an undisputed world champion from Mexico, proved to be a tremendous draw in Los Angeles. His rematch with Halimi, which took place in February of 1960, attracted 29,004 spectators and earned \$351,801 in gross receipts, accounting for almost seventy-one percent of total attendance and almost ninety-five percent of the total gross receipts for Southern California during that month. The ability of Macías, Moreno, and Becerra

⁵³ CSA, SAC, Revenue Reports, March 1954-1960, Folder F3920:234, Detailed Monthly Report of California Boxing and Wrestling Clubs, Northern Boxing, Month of March 1955.

⁵⁴ CSA, SAC, Revenue Reports, July 1954-1960, Folder F3920:234, Detailed Monthly Report of California Boxing and Wrestling Clubs, Southern Boxing, Month of July 1959.

to attract large crowds in California prompted one Mexican boxing magazine in 1959 to boast “TOPIC OF THE TIMES: THE MEXICAN BOXER INVADES ALL OF CALIFORNIA!”⁵⁵ Under the direction of Parnassus, the late 1950s and the year 1960 proved to be quite profitable ones for Mexican boxers (at least theoretically) and for the California boxing industry.

Despite the wealth and fame achieved by Macías, Moreno, and Becerra, Mexicans expressed concern over how Parnassus’ handled Mexican boxers. In the case of Ratón Macías, the Tepito boxer did not want to box in the United States as often as Parnassus wanted. At the same time, Mexican boxing fans who had no problem with Macías winning a world championship in the United States took issue with that fact that Parnassus wanted the Ratón to defend his NBA championship in the United States rather than in Mexico.⁵⁶ Boxing trainer and manager Arturo “Cuyo” Hernández questioned the logic of sending Macías to the United States to fight, insisting that Macías was “the only boxer after Casanova that could win enormous quantities of money without leaving the country,” and to have placed Macías under the control of the IBC was “like having a goldmine and allowing others to exploit it as they wished.”⁵⁷ The media portrayal of Parnassus changed drastically from that of the late 1940s. Instead of being a man who cared for the financial and physical well being of his boxers, Parnassus was now just another greedy boxing promoter in search of easy money and who was entrenched in the

⁵⁵ “TEMA DEL MOMENTO: ¡EL BOXEADOR MEXICANO INVADE TODO CALIFORNIA!” *Box y lucha*, 27 March 1959, 4.

⁵⁶ “EL CLUB INTERNACIONAL DE BOXEO Trae Mareado al ‘Ratón’ Macías,” *ESTO*, 16 April 1955, 6(A). “MACIAS PELEARA EL 11 DE MAYO, EN CHICAGO,” *ESTO*, 19 April 1955, 13(A).

⁵⁷ Alberto Reyes, “Opinan dos Managers: CATILINARIA DE PEPE HERNANDEZ Para los Actuales Manejadores del Ratón,” *ESTO*, 4 May 1955, 4(A).

boxing “mafia.” To this point, the Mexican media and the exposés it published on the boxing industry in the United States were not completely inaccurate: Parnassus had developed close ties with the infamous IBC.⁵⁸

Macías was not alone in his uneasy relationship with Parnassus. Boxer Memo Diez complained in 1955 to daily sports newspaper *ESTO* that Parnassus forbid him to fight in Mexico and that he only netted 200 dollars from his time in California.⁵⁹ Four years later, José Medel felt it “necessary... to clarify to the Mexican public” that Parnassus did not pay better than Mexico City promoter Don Miguel De la Colina and that Mexican managers displayed a “revolting submissiveness” to Parnassus.⁶⁰ De la Colina himself said that Parnassus had “the soul of a pirate,” while manager Lupe Serrano called the Greek immigrant “a ruffian.”⁶¹ Enrique Bolaños characterized Parnassus as “disconcerting” because he could be “a tender soul on occasion,” but “a fierce and Machiavellian conspirator on others.”⁶² By the late 1950s, Parnassus was receiving substantially more negative press coverage than he had ten years earlier. In the 1940s, he received mostly praise for his work with Mexican boxers, whereas a decade later he was the recipient of mostly criticism in the mainstream Mexican media, even as he brought Mexican boxers opportunities that were unimaginable twenty years before.

⁵⁸ For example, see Don Parker, “El Caso ‘Ratón’ Macías: ASI OPERAN EL INTERNATIONAL BOXING CLUB y ‘La Combinación’ de Raqueteros, en EE.UU.” *ESTO*, 3 May 1955, 6(A); and “Lo Manejan Torpemente: DEBAN SACAR A MACIAS de la Malla del Gang Boxístico,” *ESTO*, 3 May 1955, 7(A).

⁵⁹ “Es campeón Norteamericano: Y GANA MENOS DOLARES QUE CUALQUIER BRACERO,” *ESTO*, 16 November 1955, 1.

⁶⁰ MANAGERS Y BOXEADORES SE DIVIDEN: A FAVOR Y EN CONTRA DE GEORGE PARNASSUS,” *ARENA... DE BOX Y LUCHA*, 17 October 1959, 12.

⁶¹ “PSYCOANALISIS DE... GEORGE PARNASSUS O LA ASTUCIA EN EL BOXEO,” *ARENA... DE BOX Y LUCHA*, 17 October 1959, 4.

⁶² *Ibid.*

Part of the animosity toward Parnassus could have resulted from Mexican concerns from the manner in which boxing was governed in California. Despite the changes wrought by the Cox Report, irregularities persisted in the California boxing industry. A 1959 report by the California Department of Justice declared that the California State Athletic Commission's inability to regulate boxing properly stemmed from its dual role as regulator and revenue generator: "Thus, when the boxing personnel are most motivated to violate, the Commission is most motivated to blink at the violations."⁶³ The report also argued that the Athletic Commission's responsibility for overseeing "that boisterous fraud called professional wrestling" was interfering with its ability to properly oversee boxing.⁶⁴ As to Commission's role in regulating professional wrestling, the report concluded, "We believe that saddling the State Athletic Commission with the buffoonery of wrestling is robbing the Commission of the dignity to which it is entitled and jeopardizing its ability to regulate boxing. It is akin to requiring a policeman to don a clown's uniform at night and entertain the prisoners in the jail."⁶⁵ Like the Cox Report, the report by the Department of Justice, reiterated that California had some of the country's most restrictive laws against abusing boxers, but admitted that these laws were consistently circumvented. For instance, while other states allowed the manager and boxer to split the purse equally, California required that the boxer receive at least two-thirds of the money earned for boxing. However, it was quite common that the purse would be "redivided" after the match, as the manager would make "adjustments" for

⁶³ California, Department of Justice, *Report on California Boxing* (Los Angeles: Office of Attorney General, 1959). 3. [Hereafter cited as *Report on California Boxing*]

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 7.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 10.

living and travel expenses and loan repayments on whatever terms and conditions he wanted. The report concluded, “It would be naïve to believe that ... the fighter in all instances retains his legal share of the purse.”⁶⁶

Luis Spota and the World Boxing Council

On February 2, 1959, Federal District regent Ernesto Uruchurtu, by suggestion of President Adolfo López Mateos, named Luis Spota president of the Federal District Boxing Commission. Spota gladly took the position because he was interested in “lost causes.”⁶⁷ As a novelist, Spota critiqued urban Mexican society and sought to elicit outrage at the corruption that existed within multiple sectors of Mexico. Having established his reputation as a bombastic and critical presence in mainstream popular culture, Spota took over the Boxing Commission with the intent of cleaning up the sport and providing better protection for Mexican boxers. Spota saw the exporting of Mexican boxers to the United States as the chief problem for the sport’s health in Mexico. He blamed U.S. promoters and managers in particular for taking advantage of Mexican pugilists. Within the Federal District, Spota attempted to uplift boxers by making literacy a requirement for obtaining a boxing license. Internationally, Spota sought cooperation with U.S. boxing authorities and, with Velázquez, attended the 1959 convention of the U.S.-based National Boxing Association (NBA) in Toronto before hosting the NBA annual convention in 1960.⁶⁸

⁶⁶ Ibid., 11-12.

⁶⁷ As Quoted in Edmundo Domínguez Aragonés, *Tres extraordinarios: Luis Spota, Alejandro Jodorowsky, Emilio “Indio” Fernández* (Mexico City: Juan Pablos Editor, 1980), 58.

⁶⁸ Barradas Osorio, 52.

Spota also intended to nationalize boxing regulation. Mexico, like the United States, did not have a national boxing commission. Instead, the sport was governed by several smaller commissions, usually under the aegis of a municipal government, although sometimes state governments oversaw the regulation of boxing. In December of 1959, Spota called together all the boxing commissions in Mexico and hosted the first National Convention of Boxing Commissions of the Mexican Republic. At the Convention, representatives of the Boxing Commission of Guadalajara expressed concern about the nation's ability to oversee the well-being of its boxers: "We have considered it an absolute necessity to exercise absolute control over all Mexican boxers."⁶⁹ The Guadalajara Commission representatives also suggested that every boxing commission in Mexico have the records of every boxer licensed in Mexico on file in its office. The convention ended with the founding of the Mexican Federation of Boxing and Wrestling Commissions and the standardization of medical practices within Mexico, such as physical examinations, laboratory reports, eye exams, chest x-rays, and mandatory periods of rest after fights.⁷⁰

Soon after the formation of the Mexican Federation, Spota and Velázquez explored ways to prevent Mexican boxers from fighting in the United States. In a letter to the president of the Guadalajara Commission, they insisted that Mexican boxers were neglecting the Mexican public and were overly preoccupied with going abroad, despite the fact that Mexican fans had supported them and made them into stars. Spota and

⁶⁹ AMG-Box, Caja 1, Exp. 9, H. Comisión de Box y Lucha Libre del Ayuntamiento de Guadalajara, Jalisco, PRIMERA CONVENCION NACIONAL DE COMISIONES DE BOX DE LA REPUBLICA MEXICANA, [n.d.].

⁷⁰ AMG-Box, Caja 1, Exp. 9, Alfredo E. Ambriz, Untitled Report, [n.d.].

Velázquez admitted that boxing promotion within Mexico was not great, but they believed that Mexican boxers leaving the country under the illusion of earning larger purses in the United States hurt the boxing industry more than promoter incompetence.⁷¹ In response, the Guadalajara Commission president, Max Thomsen, reminded Spota that Mexico's pugilistic stars were in demand abroad, an acknowledgement of their talents and their ability to be a box-office attractions. According to Thomsen, it was the Mexican boxing promoters who were to blame for the lack of major fights held within Mexico's borders, as their inability to pay boxers "purses in accordance with their ability" forced Mexico's boxer to seek work abroad.⁷²

The following year, Velázquez and Luis Spota organized the NBA Convention in Mexico City and Acapulco. In a letter to the Mexican President, the treasurer of the NBA declared that Velázquez was "a great credit to you and the Mexican people," and assured López Mateos that "every member of the National Boxing Association and many of their families are anxiously awaiting their visit to Mexico. We hope that we can be of service to the sport of boxing in your country."⁷³ In order to gain favor with the Mexican government, the NBA Convention organizers underscored how the convention would impact Mexico's tourism industry, which was considered an important facet in national economic development. The NBA Convention did not just aid Mexican boxing, but also the Mexican nation as a whole. This may help to explain why Velázquez insisted that the Mexican government would positively impact "the flow of tourism to Mexico" by

⁷¹ AMG-Box, Caja 1, Exp. 22, Ramón G. Velázquez and Luis Spota to Max Thomsen D., 26 January 1960.

⁷² AMG-Box, Caja 1, Exp. 22, Max Thomsen D. to Luis Spota, 2 February 1960.

⁷³ Archivo General de la Nación, Fondo Adolfo López Mateos, (Hereafter AGN-ALM), 702.1/91, Louis R. Radzienda to Adolfo López Mateos, 8 March 1960.

providing the conventioners with the same hospitality it granted the boxers who participated in the Diamond Belt Tournament.⁷⁴

Spota had no prior experience hosting an international boxing-related event, but Velázquez did. Mexico City hosted the Diamond Belt Tournament, an international amateur boxing tournament in 1958 and 1959, and it provides an ideal opportunity to examine the relationship between Mexican internationalism and national economic development. The tournament also received support from People to People International, a group started by U.S. president Dwight Eisenhower that sought to promote peace through cultural exchange. Eisenhower had complemented Velázquez for his organization of the 1958 tournament, telling him “that through your efforts there has been increased friendship and understanding among the young men of many countries. You are helping in an important part of the work that will form a basis for a just and secure peace.”⁷⁵ Later, the president of People to People reiterated this sentiment to President López Mateos, telling the Mexican President that international boxing tournaments contributed to “mutual understanding” and established “an environment in which people from different countries can cultivate friendship.”⁷⁶ By hosting the tournament then, Mexico display to the world its significance in enhancing international understanding between young men of various cultures.

Mexican authorities viewed the tournament not only as an opportunity to promote international cooperation, but also to promote Mexican tourism. Velázquez characterized

⁷⁴ AGN-ALM, 433/340, Ramón G. Velázquez to Donato Miranda Fonseca, 18 June 1960.

⁷⁵ Archivo Histórico de la Secretaría de Relaciones Exteriores, Acervo Histórico Diplomático (Hereafter AHSRE), Exp. III/8217 (72) 28623, Dwight D. Eisenhower to Ramón G. Velázquez, 18 August 1958.

⁷⁶ AHSRE, Exp. III/8217 (72) 28623, Edward P. F. Eagan to Adolfo López Mateos, 28 January 1959.

the tournament's participants, delegates, and accompanying visitors as "the best advertisers" for Mexico because they would become familiar with "the beauties of Mexico."⁷⁷ Because of the Tournament's perceived importance Mexican tourism, Minister of Foreign Relations Tello informed Federal District mayor Ernesto Uruchurtu that President López Mateos wanted to give the organizers "all the possible chances" and to take "the necessary measures" to ensure that the event lived up to its magnitude.⁷⁸ In the invitations, Velázquez stated that the Mexican President wished "that we should have as many guests as possible, in order to grant to our distinguished visitors the traditional hospitality and to display before them all the many charms of our country." The invitation also proclaimed Mexico's eagerness to entertain "your Amateur Boxers who will meet their unknown friends from other Countries and enjoy our hospitality" and ensured "that our visitors will carry back the most pleasant memories from their 'Peace loving friend Mexico.'"⁷⁹ The invitation seamlessly combined the promotion of world peace and international goodwill with the self-promotion of Mexico as a desirable tourist destination.

One year later, the NBA Convention similarly combined the themes of international cooperation with Mexican tourism. In his address to the conventioners, President Adolfo López Mateos contrasted them with a group of university professors he addressed earlier in the day, stating they represented distinct "needs, aspirations and paths," but still contributed to the "universal aspiration of fraternity and peace."⁸⁰ The

⁷⁷ AHSRE, Exp. III/8217 (72) 28623, Ramón G. Velázquez to Manuel Tello, 4 June 1959.

⁷⁸ AHSRE, Exp. III/8217 (72) 28623, Manuel Tello to Ernesto Uruchurtu, 17 May 1959.

⁷⁹ AHSRE, Exp. III/8217 (72) 28623, Ramón G. Velázquez, Untitled document [n.d.].

⁸⁰ AGN-ALM, 433/340, Adolfo López Mateos, 6 September 1960.

Mexican President was not alone in his sentiment of international goodwill. The U.S. ambassador to Mexico had opened the convention by welcoming to a meeting that would strengthen “the ties that unite Mexico and the United States.”⁸¹ In a communiqué to the convention, Federal District Regent Uruchurtu expressed his happiness with the contribution the convention would make in promoting sportsmanship “among the youth of the world.”⁸² Spota would most dramatically state the internationalist implications of the convention: “Mexico believes that cultural and sporting exchanges between peoples give rise to a better understanding...[and lead] to what the world hopes for; a just and lasting peace.”⁸³

The Convention’s program reveals that organizers also strongly promoted Mexico as a tourist haven.⁸⁴ Organizers slated activities that promoted “traditional” Mexican culture, such singers of traditional Mexican songs and a demonstration of the traditional outfits of various Mexican regions. In addition, the conventioners visited the pyramids of Teotihuacán and the beaches of Acapulco and attended the coronation of the 1960 “Queen of Boxing” (“*Reina del box 1960*”) beauty contest. Most interestingly, organizers created a “Special Program for the Ladies” for conventioners’ wives that featured a visit to the Basilica of Guadalupe, trips to the National Palace and the Metropolitan Cathedral, and excursions to Chapultepec Castle and the newly built campus of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México. The special program indicates the existence of separate masculine and feminine spheres, with the former concentrating on the serious world of

⁸¹ Hoover Institution Archives, Robert Charles Hill Collection (Hereafter HIA-RCH), Box 38, Folder 23, Untitled speech, Robert C. Hill, 5 September 1960.

⁸² Quoted in Barradas Osorio, 61.

⁸³ Quoted in Ibid.

⁸⁴ HIA-RCH, “Programa,” [n.d.].

international business relations and the latter concentrating on the realms of religion and high culture. It also highlights women's place on the periphery in the 'serious' business of boxing.

The Convention addresses also promoted Mexican tourism. López Mateos wished for the conventioners, "may Mexico City be as hospitable as you have hoped it would be."⁸⁵ Uruchurtu, in turn, reminded the visitors "Mexico offers you archeological treasures, beautiful places, and its folklore."⁸⁶ Mexican elites viewed tourism from the United States as instrumental to both Mexican economic development and improving U.S.-Mexico relations. Increased tourism from the United States meant that Mexico was politically and economically stable, a boon for both nations, as Mexico was supposed to showcase a non-communist way of modernizing in the Third World. It also meant increased contact between non-elite Mexicans and non-elite North Americans, which supposedly increase cultural understanding between the two countries.⁸⁷ The focus on tourism as a means to national development also differentiated Mexican economic nationalism from Dependency Theory-inspired economic nationalism, which professed that tourism made economically underdeveloped nations even more subservient to global capital.⁸⁸

Amid the goodwill and promotion of Mexican tourism, Spota sparked controversy by announcing that Mexico was breaking off relations with the state of California. As

⁸⁵ AGN, 433/340, Adolfo López Mateos, 6 September 1960.

⁸⁶ Quoted in Barradas Osorio, 61.

⁸⁷ Dina Berger, "Goodwill Ambassadors on Holiday: Tourism, Diplomacy, and Mexico - U.S. Relations," in *Holiday in Mexico: Critical Reflections on Tourism and Tourist Encounters*, ed. Dina Berger and Andrew Grant Wood (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2009), 108-109.

⁸⁸ Dennis Merrill, "Negotiating Cold War Paradise: U.S. Tourism, Economic Planning, and Cultural Modernity in Twentieth-Century Puerto Rico," *Diplomatic History*, 25, 2 (2001): 181-182.

President of the Federal District Boxing Commission and the Association of Mexican Boxing Commissions, Spota declared that all Mexican boxers who continued to box in California would be banned from participating in bouts in Mexico. The speech, as reported by *ESTO*, was dramatic and very nationalistic. Spota boldly declared, “It has been a long time since we have abandoned being a country conquered at every level: It has also been a long time since... a foreigner could do as he pleased with our problems.” Spota continued, “But that appears not to have been understood... [by] certain people [i.e. George Parnassus] that... with the servile complacency of some Mexicans, have become mixed into Mexican boxing.” The president of the Federal District Boxing Commission insisted, “We do not want rascals in our boxing; flaunting themselves as benefactors and guardian angels for our boys.” He was also adamant that his commission was not attacking “for the pleasure of doing so; We are simply defending those we have the obligation to defend.”⁸⁹ Spota expressed his disgust that for “many years, Mexican boxers have been subjugated to the most shameful slavery on the part of those traffickers of human meat.”⁹⁰ He therefore concluded that Mexico must break off relations with a state “in which nobody curbs the systematic and criminal voracity of those without scruples of conscience who pugilistically, physically, and morally ruin Mexican boxers, whom they dazzle with the bait of large wages and drive with impunity to the slaughterhouse.”⁹¹

⁸⁹ Antonio Hernández, “Explotan y malogran a nuestros púgiles... EL BOXEO MEXICANO VETA EL ESTADO DE CALIFORNIA,” *ESTO*, 6 September 1960, 3(A).

⁹⁰ “SPOTA LO DIJO: PARANASSUS, ¡FUERA LAS MANOS DEL BOX MEXICANO!” *ARENA... DE BOX Y LUCHA*, 10 September 1960, 4.

⁹¹ Antonio Hernández, “Explotan y malogran a nuestros púgiles... EL BOXEO MEXICANO VETA EL ESTADO DE CALIFORNIA,” *ESTO*, 6 September 1960, 3(A).

Spota's comments caught many by surprise. The president of the Mexican union of managers, Carlos Arena, expressed shock and noted that the ruling would hurt the Mexican boxers who boxed frequently in Los Angeles, but that it would benefit Mexican boxing fans, who would now see the best Mexican boxers more frequently than before.⁹² The President of the NBA expressed surprise as well, and added that Spota should have checked with the NBA authorities before making his announcement, even though Spota had promised to lift the ban once California State Athletic Commission rejoined the NBA.⁹³ Spota later remarked to *ESTO* that the NBA convention was "the most brilliant opportunity for Mexican boxing to liberate itself from foreign guardians, so that Mexican boxing can be managed by Mexicans."⁹⁴ Spota viewed himself as giving Mexican promoter Miguel de la Colina what he perceived to be a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity.

Aileen Eaton of the Olympic Auditorium was also surprised by Spota's declaration, and she took exception to the notion that California boxing promoters exploited Mexican boxers. According to Eaton, the management of the Olympic had "spent the last three years developing Mexican talent and they've made more money here than they could have made in Mexico." Furthermore, Eaton claimed that the Olympic Auditorium had done all it "could to give Mexico a world champion and we finally did with Jose Becerra."⁹⁵ The California State Athletic Commission also expressed surprise at the boycott, as one official wondered aloud what the basis was for Spota's charges. The

⁹² "Entre gente del box: SORPRESAS POR EL VETO A CALIFORNIA," *ESTO*, 6 September 1960, 2(A).

⁹³ "MEXICO RAPS CAL," *The Spokesman-Review*, 6 September 1960, 18. "Mexico Ends Boxing Tie-Up," *Spokane Daily Chronicle*, 6 September 1960, 18.

⁹⁴ Antonio Hernández, "El licenciado Uruchurtu dio su autorización... LA COMISION DE BOX Hará la Eliminatoria Mundial," *ESTO*, 7 September 1960, 3(A).

⁹⁵ "Mexico Severs Boxing Relations With California Over NBA Hassle," *Los Angeles Times*, 6 September 1960, 4(C).

boycott put Spota in direct confrontation with the California boxing industry, which had paid substantial purses to Mexican pugilists but whose members lacked empathy for Mexican boxing fans. A more cynical view may have interpreted Spota's actions as attempt to create a monopoly for boxing promotion within Mexico City, but Spota most likely was looking out for the boxing fans of Mexico City who wanted to see their nation's pugilistic stars in a live setting and on a more regular basis.

Despite the near-unanimous support in the Mexican media for Spota's boycott call, his bold declaration was very controversial among Mexican boxing authorities. For the second annual meeting for the Mexican Federation of Boxing and Wrestling Commission in December of 1960, Spota issued a report that warned of "interests, just as strong within the country and abroad, that we know are trying to get on the upcoming Executive Committee of this Federation, that could place it in the hands of people that could enter into shady deals or use them to their own benefit."⁹⁶ Despite this appeal, Spota's choice to succeed him as president of the Federation's Executive Committee, Max Thomsen of Guadalajara, lost the election to Manuel Corzo Blanco of Tijuana. In a letter to Spota, Velázquez reported that Corzo Blanco spoke at the convention, declaring that the members of the Executive Committee not affiliated or allied with the Federal District Boxing Commission were surprised by Spota's call to boycott California. Velázquez maintained his support for the boycott, calling it a "an absolute protection for their health and their finances." In response, Max Thomsen noted a situation where a

⁹⁶ AMG-Box, Caja 1, Luis Spota, INFORME QUE RINDE EL PRESIDENTE DEL COMITE EJECUTIVO DE LA FEDERACION MEXICANA DE COMISIONES DE BOX Y LUCHA ANTE EL CONGRESO DE LA II CONVENCION DE COMISIONES DE BOX Y LUCHA QUE TIENE LUGAR EN TIJUANA, B.C. LOS DIAS 7,8,9 y 10 DE DICIEMBRE DE 1960, [n.d.].

boxer managed by George Parnassus was paid only \$800 of a promised \$2,000, a claim denied by a representative by the California State Athletic Commission in attendance. After the debate over the California boycott, Velázquez noted that he felt a “marked hostility” towards the Federal District Boxing Commission. When it came time for the elections for the Executive Committee, Corzo Blanco defeated Thomsen. According to Velázquez, “It was remarked that possibly his intervention with reference to Mr. Parnassus was the motive for his elimination as President of the Federation.” Velázquez lamented Thomsen’s loss, characterizing the Guadalajara Boxing Commission President as “a person of convictions and character and familiar with the problems of boxing, he could have affected the good relations that were being sought with California.”⁹⁷ Afterwards, rumors circulated that the President of the Boxing Commission of Queretaro had been bribed with 500 pesos (US\$40) to vote for Corzo Blanco.⁹⁸

In response to Corzo Blanco’s election as Federation President, Spota decided to pull the Boxing Commission out of the Mexican Federation and broke off all relations with the entity.⁹⁹ Spota and Velázquez’s next major move to consolidate power in order to protect Mexican boxers would be more international in scale. By October of 1961, Spota reached a compromise with the Union of Mexican Managers, who promised to uphold certain obligations that benefited Mexican boxers.¹⁰⁰ In exchange for lifting the California boycott, the Federal District Boxing Commission demanded that Mexican boxers take a medical exam before going abroad, that they not participate in unequal

⁹⁷ AMG-Box, Caja 1, Exp. 34, Ramón G. Velázquez to Luis Spota, 15 December 1960.

⁹⁸ Luis F. Bustamante V., “La Comisión se Separa de la Federación,” *El Nacional*, 1 February 1961, 4(2).

⁹⁹ Barradas Osorio, 66-67. “La Comisión del Distrito Federal Está por Encima de la Federación,” *El Nacional*, 1 February 1961, 1(2).

¹⁰⁰ Maldonado, 29.

matches, and that the best boxers fight once in Mexico for every match they fight in California.¹⁰¹

Spota and Velázquez remained relatively quiet for much of 1962, but began to shift their gaze toward the international regulation of boxing. Attempts to regulate the sport internationally dated back to 1913. That year, the International Boxing Union (IBU) formed in Paris, but the organization failed to garner the support of the United States, Great Britain, and Latin American nations, and changed its name to the European Boxing Union in 1946.¹⁰² 1921 saw the formation of the U.S.-based NBA. Through its existence, the NBA was international in character, although it never achieved the participation of every U.S. state boxing commission.¹⁰³ By the late 1950s, the NBA became “a regrettably feeble regulatory organization whose member commissions [were] too often subject to political and promotional pressure.”¹⁰⁴ The NBA endured a severe blow January of 1960, when the California State Athletic Commission elected to leave the NBA, declaring, “the public deserves and must have boxing untainted by hoodlum influence.”¹⁰⁵

The reputation of boxing regulation suffered with the death of Cuban-born world welterweight champion Benny “Kid” Paret on April 3, 1962 following a bout with Emile Griffith. Four months later, the NBA, prompted by its Filipino and Mexican delegates, changed its name to the World Boxing Association (WBA).¹⁰⁶ Shortly afterward, the

¹⁰¹ “Entre ROUND y ROUND,” *ESTO*, 4 October 1961, 9(A).

¹⁰² From the outset, the IBU forbade British participation and, thus, was not truly international. “British Boxing Snubbed,” *New York Times*, 26 May 1913, 8. “American Won’t Join Boxing Conclave,” *New York Times*, 31 January 1920, 13.

¹⁰³ “Suggests New National Bureau for Boxers,” *New York Times*, 16 January 1923, 18.

¹⁰⁴ “Events and Discoveries,” *Sports Illustrated*, 8 September 1958, n. pag.

¹⁰⁵ “California Quits N.B.A.,” *New York Times*, 8 January 1960, 28.

¹⁰⁶ “N.B.A. Adopts New Name: World Boxing Association,” *New York Times* 23 August 1962, 34.

California State Athletic Commission applied for membership into the WBA. It explained its volte-face by arguing that the WBA had “radically different” objectives than the NBA and that national unity was key in effectively regulating the sport.¹⁰⁷ In January of 1963, Velázquez, as WBA international coordinator, announced that the WBA would seek to adopt uniformity for the rules of world championship fights at its February 1963 meeting in Mexico City. The issues at hand would include technical aspects, such as scoring, counts, and fouls, as well as concerns about in-ring safety and social security for boxers. Velázquez called the meeting the most important in the history of boxing, as it would bring together boxing commissioners from every continent.¹⁰⁸

The Mexican media hyped the significance of this World Boxing Convention, which barely received mention in the mainstream U.S. media. The convention held a special meaning for the Mexican government and the Mexican media, as it would display Mexico’s ability to lead on the stage of international sports. Newspapers attempted to persuade their readerships that the World Boxing Convention, and the accompanying convention for the Union of Latin American Professional Boxing (ULABP), showcased the power, grandeur, and rationality of the Mexican nation. As Victor Payan of *Excélsior* stated, “the conventions... undoubtedly will attract to our country the gaze of the world.”¹⁰⁹ Ramón Bravo of *El Universal* claimed that, from the Convention, “under the patronage of” López Mateos and Uruchurtu, there would “emerge an epoch, full of promises, for the future of boxing in the whole world.”¹¹⁰ Mexican newspapers also

¹⁰⁷ “California Seeks to Join World Boxing Group,” *New York Times*, 20 December 1962, 16.

¹⁰⁸ “Uniformity Due in World Boxing,” *New York Times*, 9 January 1963, 16.

¹⁰⁹ Victor Payan, “Antes del Congreso Mundial de Box, Será la Convención Latinoamericana,” *Excélsior*, 22 January 1963, 25-A.

¹¹⁰ Ramón Bravo, “Rounds de Sombra,” *El Universal*, 15 January 1963, 19(A).

printed glowing remarks about Mexico from convention participants as the convention approached, with WBA vice-president Albert Klein providing very laudatory assessments. He told *Excélsior* that, after hosting the 1960 NBA Convention, “Mexico was converted into the nerve center of boxing.”¹¹¹ In *El Universal*, he gave thanks to López Mateos for demonstrating “an interest that fills all of us with enthusiasm” and declared that “All of us in the world who are interested in boxing feel a particular fondness for” the Mexican President.¹¹²

The World Boxing Convention was actually two conventions. For the first two days Latin American delegates met to create a continental organization along the lines of the European Boxing Union. Unsurprisingly, Spota was elected the first president of this organization, which would represent Latin America at the World Boxing Convention. Following his election as Union president, Spota engaged in his antagonistic speech that asserted Latin America’s place in the world.¹¹³ Despite the bombastic rhetoric, Spota maintained a cooperative disposition during the World Boxing Convention. This time, instead of starting a conflict with the state of California, Spota looked to incorporate all the world’s boxing commissions into one organization under his control. His rhetoric, then, became more conciliatory and not nearly as inflammatory as it had been in 1960.

In the end, the World Boxing Convention accomplished two goals for boxing. First, it placed all of the world’s boxing commission, save the New York State Athletic Commission, under the umbrella of the World Boxing Council, over which Spota

¹¹¹ Victor Payan, “Alrededor del Ring,” *Excélsior*, 7 February 1963, 38(A).

¹¹² Ramón Bravo, ““En Latino América el Boxeo es Aún un Deporte y no Negocio”: Klein,” *El Universal*, 13 February 1963, 18(A).

¹¹³ Ramón Bravo, “Luis Spota fué Nombrado Presidente de la U.L.A.B.P.,” *El Universal*, 12 February 1963, 13(A).

presided. Second, all members of the WBC agreed to ban the rematch clause in contracts. The rematch clause was frequently inserted in title matches, where, in the case that the challenger won, he would be obligated to give the champion an opportunity to regain the championship. The clause had negative consequences for the sport, as a champion could wittingly or unwittingly lose to an inferior challenger and be able to win back his championship in a “return” match that would almost be guaranteed to make more money than the previous match. The rematch clause prevented more boxers from getting opportunities to challenge for a title, as, theoretically, champion and challenger could alternate winning matches and thus be forced to fight each other until somebody finally won twice in a row.

The World Boxing Convention produced modest results, yet the Mexican media determined to project its accomplishments as major national achievements that overcame tremendous odds. *ESTO* praised three factors for overcoming schemes to derail the convention and for convincing reluctant organizations to join the WBC: “The prestige of Mexico, the work and good faith of the organizers, and, above all, the highly dedicated sponsorship of the President of the Republic and the regent of the Federal District” and quoted one delegate who called the convention a “triumph for Mexico... as it achieved what we thought could not be achieved.”¹¹⁴ *ESTO*’s laudatory coverage of the convention reveals that Mexican internationalism was not just designed to impress other nations, but also to impress Mexican readers with Mexico’s ability to exert power on a global scale.

¹¹⁴ Antonio Hernández H., “Comentarios a una histórica reunion: Por Encima de recelos y rencillas México ha creado el comite mundial,” *ESTO*, 17 February 1963, 8(A).

The WBC united the world's boxing commissions in theory, but, in practice, Spota's job proved quite difficult. Particularly difficult to navigate was the relationship between the WBA and the WBC. The Federal District Boxing Commission, which Spota led, had been a member of the WBA since at least 1935, yet the WBA belonged to the WBC, which Spota also led. Making matters more confusing was that, initially, the WBC used the WBA's ratings in determining who would fight for its championships. The WBC eventually began making its own ratings, a process that foreshadowed the discord between the entities.¹¹⁵ In 1965, Luis Spota and the Federal District Boxing Commission pulled out of the WBA over the issue of rematches, thus effectively ending whatever presence Mexico had within the WBA.¹¹⁶ In August of 1966, the WBA pulled out of the WBC, setting off a rivalry between the two organizations that continues to this day.¹¹⁷

Some boxing fans blamed Spota's perceived pretentiousness for his lack of success. One boxing enthusiast wanted boxing authorities to get rid of "the awful man with the pipe, Luis Spota, the pseudowriter of pretentious melodramas, who has done tremendous damage to our favorite spectacle."¹¹⁸ He received criticism from another reader for his "contemptuous" behavior towards a Mexican boxer who pursued his career strictly in California. The fan invited Spota to leave boxing and "to return again to writing books in the style of *Children of Sanchez*," a book by U.S. anthropologist Oscar Lewis.¹¹⁹ Even the writers of *Ring Mundial* characterized Spota as a "writer in the Lewis

¹¹⁵ Felipe Bustamante, "El Consejo Mundial de Box Hará las Clasificaciones," *Novedades*, 23 September 1964, 24.

¹¹⁶ "Mexico Quits as WBA Member," *Los Angeles Times*, 20 October 1965, 2(B).

¹¹⁷ "LA WBA SE RETIRO DEL CONSEJO MUNDIAL DE BOXEO," *Ring Mundial*, 27 August 1966, 40.

¹¹⁸ Idelfonso Gómez, "LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: ¡SPOTA FUERA DEL BOX!," *Ring Mundial*, 3 March 1966, 22.

¹¹⁹ Lorenzo Santiago, "LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: SPOTA, NEFASTO PARA EL BOX," *Ring Mundial*, 18 December 1965, 23.

style,” a comment that undermined Spota’s authenticity as a Mexican. In the 1960s, reactionary Mexican nationalists took umbrage with Lewis’ depiction of the Mexico City neighborhood Tepito, claiming, “that the poor were less uncouth, the police less brutal, and the government less corrupt than Lewis had suggested.”¹²⁰ These critics believed that the book did irreparable harm to the Mexican national economy and to Mexico’s image abroad, thus apparently damaging Mexico’s tourist industry and its prospects for hosting of the 1968 Summer Olympics.

While some boxing fans associated him with a supposedly anti-Mexican academic from the United States, others derided Spota for his inability to curry favor with the U.S. boxing industry. One reader of *Ring Mundial* suggested in 1966 that Velázquez replace Spota before the WBC lost all prestige, as Velázquez would be more conciliatory to European and North American interests and would possess more tact than Spota.¹²¹ Another reader called the WBC a “farce” and a “bastard group” that only served the interests of “the manipulators of national boxing.”¹²² There was also a reader who declared Spota a failure as WBC President, insisting that he only knew how to take away boxers’ licenses without reason and wishing that this “*quitalicencias*” would retire to “write” [quotation marks in the original].¹²³ Another fan asserted that Spota “may know a lot about books, but about boxing... zilch.”¹²⁴ One fan expressed concern about the

¹²⁰ Roseblatt, 619.

¹²¹ Ignacio Pozas R., “LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: VELAZQUEZ DEBE REINAR EN EL CONSEJO,” *Ring Mundial*, 13 August 1966, 19.

¹²² Luis Derbez P., LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: EL CONSEJO ¡PARA NADA SIRVE!,” *Ring Mundial*, 1 October 1966, 19.

¹²³ Andrés Jiménez Segura, “LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: QUE HACE EN EL BOX SPOTA,” *Ring Mundial*, 21 October 1966, 22.

¹²⁴ José Chávez Mendoza, “LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: A LAS AUTORIDADES DEL BOX,” *Ring Mundial*, 18 December 1966, 20-21.

naïveté of the WBC, which he believed was frequently “outwitted” by international boxing interests.¹²⁵ Ever since he had taken over the Federal District Boxing Commission in 1959, many of Spota’s critics complained that he knew nothing about the sport or business of boxing, often portraying him as an aloof and snobby intellectual whose literary intelligence poorly prepared him for overseeing boxing in Mexico City or the world.

On the other hand, some Mexican boxing fans expressed alarm that Ramón Velázquez had developed a very close relationship with Parnassus, a relationship that seemed detrimental to Mexican boxing. Newspaper reports of Velázquez attending a championship boxing match on Parnassus’ invitation stoked the ire of some readers. One fan found Velázquez’s attendance “awkward,” as Parnassus “the trafficker” was the primary reason why Mexican contender José Medel did not have an opportunity to challenge for a world title.¹²⁶ Another fan viewed Velázquez’s trip as proof that Parnassus was the “invisible boss of the World Boxing Council.”¹²⁷ Yet another took no issue with Velázquez’s trip, but expressed concern that the Vice-President of the WBC was “intimately linked to... the people of the American underworld,” which had “done damage to boxing.”¹²⁸ The friendly behavior between Velázquez and Parnassus may have implied differing opinions within the WBC, it did not signify that Velázquez was undermining Spota’s authority. That evidence would present itself later in 1966.

¹²⁵ Luis Flores G., “LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: ¡QUE INGENUO ES EL CONSEJO!,” *Ring Mundial*, 5 March 1967, 10.

¹²⁶ Fidencio Morfin M., “LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: VELAZQUEZ Y SU COMPADRE,” *Ring Mundial*, 26 March 1966, 27.

¹²⁷ Jorge Hernández R. “LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: El Viaje de Velázquez,” *Ring Mundial*, 19 March 1966, 22.

¹²⁸ Bernardo Ramírez, “LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: ¿Velázquez en Japón?” *Ring Mundial*, 18 June 1966, 34-35.

The respectability of the WBC suffered in October of 1966 when Velázquez intervened in a world lightweight title match in the state of Mexico between Puerto Rican champion Carlos Ortiz and Cuban-born, but Mexico City-based challenger (and former featherweight champion) Ultiminio Ramos. According to the Associated Press, referee Billy Conn stopped the fight in the fifth round, as Ramos had suffered a large gash above his left eye, and declared Ortiz the winner by technical knockout.¹²⁹ This sparked an agitated Mexican audience to throw objects into the ring, spurring Ortiz and his cornermen to leave the ring for the safety of the dressing room. Velázquez, the most senior WBC representative present, attempted to quell the audience by ordering the fight to restart, then declared Ramos the winner and champion because Ortiz failed to reappear. Immediately afterward, Spota changed Velázquez's decision ruled the title vacant and ordered a rematch between the two. Ortiz won the rematch but, more importantly for Mexican boxing, the WBC's reputation suffered. According to one observer, Velázquez's actions were unprecedented even for the "dirty, corrupt, cruel sport of professional boxing." More important, however, was "the damage that has been done to Mexico as a future Olympic host and as a tourist attraction."¹³⁰

Velázquez received criticism from one Mexican boxing writer "for believing that he was the dictator of world boxing."¹³¹ One fan wrote that Velázquez had become the "principal sustainer and cheerleader" of the WBC, an organization that the writer

¹²⁹ "Ortiz, Ramos to Fight Again," *The Miami News*, 25 October 1966, 2(C).

¹³⁰ Bill Llano, "LOS SIETE DIAS," *Impacto*, 2 November 1966, 60.

¹³¹ José Octavio Cano, "UN FRAUDE LA CONTIENDA ORTIZ-ULTIMINIO: ¡MOTIN EN LA TARIMBA BRAVA!" *Ring Mundial*, 23 October 1966, 5.

believed would eventually disappear and whose members would return to the WBA.¹³²

Another fan portrayed Spota as the cowardly culprit in the affair, as he allowed Velázquez to wield too much power on behalf of the WBC. This fan faulted Spota for showing “weakness and a complete lack of authority.”¹³³ By the end of 1966, the WBC began the transition from being an organization intent on protecting the interests of Mexican boxers under the authority of Luis Spota to one more focused on cooperation with the business elements of world boxing under the authority of Ramón Velázquez. Although Velázquez did not immediately usurp Spota’s power, his actions in the Ortiz-Ramos fight were the first public sign that the two were not in agreement over the direction of the WBC

By May of 1967, the friendship between Parnassus and Velázquez had placed a serious strain on the relationship between Velázquez and Spota. *Ring Mundial* declared the WBC “at the brink of death, drowned by bastard interests, indifference from commissions from other countries, and by virtue of its directors being in total disaccord.”¹³⁴ The magazine blamed Parnassus, the “mortal enemy” of Spota and the WBC, for “debilitating the organization with his infinite resources.”¹³⁵ One boxing enthusiast predicted that while Spota had separated the WBC (a “pseudo group”) from the WBA, Velázquez was working to improve relations with that “hotbed of gangsters” and predicted that Spota would soon be asking for “harmony with the union of thugs.” The writer seemed to be appealing to nationalistic sentiment with his concluding question,

¹³² José Antonio Rodríguez, “LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: BAJO LA RESPONSABILIDAD DE VELAZQUEZ, SE ACABÓ EL CONSEJO,” *Ring Mundial*, 13 November 1966, 28.

¹³³ Jorge Rodríguez, “LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: SPOTA QUEDO EN ENTREDICHO,” *Ring Mundial*, 13 November 1966, 29.

¹³⁴ “Un muerto en vida: El Consejo Mundial AGONIA,” *Ring Mundial*, 21 May 1967, 8.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

“Where are you, dignity?”¹³⁶ While many observers realized that Spota’s militant economic nationalism had not worked as a strategy to improve the earnings of Mexican boxers and keep them from boxing in California, they also did not view subservience to the California boxing industry as a viable option either.

The Los Angeles boxing business also suffered through a downturn during this time. The early 1960s proved to be slow times for boxing in California. Both 1961 and 1962 failed in repeating the success of 1960, which had proven to be a peak year for the Los Angeles boxing business.¹³⁷ The slump continued into 1964, as the Olympic Auditorium, which had hosted seventy-six boxing shows in 1960, only hosted one to two shows a month in 1964.¹³⁸ Parnassus was also very unpopular in Mexico, as evidenced by the jeering he received from fans at the Ultiminio Ramos - Raifu King fight in Mexico City in 1963.¹³⁹ One fan called Parnassus “a gangster disguised as a boxing magnate” for allowing Ricardo Moreno to continue boxing, adding that “the Greek will have to respond to the Creator for this new felony.”¹⁴⁰ Parnassus’ greatest success during this down period came with Vicente Saldívar, who defended his world featherweight championship four times in Mexico and only once in Los Angeles. Saldívar’s most famous title defenses, however, took place in London and Cardiff, Wales against Welsh challenger Howard Winstone. For much of the mid 1960s, the flow of Mexican boxers to Los Angeles had slowed to a trickle.

¹³⁶ Luis Cortez, “LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: ¿MEXICO OTRA VEZ A LA WBA?” *Ring Mundial*, 5 September 1967, 13.

¹³⁷ John Hall, “Neutral Corner: Brighter Days Ahead for Local Boxing,” *Los Angeles Times*, 30 December 1962, 5(G).

¹³⁸ John Hall, “‘California’s Killing Boxing,’ Says Promoter,” *Los Angeles Times*, 23 October 1964, 3(B).

¹³⁹ Fonoteca Nacional, “Box. King vs. Ramos/1,” Televisa Radio (Mexico City: XEW, 13 June 1963).

¹⁴⁰ Juan Dieguez, “LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: ‘PAJARO MORENO’ UN BOXEADOR MAS EXPLOTADO,” *Ring Mundial*, 14 January 1967, 19.

After a dispute with Aileen Eaton, Parnassus left the Olympic in 1966. Two years later, Jack Kent Cooke opened the 18,000-seat Forum in Inglewood, just outside Los Angeles, and appointed Parnassus as the boxing promoter for the arena. After a difficult process of re-obtaining his promoter's license - due to wrangling by Aileen Eaton of the Olympic - Parnassus re-entered the boxing business in April of 1968.¹⁴¹ In response to Parnassus' appointment with the Forum, most Mexican managers were happy with finding "a new source of work" from a man "that traditionally had helped Mexican fighters."¹⁴² The feelings of the Mexican managers proved correct, as Parnassus' time with the Forum introduced a second "Golden Age" of Mexican boxing - this time in Los Angeles, not Mexico City. The star attractions included José "Mantequilla" Nápoles, Carlos Zárate, and Rubén Olivares. The latter was the world's best-paid athlete in 1970, his US\$300,000 earnings outpacing Pelé (before taxes) and Wilt Chamberlain.¹⁴³ By 1969, Parnassus was receiving different treatment in Mexican periodicals. *Ring Mundial* recalled the 1960 boycott, but characterized it as a wrong decision based on "ghost stories" that lowered the quality of Mexican boxing because "Mexicans did not have their desired action" against world-class competition.¹⁴⁴ The magazine reminded readers "boxing is a business and Parnassus is a promoter, therefore a businessman and not the Holy Mother of Caridad."¹⁴⁵ This era also opened up a new chapter in the life of the

¹⁴¹ Paul Zimmerman, "PARNASSUS HAS DANDER UP: Vet Promoterirate as Boxing Board Delays Granting License," *Los Angeles Times*, 3 April 1968, 3(B). "Parnassus Gets License," *Los Angeles Times*, 6 April 1968, 3(A).

¹⁴² "En California: PARNASSUS A LA PROMOCION," *Ring Mundial*, 21 April 1968, 9.

¹⁴³ John Hall, "The Gold Dust Gang," *Los Angeles Times*, 14 August 1970, E3.

¹⁴⁴ "George Parnassus: ?MECENAS, EXPLOTADOR O QUE...?," *Ring Mundial*, 19 January 1969, 31.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 32.

WBC, as Luis Spota was replaced with allies of Velázquez, who held less nationalistic outlooks on the boxing industry than the Federal Boxing Commission President.

Cooperation between the WBC and California

In 1968, the WBC was resurrected in Manila, Philippines with Filipino Justiniano Montano becoming president and Velázquez becoming vice-president. Aside from the continental commissions of Europe, Asia and Africa, the State Athletic Commissions of California and Nevada joined the organization. The WBC re-organizers were motivated by the lop-sided power structure of the WBA, which granted each US state one vote, the same allocated to each participating nation. Thus, a nation like Mexico, which had 63 boxing commissions, had the same power as U.S. state like Wyoming, which did not even regulate boxing. Furthermore, according to a one-time WBC vice-president Bob Turley, Mexico probably held “more boxing shows in a month than are held in the United States in a year,” making the WBA’s voting structure seem “ridiculous.”¹⁴⁶ Even boxing commissions not affiliated with the WBC, saw the fault in the ways of the WBA. The Chairman of the New York State Athletic Commission contended that the WBA “set up an inequitable situation which has done nothing but cause trouble.”¹⁴⁷ The Chairman of the Colorado State Athletic Commission characterized the WBA as “a failure to the Boxing world,” with thinking “so lop-sided it was pitiful.”¹⁴⁸

¹⁴⁶ CSA, SAC, Correspondence, W.B.C. 1974-1977, Folder F3920:255, Robert L. Tourley to Nat Loubat, 11 August 1975.

¹⁴⁷ CSA, SAC, Correspondence, N.A.B.F. 1969-1970, Folder F3920:257, Edwin B. Dooley to Robert L. Turley, 17 February 1969.

¹⁴⁸ CSA, SAC, Correspondence N.A.B.F. 1969-1970, Folder F3920:257, Eddie Bohn to Robert L. Turley, 13 February 1969.

Boxing was not alone in adjusting to new power structures within the international sports community. Decolonization in Africa and Asia had disrupted European and North American - dominated sporting bodies, whose one-country - one-vote policies appeared to be democratic, yet consolidated Western hegemony, with European colonial powers representing their colonies as well. Decolonization dramatically altered power structures within the Fédération Internationale de Football Association (FIFA), soccer's international governing body, as with "the collapse of Empire, UEFA [Union of European Football Associations] was finding itself being squeezed into an electoral minority."¹⁴⁹ The inclusion of African nations drastically changed the power structure of FIFA and paved the way for Brazilian João Havelange to become elected president of the organization in 1974, the first non-European to hold the position. That same year, the U.S.-based WBA democratized by allowing multiple boxing commissions within one nation to have a vote. Panamanian delegates gathered enough votes from Latin American boxing commissions to secure an electoral victory for Elias Cordova, who became the first NBA/WBA president to be elected from a country other than the United States or Canada.¹⁵⁰ Mexico's ability to increase its power within the world of professional boxing through the WBC, then, was a harbinger of change in the power dynamics between first and third world nations in the realm of international sports regulation.

The late 1960s and early 1970, then, witnessed a geopolitical power shift in the international regulation of boxing, with the new cooperation between the WBC and the

¹⁴⁹ Paul Darby, "Africa and the 'World' Cup: FIFA Politics, Eurocentrism and Resistance," *The International Journal of the History of Sport*, 22, 5 (2005): 891.

¹⁵⁰ Hauser, 95.

State Commissions of California and Nevada leading to the creation of the North American Boxing Federation (NABF) in August of 1969. Ideally, the NABF was to represent all the boxing commissions of the United States and Canada, but instead initially included only the State Athletic Commissions of California, Nevada, Hawaii, Illinois, and Arizona at the time of inception.¹⁵¹ Although William Houston, the chairman of the California State Athletic Commission, was the first NABF president, California State Athletic Commission member Bob Turley proved to be the most important link in the Athletic Commission's relationship with Mexican boxing authorities. It was Turley who appealed to WBC President Justiniano Montano on behalf of Mexican citizen and former world champion José Nápoles in his dispute with current WBC champion Billy Backus, who had backed out of several agreements with Nápoles promoter George Parnassus.¹⁵² In the 1960s, Nápoles had earned the moniker "Champion without a Crown" from the Mexican media for his inability to receive an opportunity to fight for a world championship. By the early 1970s, the California State Athletic Commission was appealing on his behalf.

Velázquez became WBC president in 1971 and kept the position until 1975, with Turley and José Sulaimán serving as vice-president and secretary general, respectively. The new WBC leadership maintained the cooperative relationship that had developed between the WBC and the California State Athletic Commission and that represented a clear departure from the days when Luis Spota was WBC president. Spota, however,

¹⁵¹ CSA, SAC, Correspondence, W.B.C. 1976-1977, Correspondence, N.A.B.F. 1969, Folder F3920:256, Department of Professional and Vocational Standards, California, Press Release, 25 August 1969.

¹⁵² CSA, SAC, Correspondence, W.B.C. 1968-1972, F3920:253, Robert L. Turley to Justiniano Montano, 20 April 1971.

could still affect the regulation of boxing at the national level. He may have no longer controlled the WBC and the Mexican Federation of Boxing and Wrestling Commissions, but he still held considerable political clout and could occasionally strike back at the allies of Velázquez and José Sulaimán. In 1972, the newly elected mayor of Tijuana, an ally of Spota, relieved Ariosto Manrique of his duties as President of the Tijuana Boxing Commission. Not only was Manrique the Commission president, he was also president of the Mexican Federation of Boxing and Wrestling Commissions. As soon as he took his position, Manrique's replacement announced that the Tijuana Commission was no longer affiliated with the Mexican Federation and that it "would play ball" with Spota and the Federal District Boxing Commission. The California State Athletic Commission wrote letters in appeal to the mayor of Tijuana and the governor of Baja California.¹⁵³ Spota's victory was brief, as Manrique eventually returned to a prominent position in Mexican boxing and became WBC Secretary General in December of 1975.¹⁵⁴

Although the WBC and California Athletic Commission enjoyed a cooperative relationship, rifts occasionally arose within the WBC's leadership. Both Sulaimán and Turley took exception to Velázquez's personal appointment of referees for WBC-sanction matches, a responsibility normally left to the boxing commission overseeing the fight.¹⁵⁵ At times, however, Sulaimán allied with Velázquez against Turley. When California ring announcers often announced WBA champions as "World Champions" and the champions of the WBC only as "WBC Champions," despite the fact that California State Athletic

¹⁵³ CSA, SAC, Folder F3920:258, Ariosto Manrique to Robert L. Turley, 28 February 1972.

¹⁵⁴ "EL CONSEJO MUNDIAL SE CONSOLIDA," *Ring Mundial*, 30 December 1975, 2.

¹⁵⁵ CSA, SAC, Correspondence, W.B.C. 1971-1974, Folder F3920:254, Robert L. Turley to José Sulaimán, 20 April 1972; Robert L. Turley to Ramón Velázquez, 25 April 1972.

Commission belonged to the WBC, not the WBA. Sulaimán informed Turley in a letter, “We think and strongly recommend that WBC affiliates only talk about title fights, when it is recognized by the WBC” [sic].¹⁵⁶

The Golden Age of Mexican boxing continued amidst these small quarrels between boxing authorities in Mexico and California. Los Angeles continued to attract not only star Mexican boxers, but mid-level pugilists as well. In 1974, boxer José Palacios explained to *Nocaut... Sólo Box* that he was moving to California in order to receive better fights and to earn more money. Palacios knew of one boxing friend who was able to buy his mother a house with earnings from fighting in California. Palacios offered this optimistic assessment: “there, one faces third-rate opponents and they pay good money for it. What more can you ask for?”¹⁵⁷ One of *Nocaut*’s readers agreed with Palacios, telling the magazine that the great boxer did not fight in Mexico “because they do not pay them.” The only way Mexican boxing would see great boxing live was if a “promoter would take a risk and pay the fighters what they’re really worth.”¹⁵⁸ Palacios’ reasoning reflected that of the 1940s that assumed that boxing promoters in Mexico could offer the same purses promoters in California could offer, despite disparities in gross ticket sales for boxing matches in the two countries.

Clearly Mexican boxers needed California to earn substantial amounts of money, but the California boxing industry also needed Mexican boxers, especially one that drew

¹⁵⁶ CSA, SAC, Correspondence W.B.C. 1971-1974, Folder F3920:254, José Sulaimán Chagnón to Bob Turley, 7 May 1973. See also CSA, SAC, Correspondence W.B.C. 1971-1974, Folder F3920:254, José Sulaimán Ch. to Robert L. Turley, 20 August 1973.

¹⁵⁷ “JOSE PALACIOS EMIGRA,” *Nocaut... Sólo Box*, 29 June 1973, 6.

¹⁵⁸ Fernando Argüello, “¡EL NOCAUT! de los Lectores: LA PROMOCION EN MEXICO ES PESIMA,” *Nocaut... Sólo Box*, 22 January 1974, 14.

large crowds with their talent and exciting in-ring style. In late 1975 Turley appealed to Velázquez and Sulaimán on behalf of Carlos Zárate, a Mexican boxer born in Tepito who was the number one contender to the WBC bantamweight championship and had not received an opportunity to challenge the WBC champion, Rodolfo Martínez, who also was from Tepito. Turley claimed that the WBC had protected Martínez by not enforcing the rule that he had to fight the number one contender Zárate, whom Turley characterized as “one of the best boxers and punchers ever to come out of Mexico.”¹⁵⁹ Thus, favoritism in the treatment of boxers did not follow Spota’s strict nationalistic logic, but was more influenced by economic factors and personal relationships.

Nationalistic sentiment did not even dictate the divisions within the WBC. Despite the depictions of Velázquez as an all-powerful and everlasting ruler of the WBC, in reality, he ruled over a deeply divided organization. By April of 1973 Sulaimán expressing his frustration with the lack of notoriety he received. In a letter to an Italian delegate of the WBC, he noted, “few people know how many hours I devote to our ratings. I don’t mind the leaving me out as probably all the people that read such things have never heard of me, will never do it and for sure they will not even be able to pronounce my name... I only resent the fact that I have been left out.”¹⁶⁰ By late 1974, Sulaimán had announced his intention to run for WBC president at the 1975 convention to members of the WBC.¹⁶¹ 1975 would prove instrumental in determining the future of

¹⁵⁹ CSA, SAC, Correspondence, W.B.C. 1974-1977, Folder F3920:255, Robert L. Turley to Ramón Velázquez, 7 November 1975. See also CSA, SAC, Correspondence, W.B.C. 1974-1977, Folder F3920:255, Robert L. Turley to José Sulaimán, 20 October 1975.

¹⁶⁰ CSA, SAC, Folder 3920:254, José Sulaimán Chagnón to Piero Pini, 24 April 1973.

¹⁶¹ CSA, SAC, Correspondence, W.B.C. 1974-1977, Folder F3920:255, José Sulaimán to James E. Deskin, 2 December 1974.

the WBC, as Sulaimán expressed his displeasure with Velázquez privately and, on occasion, usurped his power publicly.

The death of George Parnassus provided an opportunity for Sulaimán to separate himself from Velázquez, at least to the members of the WBC. In a letter to Bob Turley, Sulaimán expressed disgust at Velázquez's reaction to the boxing promoter's death. According to Sulaimán Velázquez told the Mexican media "that Mexican promoters were now able to promote and make money, as with the death of Mr. Parnassus an era of monopoly had come to an end." Sulaimán, in contrast, insisted that he believed "that Parnassus' death was the greatest blow for the history of boxing in Mexico," and characterized the promoter as a man "who had the gift of knowing who could become a Mexican idol, who had the greatest faith in Mexican boxers, and who had a big bag full of money to give Mexicans all the time and opportunities to fight for world titles."¹⁶² *Ring Mundial* echoed Sulaimán's sentiment, recalling Parnassus as "always honest, within the honesty that business permits," and that "with his talent, his vision, and his connections, the old fox could do it all."¹⁶³ It concluded, "Mexican boxing cries for him because it will be an irreparable loss."¹⁶⁴ Although less laudatory, *La Afición* called Parnassus, "neither saint nor villain," and characterized him as "a natural product of the contradictions of this life of ours."¹⁶⁵ In comparison to the sentiments of Sulaimán and the Mexican media, Velázquez's insensitivity to the death of Parnassus was draped in

¹⁶² CSA, SAC, Correspondence, W.B.C. 1974-1977, Folder F3920:255, José Sulaimán to Robert L. Turley, 27 February 1975.

¹⁶³ "Murió el Papá Griego: PARNASSUS DE LAVAPLATO A MILLONARIO," *Ring Mundial*, 5 March 1975, 16.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 19.

¹⁶⁵ Pioquinto, "GRADERIA," *La Afición*, 4 March 1975, 2.

nationalistic rhetoric, when, in fact, the insensitivity stemmed from personal animosity between the two.¹⁶⁶

Soon afterward, it was Sulaimán's turn to become mired in controversy. Like Velázquez in 1966, Sulaimán jeopardized the WBC's reputation in March of 1975 by controversially interfering in a title match held in Mexico between Mantequilla Nápoles, a Cuban-Mexican, and Armando Muñiz. Sulaimán and the referee stopped the match short and deferred to the judges, who handed Nápoles a very controversial victory. Mainstream Mexico City newspapers, such as *El Universal* and *Excélsior* ignored the irregularities, but *Ring Mundial* called the decision a "flat-out mugging" of Muñiz.¹⁶⁷ One of the magazine's readers concurred, calling it "a flat-out robbery," and expressed concern about "the vested interests that are doing so much damage to our boxing."¹⁶⁸ In regard to the Nápoles-Muñiz decision and other recent irregularities, one reader asked whether Mexican boxing judges had "sold out" or whether they were just inept.¹⁶⁹ Many Mexican boxing fans interpreted the actions of the WBC as reflecting upon Mexican boxing and sometimes Mexico in general. Since the days of Luis Spota, it mattered to them that the WBC portray itself in a respectable and powerful manner - anything less would cause embarrassment to the Mexican nation.

Despite concerns that the power struggle between Sulaimán and Velázquez would cost Mexico the WBC presidency, Sulaimán was elected WBC president in December of

¹⁶⁶ In October of 1971, Velázquez confidentially asked Bob Turley to buy him a ticket to a match promoted by Parnassus in Los Angeles. Apparently, the two had feuded over a recent WBC decision, and Parnassus had ignored Velázquez's request for a ticket. CSA, SAC, Correspondence, W.B.C. 1968-1972, F3920:253, Letter, Ramon G. Velazquez to Robert L. Turley, 22 October 1971.

¹⁶⁷ "BERUMEN Y SULAIMAN Conservaron el Título Para Mantequilla," *Ring Mundial*, 5 April 1975, 1.

¹⁶⁸ Jesús Torres Salvador, "La Esquina del Fan: EL ROBO DEL AÑO," *Ring Mundial*, 27 April 1975, 31.

¹⁶⁹ Arnoldo Martínez P., "La Esquina del Fan: ¿QUÉ PASO CON LOS JUECES?," *Ring Mundial*, 18 May 1975, 31.

1975, promising “a total and radical change in every aspect.”¹⁷⁰ He has remained in charge ever since, drawing his fair share of critics for the manner in which he runs the WBC. He has had a tendency to be very flexible with the organization’s rules, especially in regard to his crony, US boxing promoter Don King. According to boxing writer and Muhammad Ali biographer Thomas Hauser, the rampant corruption within the organization is not based on money, but rather personal friendship and loyalty.¹⁷¹ In the mid 1980s, Hauser offered the following assessment of Sulaimán:

The prevailing view is that Jose Sulaiman is basically a decent man. He cares deeply for boxing as a sport, and for boxers as people. He holds the World Boxing Council together in masterful fashion by engendering a mixture of personal loyalty, respect, and fear. His decisions are sometimes unwise, but once his word is given he keeps it. The problem is that Sulaiman wants to be more - he wants to be boxing’s savior, a benevolent monarch, and he wants everybody to like him.¹⁷²

On one hand, Sulaimán cast himself and the WBC as the international savior of boxing. On the other, he continued to cater to Mexican nationalistic sentiment. Luis Spota once characterized him as “a man who sold junk to the government of my country, who has no idea about boxing and who only looks for popularity.”¹⁷³ In the beginning years of his presidency, Sulaimán often held public award ceremonies honoring various members of the Mexican elite. For example, he offered Mexican president José López Portillo “The Great Medal of Sports Merit” in April of 1978 for his support of Mexican sports.¹⁷⁴ Before the 1980 annual convention of the WBC, Sulaimán announced his

¹⁷⁰ “DESCALIFICACION,” *Ring Mundial*, 26 October 1975, 1. “EL CONSEJO SE CONSOLIDA,” 30.

¹⁷¹ Hauser, 98-102.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 102.

¹⁷³ Andrés Astruells, “UN EX PONTIFICE DEL BOXEO PASO POR BARCELONA: LUIS SPOTA: EL FUNDADOR DEL CONSEJO MUNDIAL ES AHORA SU PEOR JUEZ,” *MUNDO DEPORTIVO*, 7 May 1976, 19.

¹⁷⁴ World Boxing Council Archives (WBC), Exp. Boletín de Prensa 1978, “BOLETIN MENSUAL,” June 1978,

intentions to award López Portillo with another medal in recognition of the Mexican president's "absolute support for sports, especially boxing, and for his policies of equality and respect for human rights in sports that have made him one of the best leaders of the world, especially from the developing countries."¹⁷⁵ The 1980 convention also allowed Sulaimán to honor the Mexican media "that has meant so much for the position of this organization." Among those honored were Antonio Andere, who had announced for Televisa and written for *Siempre!*, *La Afición*, *ESTO*, and *Ring Mundial* throughout his career and Manuel Seyde of *Excélsior*.¹⁷⁶ Underlining the importance of Mexican nationalism to the position of WBC president, many boxing fans expected Sulaimán to continue to look out for the interests of Mexican boxers. In 1977, *Ring Mundial* published an appeal for Mexican-American boxer Alberto Dávila to be ranked by the WBC: "although born in California, he is the son of Mexican parents and feels Mexican to the core... One of his greatest joys truthfully is that Aztec blood runs through his veins."¹⁷⁷

In the end, Velázquez's and Sulaimán's vision of cooperation would prove to influence public perception about the WBC more than the vision Spota had. By the early 1980s, however, the pipeline of Mexico City boxers to Los Angeles ended. More Mexican boxers hailed from provincial cities and fewer from Mexico City, while most major boxing matches began taking place in casinos in Las Vegas and Atlantic City, as opposed to Los Angeles and New York. Don Fraser, who had worked for Parnassus at the

¹⁷⁵ WBC, Exp. Boletín de Prensa 1980, "PRENSA CMB," 14 November 1980.

¹⁷⁶ WBC, Exp. Boletín de Prensa 1980, "PRENSA CMB," 24 November 1980.

¹⁷⁷ "Grita la Sensación de Los Angeles... Yo También Soy Mexicano Señor Sulaimán," *Ring Mundial*, 19 March 1977, 28.

Olympic and the Forum, then became Executive Director of the California State Athletic Commission, described this phenomenon in a 1983 California Senate hearing: “a hotel in Las Vegas will say, hey, we’ll give you \$75,000; we’ll give you 20 free rooms; meals for 20; so the promoter says, gee, how can you beat that? You don’t even have to promote it. They promote it for you. That’s why there has been a decline of boxing in California.”¹⁷⁸ Thus Las Vegas casinos were able to do what Luis Spota had always wanted to do, but never could: stop Mexican boxers from fighting in California. Of course, Mexican boxers did not return to fighting in Mexico en masse - they merely took their talents to a city where promoters paid them better.

Reflecting back on his time as WBC president, Spota explained how the organization had changed once Velázquez gained power:

Velázquez never saw boxing as a formative sport, but as a speculative business. His interests were growing in the same manner as his connections with promoters, managers, etc. He managed to bring stiff to Parnassus... when I announced that I would be leaving the presidency of Council, he moved like an octopus, associating himself with an unknown Filipino named Montano who was then elected president. From then on, the World Council has not returned to what we intended it to be from the beginning.¹⁷⁹

Through Spota, it is possible to understand how Velázquez and Sulaimán proved more successful in gaining a foothold on power within the business of professional boxing. Both men viewed the boxing precisely as a business, whereas Spota viewed it as a sport with a business aspect to it. In some ways, the roles played by Velázquez and Sulaimán resembled those of *buscones* in the

¹⁷⁸ California, Legislature, Senate Select Committee on Licensed and Designated Sports, *California Sports, Professional Boxing, Part 1, Interim Hearing March 29, 1983*, (Sacramento: The Committee, 1983), 12.

¹⁷⁹ Astruells, “UN EX PONTIFICE DEL BOXEO PASO POR BARCELONA,” 18-19.

Dominican Republic, who mediate between baseball players and Major League Baseball. Like Velázquez and Sulaimán, *buscones* work within the traditional capitalist framework, but still change the nature of the business precisely because of their flexibility and ability to adapt within the establish framework, as well as their ability to cultivate relationships.¹⁸⁰ Spota and his rhetoric of economic nationalism proved unable to adapt to the reality that California, and Los Angeles in particular provided Mexican boxers with better financial opportunities.

CONCLUSION

The philosophical changes in the WBC mirror the ineffectiveness of Mexican economic nationalism of the 1960s. Luis Spota's tendency to view the economic dynamics of boxing along strict nationalistic lines damaged his ability to mold the ruthless business of international boxing into a more humane industry. Although it changed to a more cooperative philosophy, the WBC continued to serve the interests of Mexican boxers in their dealings with the United States boxing industry. Even as the organization became more powerful and international, encompassing every continent in the world, it still deferred to Mexico's institutions and its pugilistic past. Mexican boxers finally stopped going to California in large numbers not because of Mexican protectionist policies, but because of changes in the economics of boxing. Las Vegas became a more desirable destination than Los Angeles. The more cooperative attitudes of Ramón G. Velázquez and José Sulaimán toward promoters in California and Nevada, particularly

¹⁸⁰ Alan Klein, "Chain Reaction: Neoliberal Exceptions to Global Commodity Chains in Dominican Baseball," *International Review for the Sociology of Sport*, 47, 1 (2012): 27-42.

George Parnassus, allowed the WBC to extend its influence globally and provided Mexican boxers with more opportunities to win world championships.

Chapter 5:
José ‘Mantequilla’ Nápoles:
Race and Nationalism in the Second Golden Age of Boxing

On April 18, 1969 Afro-Cuban boxer José “Mantequilla” Nápoles fought world welterweight champion Curtis Cokes at the Forum, just outside the city limits of Los Angeles. After listening to the national anthems of Mexico, Cuba, and the United States, the Cuban and Mexican fans cheered Mantequilla as he entered the ring. The Cuban fans, however, were soon overtaken by “porras” [Mexican cheers], the noise of maracas, and the chorus of “¡México! ¡México! ¡México!”¹ Throughout the match, Mexican fans cheered on Nápoles as he bobbed and weaved, stuck and moved, and punished Cokes’ body and head. When Cokes’ cornermen refused to let their fighter emerge for the fourteenth round, “crazed” members of the “highly partisan Mexican crowd” lifted the new champion, donning the sombrero of a mariachi, onto their shoulders in celebration.² By winning the world welterweight championship, Nápoles became the Afro-Cuban embodiment of a Mexico with foundations in *mestizo* (Indigenous and European) nationalism.

This chapter examines the boxing career of José Nápoles through the context of Mexican nationalism in the 1960s and 1970s. In the process, it highlights the instability of Mexican national identity based on *mestizaje*, the mixing of indigenous and European blood and cultures, that was dominant in the postrevolutionary era and continues to be today. It also underscores boxing’s status within Mexican society and the sport’s ability

¹ Rodolfo B. García, “Nápoles Ametralló a Cokes para Coronarse Campeón,” *La Opinión*, 19 April 1969, 6.

² “‘Mantequilla’ arolló a Cokes,” *El Nacional*, 19 April 1969, 1(2a). “Napoles Stops Cokes in the 13th: Cuban Refugee Wins World Welterweight Crown,” *New York Times*, 19 April 1969, 38.

to naturalize and authenticate people who did not fit the mestizo construct. Through his in-ring feats and public adaption of Mexican cultural norms, José Nápoles became a symbol of Mexican nationalism. Mexicans who embraced him did so by downplaying his skin color and emphasizing his physical talents and personality traits, which allowed them to incorporate an Afro-Cuban into Mexican nationalism without challenging the mestizo construct.

Because of his Cuban roots, Nápoles had to exert more effort than other boxers to substantiate his mexicanidad. Nápoles may have represented a more cosmopolitan form of Mexican nationalism, but he still needed a relatable life story for Mexican fans, which is a necessity for sports celebrity. Daniel McNeil cites an ambiguous personal narrative as a reason why boxer Lennox Lewis failed to gain mass approval by U.S. boxing fans in the 1990s and 2000s, despite being world heavyweight champion. Lewis celebrated his connections to Jamaica, England, and Canada and caused confusion among U.S. boxing fans who had difficulty placing him in an established narrative for boxers.³ In contrast to Lewis, Nápoles presented an image of an acculturated immigrant who had experienced a similar childhood to other Mexican boxers, one that just happened to take place in another country. Nápoles' clear attempts to assert his mexicanidad allowed him to become a symbol of Mexican cosmopolitanism and call to mind Ulrich Beck's notion of 'rooted cosmopolitanism,' where cosmopolitanism has both " 'roots' and 'wings' ". According to Beck, "there is no cosmopolitanism without localism."⁴ Nápoles became

³ Daniel McNeil, "Lennox Lewis and Black Atlantic Politics: The Hard Sell," *Journal of Sport & Social Issues* 33, 1 (2009): 25-38.

⁴ Ulrich Beck, "The Cosmopolitan Society and Its Enemies," *Theory, Culture & Society* 19, no. 1-2 (2002): 19.

emblematic of Mexican cosmopolitanism precisely because he established roots in Mexican society.

Biographical Overview

Nápoles was born in Santiago, Cuba on April 13, 1940. In one interview with a Mexican boxing magazine, he characterized his early years as “stupendous,” but this changed when his father, a primary school teacher, died in 1946. As a result, his mother left the house to wash and iron clothing, leaving Nápoles and his siblings unsupervised for much of the day. Rather than attend school, the young Nápoles chose to stay home and play baseball and fight with the neighborhood children. Apparently, his street-fighting prowess came to the attention of a local barber who pitted Nápoles against other boys for money. It was during this time that he earned the nickname “Mantequilla,” the Spanish word for butter, which alluded to his elusiveness in fights. Nápoles claimed to have fought at least four times a day.⁵

Eventually, Nápoles caught the eye of a trainer, Kid Bururu, who converted Nápoles from a street fighter into a boxer. As Nápoles asserted, it was “better that I fight in the gymnasium and not in the street.”⁶ While boxing as an amateur, Nápoles worked several jobs to help his family, including working in a factory, selling fruit, and driving a

⁵ “‘DESDE NIÑO ‘MANTEQUILLA’ NAPOLES COBRABA POR PELEAR!’” *Ring Mundial*, 7 May 1969, P. 4. Forty years later, Nápoles would say that his brother was originally called “Mantequilla” for the same reasons, but because the two looked alike and fought a similarly in school fights that the future champion was called the same out of confusion. José Ramón Garmabella, *Grandes leyendas del boxeo*, (Mexico City: Debolsillo, 2009), 278.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 279. Nápoles had a penchant for telling entertaining, yet conflicting, stories about his introduction into boxing. In an interview published with a Cuban writer published in 1991, Nápoles claimed he entered boxing after he had been slapped hard in the face by a woman he had pinched on the street. The slap was apparently so hard, he decided he needed to learn how to defend himself. Luís Báez Hernández, *Los que se fueron*, 88.

bus.⁷ He turned professional at the age of eighteen and moved from Santiago to Havana, where he boxed from August of 1958 until June of 1961, accruing a record of twenty victories with just one defeat.⁸ When Fidel Castro banned professional boxing in 1961, several boxers left the island nation⁹. Most of them migrated to Miami. Nápoles, however, departed for Mexico City. For Nápoles, the decision to go to Mexico was not a tough one. Almost fifty years later, he contended that he “already knew through references that the character of the Mexican greatly resembled that of the Cuban, that the weather in most of the country was similar to that of Cuba and ... that there existed a large fanbase for boxing.”¹⁰ Nápoles, however, also admitted that personal connections played an important role in his decision to come to México. He was familiar with Kid Rapidez, one of the best trainers in Cuba who would become his trainer in Mexico, and also knew Cuco Conde, a Cuban sportswriter who would become Nápoles’ manager in Mexico, before he immigrated in 1962.

Later, Nápoles told a Cuban audience that he supported what Castro was doing in Cuba, but that he enjoyed professional boxing even more, as it was the only thing he knew how to do.¹¹ The Mexican media, unlike the U.S. media, never referred to Nápoles as a refugee, often characterizing him as having ‘settled’ in Mexico. This ambivalent media reaction reflected the Mexican government’s reaction to the Cuban Revolution in general, despite the strong opinions it generated among Mexico’s populace. Following

⁷ “Propósitos de ‘Mantequilla’ Antes del Encuentro Crucial,” *El Universal*, 9 February 1974, 14(1). “¡DESDE NIÑO ‘MANTEQUILLA’ NAPOLES COBRABA POR PELEAR!” 5.

⁸ Garmabella, 280. All records are from the Boxrec website, <http://www.boxrec.com>.

⁹ Reejsinghani, 310-313.

¹⁰ Garmabella, 282.

¹¹ Luís Báez, *Los que se fueron* (Havana: Editorial José Martí, 1991), 87-88.

the Cuban Revolution, Mexico and Cuba pursued foreign relations based on the principal of mutual non-intervention, whereby Cuba agreed not to support revolution within Mexico and Mexico agreed not to support counterrevolution in Cuba.¹² Although Mexico remained allied with the United States, it maintained relations with the Castro government. Nápoles was never treated as a political refugee, but rather as an immigrant who had come to Mexico for economic purposes.

Nápoles began his boxing career in Mexico in July of 1962. From the outset, Nápoles caught the attention of Mexican boxing fans with his wide array of boxing skills. For the next seven years, he compiled a record of thirty-nine victories and three defeats and patiently awaited an opportunity to challenge for the world championship; first as a lightweight, then as a junior welterweight. Nápoles fought throughout Mexico during this time, from northern cities such as Tijuana, Ciudad Juárez, and Monterrey to as far south as Mérida, Yucatán. After the cancellation of his January 1967 match with world lightweight champion Salvador Lopopolo, Nápoles earned the moniker “*el campeón sin corona*,” (“the champion without a crown”), taken from the title of the famous Mexican film.¹³ Some fans feared that Nápoles would never challenge for a world championship. Sometimes they blamed the incompetence of world boxing authorities and Nápoles’ management and at other times they blamed international conspiracies against the

¹² Ana Covarrubias, “Cuba and Mexico: A Case for Mutual Nonintervention,” *Cuban Studies* 26 (1996): 126. For analysis on Cuban-Mexican relations that places greater emphasis on the ability of Mexican leftists to shape Mexico’s Cuban policy see, Renata Keller, “A Foreign Policy for Domestic Consumption: Mexico’s Lukewarm Defense of Castro, 1959-1969,” *Latin American Research Review* 47, 2 (2012): 100-119.

¹³ “Lopopolo Ask Postponement,” *New York Times*, 23 December 1966, 34,

boxer.¹⁴ Finally, in April of 1969, Nápoles faced Cokes for the world welterweight championship, which caused a stir among Los Angeles' ethnic Mexican community. The Los Angeles Spanish language newspaper *La Opinión* reported on the Cuban's popularity among Mexicans, calling him the "Cuban refugee settled in Mexico, where he is an idol" and noting that he had been adopted by Mexicans as "one of their own."¹⁵ Nápoles did not disappoint his Mexican fans and defeated Cokes in thirteen rounds by technical knockout.

Nápoles held the world championship twice. The first reign lasted from April 1969 to December 1970, and the second from June 1971 to December 1975. He emerged victorious eighteen times and only lost three times during this period. In June of 1970, he avenged his loss to Billy Backus and regained the title Backus had surprisingly taken from him in December the year before. He also lost to middleweight champion Carlos Monzón of Argentina in February of 1974, who would later retire having never been vanquished in a championship fight. Nápoles' final loss was also his last fight, in which he ceded his title to Englishmen John Stracey. During his reign, Mantequilla defeated several top-level opponents including Ernie López, Hedgemon Lewis, and Hall of Fame member Emile Griffith. Nápoles' dominance over his peers was such that the former Secretary General of the World Boxing Council commented that the champion had "difficulty in getting the right opponent for a title fight, he, being clearly superior over his

¹⁴ Hildeberto Navarette, "LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: 'MANTEQUILLA' MERECE PELEA TITULAR," *Ring Mundial*, 12 March 1968, 12. José Armenta, "LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: UN CRIMEN LO DE 'MANTEQUILLA,'" *Ring Mundial*, 20 October 1968, 31. Juan Alvarado, "LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: 'MANTEQUILLA' VICTIMA DE LA MAFIA," *Ring Mundial*, 24 November 1968, 40.

¹⁵ Rodolfo B. García, "Esquina Neutral," *La Opinión*, 18 April 1969, 10. "Cokes es 2-1 Favorito Para Vencerá Nápoles," *La Opinión*, 18 April 1969, 10.

division's contenders."¹⁶ During his reign as champion, Nápoles traveled throughout the world, not only to the United States, but also to Canada, England, and France. In the process, the Cuban immigrant became a celebrity in Mexico, even co-starring with *lucha libre* icon El Santo in one of the b-movie star's fifty films, *La venganza de la llorona* (*The Revenge of the Crying Woman*, 1974). After losing to Stracey in 1975, Nápoles retired from the sport and has remained retired since.

***Mestizaje* and Blackness in 20th Century Mexico**

Nápoles' blackness and his public adoption of Mexican values and citizenship provide a unique opportunity to better understand the role of race in Mexican nationalism. Since the Porfiriato, Mexican intellectuals equated *mestizaje*, the mixing of European and Indigenous blood and cultures, with nationhood. *Mestizaje* became even more popular following the Revolution of 1910-1920 because it allowed intellectuals to separate themselves ideologically from the Porfirian past without embracing socialism or communism.¹⁷ This mestizo image consolidated in Mexican national culture in the 1930s, whereby the acculturated Indian (an indigenous Mexican with Western or modern cultural behaviors) stood as the prime symbol of the modern *mestizo* nation-state. As Mexico industrialized in the 1930s and 1940s, the indigenous aspect of *mestizaje* gained greater importance in national culture order to offset Mexico's increasing integration into the international world of consumerism.¹⁸

¹⁶ Letter, Rodrigo L. Salud to Robert L. Turley, 4 October 1971, Office of the Secretary of State, California State Archives, Folder F3920:253, "Correspondence, W.B.C. 1968-1972."

¹⁷ Knight, "Racism, Revolution, and Indigenismo: Mexico, 1910-1940," in *The Idea of Race in Latin America, 1870-1940* ed. Richard Graham (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1990): 85-86.

¹⁸ López, 40-41.

At its base, however, mestizo nationalism was a racist construction. Supposedly, Western customs helped modernize and improve the habits of traditional Indians. In this construction, Indians were symbols that helped anchor Mexico's rapid industrialization in some shared, imagined, and authentic past. The Mexican government also appropriated them to promote sporting activities and events. Presidents Miguel Alemán Váldes and Adolfo Ruiz Cortines both employed the symbol of the Aztec warrior, the epitome of a healthy Indian body, in advertisements that declared presidential support for national sports organizations in 1948 and 1955, respectively.¹⁹ The spectacle of healthy mestizo bodies was important for displaying national progress and unity. One can see, then, how boxing could provide visual evidence of this progress, by showcasing two fit mestizo men in front of audiences in Mexico and around the world. For José Nápoles, his blackness prevented him from embodying the mestizo nation, yet his successful manipulation of his body in the ring and his public adherence to Mexican cultural norms outside of it allowed him to symbolize the cosmopolitan aspect of Mexican national culture.

Most boxers either self-identified as mestizo or generically Mexican or at least performed those identities regardless of phenotype. Because of the proliferation of boxing gyms in urban areas, the sport attracted young men dislocated from indigenous communities. Journalists frequently referred to Rodolfo 'Chango' Casanova in the 1930s and 1940s as the Indian from Guanajuato and José 'Toluco' López in the 1950s and 1960s as the Golden Indian (*Indio del Oro*). These references, however, reflected the dark

¹⁹ Brewster, "Redeeming the 'Indian,'" 226.

skin and indigenous facial features more than identification with an indigenous Mexican culture. To the Mexican sports media, regionalism mattered more, as journalists frequently touted the regional origins of boxers who had migrated to Mexico City. The Mexican media generally conflated all phenotypes into the category of ‘Mexican,’ although journalists readily differentiated between races in the United States.

Mestizaje discourse emphasized integration and the elimination of racial and ethnic differences. As a result, Mexican newspapers and sporting press supported the U.S. Civil Rights movement in the 1960s and the anti-Apartheid movement in the 1970s, but disparaged the U.S. Black Power movement. When Joe Frazier defeated Muhammad Ali in the ‘Fight of the Century’ in 1971, *Ring Mundial* denigrated Ali for being “for black supremacy, for racial confrontation” and exalted Frazier for being “for integration.” The magazine characterized the victorious Frazier “as a new titan in the struggle for civil rights, within the pacifist camp.”²⁰ Later, the magazine interviewed a black South African boxer who, like Nápoles, had relocated to Mexico. Responding to the boxer’s characterizations of Mexico as “a marvelous country” and as a place where he could “greet people of all races,” the article declared Mexico “the country in which racial discrimination does not exist.” Mexico’s form of mestizaje continued to be celebrated as a panacea for the racial problems that plagued the world well into the 1970s.

Nápoles had entered a society that had long ignored its African roots, at least at the national level, even though slaves and free blacks were clearly visible in colonial Mexican society. Furthermore, two of the key member of Mexican independence, José

²⁰ “EL BOXEO Y LA POLITICA,” *Ring Mundial*, 14 April 1971, 1.

María Morelos and Vicente Guerrero, were mulatto and the latter became the second president of the Mexican Republic.²¹ However, after independence, blacks disappeared from the national narrative. The two strongest holdings of African culture in Mexico are in the state of Veracruz, the entryway for slaves in colonial Mexico and the destination for Cubans fleeing various politically tumultuous situations, and the Costa Chica region along the Pacific coasts of the states of Oaxaca and Guerrero. Anthropologist Laura Lewis has found that Afromestizos from the Costa Chica identify with indigenous Mexicans because they cannot be simultaneously black and Mexican. Because Mexican intellectuals never romanticized Mexico's African heritage, Afromestizos found solace in identifying with the segment of Mexican national ideology that incorporates an exploited segment of society within the national imaginary²².

The most conspicuous black Mexican in the twentieth century was comic-book character Memín Pinguín. Although originally inspired by a Mexican's encounter with Afro-Cuban children in Havana, Memín Pinguín and his mother both strongly resembled two African American stereotypes that date from the Jim Crow era: the sambo, or pickaninny, and the mammy. Most issues featured the title character finding his way into mischief and eventually learning a valuable lesson after others have helped him out of the situation. Pinguín and his mother were the only black characters in the series. His friends, teachers, and neighbors were all normative Mexicans living in Mexico City.

²¹ Ben Vinson III, "Black Mexico and the Historical Discipline," in *Black Mexico: Race and Society from Colonial to Modern Times* ed. Ben Vinson III and Matthew Restall (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2009): 1-20.

²² Laura A. Lewis, "Blacks, Black Indians, Afromexicans: The Dynamics of Race, Nation, and Identity in a Mexican Moreno Community (Guerrero)," *American Ethnologist* 27, 4 (2000): 917. Lewis, "Of Ships and Saints: History, Memory, and Place in the Making of Moreno Mexican Identity," *Cultural Anthropology* 16, 1 (2001): 69, 75.

Occasionally, Pinguín encountered racism, both in Mexico and in the United States, but, like Nápoles, he was never connected to Mexico's Afro-mestizo population.²³ When the Mexican government issued a series of stamps commemorating Memín Pinguín in 2005, a debate broke out between African-Americans in the United States and Mexican elites about the offensiveness of the character. Afro-Mexicans however, played little, if any, role in the debate.²⁴

Nápoles' blackness may have provided a hurdle to his becoming a symbol of Mexican modernity and cosmopolitanism, but his Cubanness did not necessarily hinder his acceptance into Mexican society. Throughout the twentieth century, Cuban entertainers and athletes traveled to Mexico and performed in front of enthusiastic crowds. Through song and cinema, Mexican audiences were quite accustomed to Cuban dancers, such as Ninón Sevilla, and Cuban musicians, like Dámaso Pérez Prado, from the 1920s through the 1950s.²⁵ Cuban athletes were prevalent as well throughout Mexican. Cuban players had performed a 'crucial' role in spreading baseball throughout Mexico.²⁶ Hall of famers such as Martín Dihigo and lesser known Cubans had filled up baseball squads since the inception of professional baseball in Mexico in 1925. Boxing was also a point of contact for Cuban and Mexican athletes, who had competed against each other since the end of the nineteenth century.²⁷ The boxing dynamic between Cuba and Mexico

²³ Marco Polo Hernández Cuevas, "Memín Pinguín: Uno de los *comics* mexicanos más populares como instrumento para codificar al negro," *Afro-Hispanic Review* 22, 1 (2003): 52-59.

²⁴ Marco Katz, "Tiras, timbres, estereotipos: el negro Memín Pinguín y la manipulación de la cultura popular con representaciones étnicas," *Culturas Populares: Revista Electrónica* 5 (2007): 1-21.

²⁵ Gabriela Pulido Llano, *Mulatas y negros cubanos en la escena mexicana, 1920-1950* (Mexico City: Instituto Nacional de Antropología e Historia, 2010).

²⁶ Axel Ramírez, "Cuba en México: Migración y migrantes," in *Relaciones México-Cuba 1950-2006. Historias y perspectivas* (Mexico City: Universidad Autónoma de México, Centro Coordinador y Difusor de Estudios Latinoamericanos, 2007), 106.

²⁷ Marco Antonio Maldonado and Rubén Amador Zamora, *Historia del box mexicano I: Pasión por los guantes* (Mexico City: Clío, 1999), 24-25.

changed when Fidel Castro banned professional boxing in 1961. Mexican fans witnessed a “pugilistic chachacha” of Cuban boxers migrating to Mexico.²⁸ A year later Nápoles would join several of his countrymen in Mexico City. Nápoles would later tell a Mexican audience that similarities between the Mexican and Cuban cultures led him to decide on Mexico City rather than Miami, the most popular destination for Cuban pugilists following the revolution.²⁹

The Second Golden Age of Mexican Boxing

Nápoles achieved his fame and success in what Mexican boxing fans generally consider the second “Golden Age” of Mexican boxing, which lasted from 1968 until the early 1980s. The era started with appointment of George Parnassus, who had long been the most popular manager for Mexican nationals fighting in the United States, as promoter of boxing events for the Forum. Whereas the original Golden Age was a highlight for Mexican boxing because of the high-quality boxing that took place in Mexico City, this new era was a high point for Mexican boxing because of the success Mexican boxers had in other destinations, primarily Los Angeles. Prior to the second Golden Age, Mexico at most boasted one world champion at any one time. Now it would boast up to six world championships simultaneously. This new found success was aided by the increase of the number of weight classes and the friction between World Boxing Council and the World Boxing Association that led the organizations to recognize different world champions. The sport became even more popular during this time, aided by cooperative sports journalists and advancements in television technology. Since

²⁸ Maldonado and Amador Zamora, *Historia del box mexicano II: Cosecha de Campeones* (Mexico City: Clío, 2000), 24-25.

²⁹ Garbella, 282.

Vicente Saldívar's title defense from London in 1965, Mexico possessed the technology to broadcast international matches live on television through satellites. In this era of success, world championships were no longer surprising opportunities to celebrate Mexican national progress, but rather expected opportunities to do so. Merely winning a world championship no longer signified a boxer's greatness, defending that title several times did.

The year 1968 stands out not just for its significance to Mexican boxing. That October, Mexico City hosted the Summer Olympics, which were designed to broadcast the modernity and progress of Mexico to the world. This modern and progressive image was shattered by the massacre of around 300 student protesters at the Plaza de las Tres Culturas in the Tlatelolco area of Mexico City about two weeks before the opening ceremonies. Although the hosting of the Olympics went as planned, many segments of the Mexican population became far more skeptical of the government than they had been during much of the Mexican economic 'miracle.'³⁰

When Luis Echeverría replaced Gustavo Díaz Ordaz as president in 1970, he did so amid a political and economic landscape littered with anxieties. It was not just the flaws in the Mexican political system that were exposed. Cracks also appeared in the Mexican economic system. The steady economic growth of the previous thirty years slowed as it did elsewhere in the world. Rather than plan for long-term economic growth, Echeverría turned to economic populist measures that promoted temporary political stability. These measures largely failed. As a result, the last year of Echeverría's

³⁰ Carey, *Plaza of Sacrifices*.

term (1976), witnessed the first devaluation of the peso in twenty-two years.³¹ Yet hope still remained that Mexico would return to its path of economic advancement.

Unfortunately, six years later, Mexico entered economic freefall with the debt crisis of 1982 and hope dissipated. The Golden Age of Mexican boxing, then, coincided with era of both hope and anxiety in Mexico's political and economic realms.³²

Just as they had done during the "miracle" years, Mexican boxers continued to symbolize national progress and advancement. Ironically, they did so even as their increased success came at a time when the Mexican economy sputtered. Regardless of Mexico's economic situation, during the second Golden Age Mexico achieved renown in an activity with international implications. Concerns about the Jamaicón syndrome (Mexicans' supposed propensity for underperforming abroad) eased, at least for boxers, with several Mexican nationals conquering world championships. They included International Boxing Hall of Fame inductees Nápoles, Olivares, Miguel Canto, Pipino Cuevas, Carlos Palomino, Vicente Saldivar, Salvador Sánchez, and Carlos Zárate.³³

The second Golden Age also marked a transformation in the US boxing industry. Mexican nationals and Mexican-American boxers and boxing fans played a key role in Los Angeles' replacing New York as the center for pugilism in the United States. One *New York Times* article described a match between Nápoles' and North American Ernie

³¹ Aboites Aguilar, 288.

³² Echeverría attempted to redirect the Mexican Revolution back to its original course. One of Echeverría's key reforms was the political opening, which allowed greater freedoms for dissenting political parties. Echeverría also enacted land reform, the most widespread since the days of Lázaro Cárdenas. Unfortunately, Echeverría also displayed several dictatorial characteristics, even enacting a dirty war against leftist radicals and insurgents. For a comparison between Echeverría and Cárdenas see Amerlia M. Kiddle and María L.O. Muñoz, eds., *Populism in 20th Century Mexico: The Presidencies of Lázaro Cárdenas and Luis Echeverría* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2010).

³³ International Boxing Hall of Fame, "Modern - Last bout no later than 1943," [n.d.].

Lopez as characterizing “the nationalist fervor that has resurrected boxing on the West Coast,” noting that the fans, “many of them Mexican who flocked across the border by the thousands, came in open-collared sports shirts, sang their national anthem loudly and proudly and waved noise-makers, sombreros, flags and their fists.” In addition to their between-round chants of “May-hee-co, May-hee-co,” the Mexican fans quickly told “anyone who dared scorn Mantequilla” to “[p]ut up or shut up!”³⁴ The Nápoles-Lopez fight also drew the attention of *Wall Street Journal* writer P.F. Kluge declared that George Parnassus promoted events that “are more than prizefights; they are spasms of Mexican nationalism.”³⁵ The writer colorfully depicted the entrances of both participants:

The capacity crowd at the Inglewood Forum applauded politely when the spotlight sliced through a smokey [sic] haze to pick out the American flag advancing down the aisle towards the ring, followed by Lopez. But when the Mexican tricolor appeared, a bobbing, dancing Napoles in its wake, the crowd exploded. Chants, noisemakers, surreptitious bottles of whisky [sic] and cries of “Mexico! Mexico!” helped fans cheer Napoles to an easy victory.³⁶

The Golden Age was dominated by boxers like Nápoles who trained in Mexico City. Ironically, however, the first Mexican to claim a world champion during this period, Efrén “Alacrán” (“Scorpion”) Torres of Guadalajara, who defeated Chartchai Chionoi of Thailand in February, 1969 become the WBC Flyweight champion. Two months later, the Mexico City-based but Cuban-born fighter Nápoles won the undisputed world welterweight championship in front of a majority Mexican crowd at the Forum. Four months after Nápoles’ victory, Olivares won the undisputed world bantamweight

³⁴ Neil Amdur, “Napoles Keeps Title as Aficionados Cheer,” *New York Times*, 16 February 1970, 46, ProQuest (11 August 2006).

³⁵ P.F. Kluge, ““Hit That Gringo’ Ethnic Rivalry Boosts Boxing in Los Angeles,” *Wall Street Journal*, 16 April, 1970,

³⁶ Ibid.

championship in Los Angeles. Within a span of six months, Mexico went from zero world championships to three. One boxing fan commended these “good sportsmen who are starting to surge in the new booming modern Mexico.”³⁷

Like previous decades, these in-ring accomplishments elicited outbursts of national pride, both at the actual event and afterwards. Torres’ championship victory, which made him the first Mexican world champion since Vicente Saldivar retired in 1967, inspired some fans to write *corridos* in his honor. The following corrido, written by a fan from the northern city of Hermosillo displays a positive and nationalistic sentiment about the Torres’ accomplishment:

*Yo voy a contarles, algo verdadero
La historia de un pugil, que ha sido el mayor
Escribí estos versos, para recorlarlo [sic]
Como es mexicano, alabemos su honor.
Veintitrés el día, fue mes de febrero
El año, la fecha recordaré
Aquella batalla entre dos titanes
Jugaron sus vidas, no lo olvidare
Nuestro Mexicano, llamado Efrén Torres
Subió al enlonado como retador
Del campeón del mundo, rival peligroso
Lo venció sin dudas siendo el ganador.
Hacia algún tiempo, quería en sus seines
Esa gran corona, ese cinturón
En dos ocasiones lo había intentado
Quería el reinado para su nación.
Viva México, Viva el Rey Universal
Viva el héroe que ganara el campeonato mundial.
Nuestro President está satisfecho
De tu gran hazaña, de tu gran valor.
Esa valentía y poder en tus puños
Son los que te hicieron llegar a campeón.
Tu nombre y grandeza quedaron escritos*

³⁷ Carlos Rodríguez Bustos, “La Esquina del Fan: EL ALACRAN VALIA MENOS,” *Ring Mundial*, 10 June 1970, 46.

*Con letras brillantes, no se opacarán
 Tú... Rey de los moscas y del mundo entero
 Hiciste honor a tu apodo Alacrán.
 Aquí me despido, deseándote suerte
 Y sigas peleando con el corazón
 Defiéndote siempre, y sigue venciendo
 Para que conserves ese cinturón.
 Viva México, que escuchará esta canción
 Aquí termina el corrido del campeón que fue el mejor.³⁸*

I am going to tell you all something very true
 The story of a pugilist who has been the best
 I wrote these verses, to remember him
 As he is Mexican, we praise his honor.
 The twenty-third day, it was the month of February
 The year, the date I will remember
 That battle between two titans
 Risking their lives, I never forget it
 Our Mexican, named Efrén Torres
 Entered the ring as a challenger to the world champion, a dangerous rival
 Without a doubt, he beat him and was the winner.
 Some time ago, he wanted in his temple
 That great crown, that belt
 In two occasions he tried
 He wanted the title for his nation.
 Long live Mexico, long live the world King
 Long lives the hero who won the world championship.
 Our President is satisfied with your achievement, of your great value.
 That courage and power in your fists
 Are what made you a champion.
 Your name and greatness remain written
 In brilliant letters, they will not be overshadowed
 You... king of the flyweights and of the whole world
 You are an honor to your nickname "Alacrán."
 Here I bid farewell, wishing you luck
 And keep fighting with all your heart
 Always defending yourself, and keep winning
 So that you keep that belt.
 Long live Mexico, which will hear this song
 Here ends the corrido of the champion who was the best.

³⁸ Jesús Ortega Montaña, "LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: CORRIDO AL IDOLO ALACRAN TORRES," *Ring Mundial*, 30 Abril 1969, 37.

Not only do these verses celebrate the accomplishments of Torres, they also ascribe to Torres his motivation for winning the world championship: He did it for the Mexican nation. This attribution of selflessness to boxers dates back to at least the 1950s, when the Mexican sports media often portrayed Raúl Macías as a humble person dedicated to serving Mexico. In some ways, it was an expectation and may help explain why Vicente Saldivar had failed to conquer the hearts of Mexican boxing fans, as he insisted that he fought for himself and not for Mexico. This could also help in explaining the strong feelings of disappointment when Mexican boxers indulged in excesses, whether drinking, cavorting with women, or spending, as they violated the notion that boxers sacrificed their bodies strictly for the nation. The corrido also attributed feelings of satisfaction to Mexican president Luis Echeverría, who apparently was content with Torres' work and his value to the nation. Overall, the author presented a very positive situation where Mexican boxing fans, including the president, were greatly appreciative of Torres, who sacrificed and struggled in order to bring glory to the Mexican nation.

As Mexico amassed world championships, Mexican fans began to consider their nation's place within the realm of professional prizefighting. A newfound confidence overtook Mexican analyses of national boxing, as evidenced by a fan who noted, "Our pugilism has demonstrated in these recent years its true capacity, and today it is the strongest that exists."³⁹ Another fan, however, warned of the responsibilities associated with Mexico's new found place in the world of pugilism: "Mexican boxing has achieved a great prestige, with the long line of world champions that we have, and figures of first

³⁹ Ricardo Maldonado García, "La Esquina del Fan: MEXICO, EL PRIMERO," *Ring Mundial*, 11 August 1974, 31.

magnitude that shine in various divisions. We have to take care of this prestige.”

Particularly of concern to the fan was a recent program in Ecuador that featured five low-grade Mexican boxers, all of whom lost to boxers from Ecuador: “We have to be vigilant that Mexicans leave in good conditions,” as “the international prestige of our boxing” allowed these boxers to make money outside the country.⁴⁰ The international image of Mexican boxing was a serious matter to followers of the sport within Mexico.

The accomplishments of Mexican prizefighters served notice that Mexico was rising as a nation, yet a conundrum continued: most of the boxing events involving Mexican world championships took place in Los Angeles and not in Mexico City, despite the fact that most world champions were from the Mexican capital. In the beginning of 1974, *Ring Mundial* listed as one its desires for the new year, “That Mexican boxing continue triumphing, but that our pugilists do not have to continue living like globetrotters; that they can fight here, defend their world titles and win new ones.” It explained, “it is not strange to ask what is the reason that we in Mexico have many world champions, but we only watch championship fights on television.” Moreover, “California has always been the dangerous market for Mexican fans for the simple reason that with its dollars, it takes our best elements. Even so, another enemy has already emerged: Japan.”⁴¹ Thus, while boxing revealed Mexican national progress to some, it revealed the limitations of this progress to others.

A series of letters that appeared in boxing magazine *Nocaut...Sólo Box* in the early 1970s reveal the strong connections between Mexican pugilistic accomplishments,

⁴⁰ Ramiro Toledano A., La Esquina del Fan: El Prestigio Mexicano,” *Ring Mundial*, 11 November 1973, 31.

⁴¹ “Nuestros Deseos,” *Ring Mundial*, 13 January 1974, 1.

race, and national pride. The letters, which were responses to a letter from a woman named Amparo Morales from the state of Mexico. In her original letter, Mrs. Morales had critiqued Mexican boxers and the state of boxing in Mexico and, in the process, unleashed a whirlwind of debate. One fan from Mexico City actually wrote in support of the sentiments of Morales' letter: "I agree with her on everything, but she forgot to say that national fighters... only enter the ring to throw fists left and right, like savages. They don't know the science and technique of boxing." He concluded his letter by saying: "Hey, Mexicans, learn what boxing is, don't confine yourselves to FOREIGNERS like 'Mantequilla' Nápoles who come to reside in Mexico in order to give luster to your homeland."⁴² These letters touched on the sensitive subjects of Mexico's backwardness and its lack of modernity by referring to the supposed lack of technique and savagery of Mexican boxers.

The letters critical of Ms. Morales frequently questioned her nationality and asserted Mexico's prominence in the world of professional prizefighting. One Mexican fan wanted to address "that woman who wrote that Mexicans are cowards, to tell her that surely she is Spanish, otherwise she would not talk that way, and that she is hurt because Chango Carmona [a Mexican boxer] gave no chance to her wearisome *gachupín* [a derogatory term for Spaniards] Pedro Carrasco." He concluded the letter with, "Up with the Mexicans, who are the best in the world!"⁴³ This was not the only letter that questioned Mrs. Morales *mexicanidad* for calling into question the quality of Mexican

⁴² José Inés Bermúdez, "¡EL NOCAUT! De los Lectores: SI ES CIERTO: LOS MEXICANOS NO SABEN PELEAR," *Nocaut... Sólo Box*, 5 November 1972, 16.

⁴³ "¡EL NOCAUT! De los Lectores: LOS MEXICANOS SON LOS MEJORES DEL MUNDO," *Nocaut... Sólo Box*, 5 November 1972, 16.

boxers. A female fight fan from the city of Queretaro also took umbrage with Morales: “I don’t think it’s necessary to know much about boxing to say that in this professional sport we are currently a true power.” Furthermore, the fan demanded, “I would like to know the nationality” of Morales.⁴⁴ A fan from the state of Oaxaca expressed dismay that Morales “would dare write something so cruel, classifying our tough guys as cowards.” He advised her, “Do not be ashamed of your fellow countrymen who are and will continue to be the best of all... if not, ask PARNASSUS.”⁴⁵ Ironically, Mexicans had frequently portrayed George Parnassus as a exploitative foreigner. Yet this fan employed him to substantiate the high quality of Mexican boxers.

Other letters continued to question Morales’ mexicanidad but also took on a more sexist tone and even questioned whether women should be allowed to critique boxing. A male fan from the city of Hermosillo expressed his desire to tell Morales “not to meddle in the affairs of boxing. You demonstrate very few womanly qualities. Tell me: When have you seen a true man get involved with affairs as feminine as a beauty salon, for example? Maybe you have seen ‘strange men’ that work in those beauty salons.” The fan continued, “reading your letter, I imagined that maybe you were tall, blonde, with blue eyes, with curly, European-style hair. But later... I knew you were an authentic Malinche, as Mexican as the boxers that you say you look down upon, with a European complex, very hateful, very nosy, and very ugly.”⁴⁶ A Mexican fan from Houston Texas

⁴⁴ Ernestina Martínez de Guerrero, “¡EL NOCAUT! De los Lectores: Los Boxeadores Mexicanos son Campeones Mundiales,” *Nocaut... Sólo Box*, 12 November 1972, 12.

⁴⁵ Victor Hugo Villalobos, “¡EL NOCAUT! de los Lectores: ¡PREGUNTEN A PARNASSUS!” *Nocaut... Sólo Box*, 12 November 1972, 12.

⁴⁶ Marco Antonio Rondo, “¡EL NOCAUT! de los Lectores: ¡Atención! Amparo Morales,” *Nocaut... Sólo Box*, 12 November 1972, 12.

also took offense to the opinions of Morales, expressing his desire “to answer the letter of Amparito Morales, when she says that Mexican fighters are shameful because they are Indian, dark, and very ugly. I would not believe that there would be Americans in Mexico... and yes they are Indians but they are willing to bust their face to find victory and they achieve it through valiancy and manliness.” He then advised Morales to “dedicate yourself to washing your husband’s underpants and try not to cram your huge parrot nose into manly things like boxing.”⁴⁷ Aside from the questioning and criticizing of proper womanly behavior, these letters also reflect an association from Mexican fans with the terms “dark” and “Indian” with ugliness, revealing a certain degree of self-loathing for Mexican physical appearances amid the self-veneration of Mexican national character.

Morales responded to these critiques with more insults of Mexican boxers and boxing fans: “They appeared like women as they let out tear after tear when I said the truth in respect to their ‘filthy’ Mexican boxers.” Morales mocked that, immediately after her letter was published, “all ‘Aztecs by heart’” defended “their fellow countrymen and forgetting about the true essence of sport and instead wishing to watch savagery and a half in the ring.” She continued, “It appears to me that I hurt them a great deal with my opinion that Mexican boxers are cowards. Well, I will continue repeating it to them while I live, and now it applies to all those that they protect, well it appears that they are miles away from knowing the difference between fencing and boxing, the skill of sports, using

⁴⁷ F.S. García, “¡EL NOCAUT! de los Lectores: LOS INDIOS MEXICANOS SON LOS MAS VALIENTES DEL MUNDO!” *Nocaut... Sólo Box*, 19 November 1972, 16.

THE HEAD to think, not to hit.”⁴⁸ Rather than critique *machismo*, the letter celebrated the tenants of macho behavior by mocking the cowardice and lack of emotional control of Mexican boxers and boxing fans.

Her response spurred further debate. A fan from the state of Coahuila also expressed his disagreement with Morales: “The boxers from Mexico are the best in the world and I say this with all my heart, because I have seen the greatness and power of Mexican boxing and I agree with others who say... that Mexican boxing outside the country is stronger because it has to triumph there to heighten the name of its homeland. For this, Mexicans have beaten box-office records within and outside of the homeland.”⁴⁹ A fan from the state of Veracruz expressed dismay with Morales’ contention “that Mexican are cowards. I don’t know how she can explain how that is when George Parnassus (quite the intelligent man) builds his great cards in Los Angeles with purely Mexican fighters. I don’t think Parnassus would sign them up if they were cowards.” He continued talking up the merits of Mexican boxers: “I want her to know and to realize that Mexico is the number one power in boxing in the entire world and you, *señorita*, are crazier than my broken watch, because Mexican boxers are spectacular and, day in and day out the best on the world, with four world champions.” He went to call Morales *malinchista*.⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Amparo Morales, “¡EL NOCAUT! de los Lectores: ¡COMO SON LLORONES!” *Nocaut... Sólo Box*, 26 November 1972, 14.

⁴⁹ José Salazar R., “¡EL NOCAUT! de los Lectores: ¡MAS SOBRE AMPARITO!” *Nocaut... Sólo Box*, 6 December 1972, 14.

⁵⁰ Guillermo Jiménez O., “¡EL NOCAUT! de los Lectores: MEXICO: PRIMERA POTENCIA BOXISTICA MUNDIAL,” *Nocaut... Sólo Box*, 13 December 1972, 14.

Other fans continued to portray Morales as a foreigner. A fan from the state of Tabasco stated his displeasure with Morales' "unjust and absurd critique about our boxers and we imagine what class of person you are, unworthy of stepping foot on Mexican soil." He continued, "if we are Indians, dark and ugly... we should not feel ashamed of our race, but if you are of refined European or Saxon blue blood, it would be good to abandon this land of 'cowards.'" He lamented, "It is a shame that you hide yourself behind the name of a woman. If not, we would respond to you in another way."⁵¹ A Mexican fan from California took umbrage with negative depictions of Mexican boxing: "Mexicans openly express that on Aztec soil true fighters do not exist, that they only dedicate themselves to throwing slaps, but they forget that in Mexico there are more champions than any other country, with the exception of the United States, which has about 200 million inhabitants."⁵² He later directed a letter to "all the refugees who are in Mexico and speak badly of it" and to "a renegade Mexican who says that Mexicans don't know how to fight." According to the reader, "The best test that the Mexicans (the pure Aztecs, not Jews or *gachupines* in disguise) are the best and most valiant boxers is that Mexico has the most world champions after the United States." The reader also advised *malinchistas* to "SHUT UP."⁵³

The conversation published in *Nocaut* provides valuable context for understanding Mexican reactions to Nápoles. For many Mexican boxing fans, supporting

⁵¹ Francisco Uco. Luna, "¡EL NOCAUT! de los Lectores!: LOS AZTECAS NO SON COBARDES," *Nocaut... Sólo Box*, 20 December 1972, 14.

⁵² Roberto Miranda, "¡EL NOCAUT! de los Lectores: Nadie Como los Mexicanos," *Nocaut... Sólo Box*, 16 February 1973, 14.

⁵³ Roberto Miranda, "¡EL NOCAUT! de los Lectores: ¡CALLENSE MALINCHISTAS!" *Nocaut... Sólo Box*, 2 March 1973, 28.

Mexican boxers was the equivalent of supporting the Mexican nation. Likewise, failure to support Mexican boxers was the same as selling-out the nation, best exemplified through the usage of the term *malinchista*. Recalling Lomnitz's observation that Mexican nationalism possessed anti-Semitic characteristics, many letters expressed fear of foreigners attempting to undermine Mexican boxing, as apparently Spaniards and Jews were coordinating their efforts with *malinchistas*. The conversation also highlights how *mesitzo* Mexican nationalism both venerated and denigrated indigeneity as multiple letters associating it with both valor and ugliness. The courage associated with indigeneity allowed these fans to assert the masculinity of Mexican boxers against the charges of cowardice raised during the conversation. Considering these factors, it might appear that there existed little opportunity for Nápoles to become a national symbol through his boxing exploits.

These letters, though, raised another issue that may help explain why Mexican fans accepted Nápoles as a Mexican boxer. The letters from Morales portrayed Mexico's pugilists as savages who lacked the technique and skill to compete with foreign competition. This accusation about Mexican boxing techniques touched upon a recurring worry to many Mexicans, especially elites: Mexico's supposed backwardness compared to the United States and Europe. The stereotypical Mexican boxer eschewed defense to inflict maximum pain onto his opponent. His only defense was his ability to absorb more punishment than his foe.⁵⁴ Of course, there were several exceptions to this stereotype. Raúl Macías, Vicente Saldívar, and Rafael Herrera were all disciplined,

⁵⁴ Rodríguez, "Palaces of Pain," 207-208.

technical fighters and were lauded by the Mexican press for their ‘scientific’ approach to the sport. Nápoles, in comparison, drew compliments for his graceful, Cuban style that emphasized both power and speed and balanced offense and defense. The Mexican media celebrated this more ‘refined’ style of boxing that seemingly coalesced with the aesthetics of modernity. In terms of boxing style, Nápoles’ foreignness may actually have helped him become a representative of Mexican modernity.

“The Cuban with Mexican Spirit”

Nápoles readily performed *mexicanidad* to the Mexican public. He most conspicuously did this by willingly participating in Mexican political theatre and never challenging the political status quo. Before a 1963 boxing match, he approached President Adolf López Mateos, who was in attendance, and handed him a letter that declared the boxer’s respect and admiration for the Mexican head-of-state.⁵⁵ Six years later, Nápoles dedicated his championship victory over Cokes to the Mexican people and to President Gustavo Díaz Ordaz. An article in the newspaper owned by the Mexican government speculated that this action may have been remuneration for the support he received from Mexicans in Mexico and Los Angeles.⁵⁶ In response to Nápoles’ dedication, the Mexican President extended his congratulations.⁵⁷ Nápoles did not always dedicate his fights to politicians. Prior to a 1970 match, he dedicated his performance “to all the humble children of Mexico, but especially to those who are confined in

⁵⁵ “El Aplauso Sincero de Su Gente: LOPEZ MATEOS, MOVIDO POR EL HOMENAJE PUBLICO,” *ESTO*, 15 November 1964, 2(A).

⁵⁶ Eduardo J. Barcelo, “Palco de Prensa,” *El Nacional*, 19 April 1969, 1(2a).

⁵⁷ “Felicitación del Presidente Díaz Ordaz a “Mantequilla,”” *El Universal*, 20 April, 1969, 3(Deportiva).

orphanages.”⁵⁸ However, Nápoles always publicly supported the political and societal status quo.

He also constructed a life story that fit the ‘typical’ narrative of the Mexican boxer. His story about the barber paying him to fight older men may have been hard to believe, but it reinforced the notion that he had a tough upbringing, which made his childhood similar to those of native Mexican boxers. He told other stories that served this function. Discussing his first fight as a child to a boxing magazine, Nápoles thoroughly assured the readership that he only had fought in public as a child and had never done so in his adult life. As an adult, he had only fought for money. At the time, Nápoles claimed, “I do not want the children to see me as a braggart or a troublemaker... but as a professional boxer, as a man that has won a world championship.”⁵⁹ Apparently, he entered his first fight, not because he enjoyed violence, but because he had to defend his friends against an older bully. The story Nápoles told resembled several told by Mexican boxers to boxing journalists, both before and after the career of the Cuban-Mexican. Nápoles, like many of his Mexican counterparts, felt the need to justify the use of force and his participation in a fight.

Nápoles also endeared himself to Mexican boxing fans by publicly declaring his love of Mexico and Mexican culture. In 1967 he told *Ring Mundial*, “I have a moral commitment to the Mexican public and to myself, to give a world championship to México, as currently I am more Mexican than the *nopales*. My wife is Mexican and I

⁵⁸ “‘Mantequilla’ Nápoles Dedicó su Próxima Pelea a los Niños Humildes de México: Manny Indicó que no Dejará ir la Oportunidad: ‘Noquearé’,” *El Universal*, 25 March 1971, 2(2).

⁵⁹ “LA DINASTIA NAPOLES MUY VALIENTE: NO ME GUSTA SER BRAVUCON,” *Ring Mundial*, 30 April 1969, P. 7.

have two children born in this land that I love so much.”⁶⁰ Upon winning the world championship, Nápoles expressed his desire to attain Mexican citizenship and permission to bring his mother from Cuba to Mexico, calling them, "two things will make me the happiest man in the world.”⁶¹ On his trips abroad, Nápoles often expressed his homesickness to the Mexican media. He told a Mexican journalist in Paris that he wanted to leave the French capital because he was “dying to return to my people.” He also told a Mexican newspaper that he felt “strange” and “alone” in Grenoble, France and was looking forward to returning to Mexico to see his family.⁶²

Religion also allowed Nápoles to publicly display his acceptance of Mexican societal norms. Catholicism played a substantial role in post-World War II Mexico in ‘protecting’ Mexicans from the corrupting influences of international consumerism and international communism.⁶³ His public manifestations of Catholicism revealed a combination of Cuban and Mexican influences. In one interview, he professed his belief in both the Virgin of the Caridad del Cobre and the Virgin of Guadalupe, the matron saints of Cuba and Mexico, respectively.⁶⁴ After winning the world championship for the first time, Nápoles visited the Basilica of Guadalupe in Mexico City with his wife to pay homage to the Virgin of Guadalupe, whom he claimed he had solicited for spiritual help

⁶⁰ “José ‘Mantequilla’ Nápoles clama: QUIERO UNA CORONA PARA MEXICO,” *Ring Mundial*, 2 March 1967, 2. *Nopal* is the Spanish word for cactus, which is a traditional Mexican food.

⁶¹ Ramón Márquez C., “Entusiasta Recibimiento; Nápoles se Nacionalizará Mexicano,” *Excelsior*, 22 April 1969, 5(Deportiva).

⁶² Ramón Márquez C., “Nápoles, Tranquilo se Embolsó más de Millón y Medio,” *Excelsior*, 10 February 1974, 29(A). Márquez C., “Mantequilla, Víctima de la Presión del Desencanto; ‘Estoy Apechugado, no me he Adaptado a Grenoble’, Dijo,” *Excelsior*, 21 June 1973, 2(D). Márquez C., “Mantequilla Paseó Ayer; hoy Cobray el Miércoles Retorna,” *Excelsior*, 25 June 1973, 2(D).

⁶³ Soledad Loaeza and Julio Moreno.

⁶⁴ “ANATOMIA DE UN REY,” *Ring Mundial*, 7 May 1967, 18.

before the Cokes match.⁶⁵ The newspaper photographs portrayed Nápoles and his wife as a respectful, harmonious couple, presenting Mantequilla as a “regular” Mexican who did not violate the *buenas costumbres* of Mexico.⁶⁶ Outside of the Basilica, Cuban musicians played on the basilica’s footsteps. *Excelsior* celebrated the cosmopolitanism of the moment, describing the scene as “Cuban warmth in the Basilica of Guadalupe.”⁶⁷

Mexicans continued to celebrate Nápoles’ championship victory as he returned to Mexico. Upon returning home after winning his first world championship Nápoles received an enthusiastic reception in his neighborhood, where residents yelled porras to Nápoles and Mexico, as a way to pay “homage to the Cuban with Mexican spirit.”⁶⁸ *El Nacional* offered the following assessment of the Cuban-Mexican’s accomplishment: “Nápoles became a boxer in Mexico. Here he stood out and had his best opportunities. We can say that he is another Mexican world champion.”⁶⁹ The writers of *Ring Mundial* viewed Nápoles’ championship as completing “an excellent panorama of Mexican boxing” and proof that “this sport is acquiring again a great popularity.”⁷⁰ Furthermore, they asserted “having two world champions [Nápoles and Torres] is very important for our boxing,” because it allowed “our pugilistic sport now to be converted into the most important on the globe.”

Several Mexican boxing aficionados echoed the nationalist sentiment. According to a reader of boxing magazine *Ring Mundial*, Nápoles “became a champion and it made

⁶⁵ “Mantequilla, Ante la Virgen Morena,” *Excelsior*, 26 April 1969, 4(Deportes).

⁶⁶ Eric Zolov defines *buenas costumbres* as “a class- and gender-laden notion of implying ‘proper upbringing.’” Zolov, *Refried Elvis*, 5.

⁶⁷ “Mantequilla, Ante la Virgen Morena,” 4(Deportes).

⁶⁸ Alonso Echegollen, “Homenaje a “Mantequilla” en las calles de López,” *El Nacional*, 24 April 1969, 2(2a).

⁶⁹ Eduardo J. Barcelo, “Palco de Prensa,” *El Nacional*, 19 April 1969, 1(2a).

⁷⁰ “UN GRAN MOMENTO DEL BOX MEXICANO,” *Ring Mundial*, 30 April 1969, 10.

us happy that he said that he conquered it for Mexico, and although he feels Cuban on the inside ... inside he [also] feels Mexican and knows that he owes us something ... [for] the encouraging applause that we the fans from Los Angeles always offer, and I think those from Mexico, too.”⁷¹ A Mexican living in Costa Rica declared Nápoles “an authentic glory for Mexico,” saying “it does not matter the place where he was born, because he became a great boxer feeling the warmth of a great majority of Mexican fans who understand him and help him because of how good he is.”⁷² Another letter to *Ring Mundial* praised Nápoles for completing his promise of bring a world title to Mexico and for asking that the national anthem of Mexico be played, “even though he was born in Cuba.”⁷³ One reader insisted that “If some boxer settled in Mexico came to hold some world championship, it must be for Mexico and not where he was born.”⁷⁴ Therefore, “the title that Mantequilla Nápoles has belongs to Mexico and not to the Island of Fidel Castro.”

Nápoles’ even inspired Mexican nationalist poetry. The following poem appeared in *Ring Mundial*’s fan letter forum shortly after Nápoles’ victory over Cokes, although the author stated that he wrote it before the match:

*Señores tengan presente lo que voy a dictar.
Que hoy en El Fórum de California Mantequilla va a pelear
Y todos los mexicanos pedimos a Dios que
Gane, nosotros no podemos ir, pero desde aquí
Te estamos ayudando.*

⁷¹ Ignacio Piña, “La Esquina del Fan: ¡MANDO NO ES MEXICANO!” *Ring Mundial*, 8 April 1970, 47.

⁷² Carlos Rodríguez Bustos, “La Esquina del Fan: Arriba Mantecas... NINO VALE MENOS...” *Ring Mundial*, 3 June 1970, 46.

⁷³ L. Tejero Mendicuty, “LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: ¡AL FIN, LA CORONA UNIVERSAL EN LAS SIENES DE ‘MANTEQUILLA!’” *Ring Mundial*, 18 June 1969, 36.

⁷⁴ Enrique Hernández, “La Esquina del Fan: Nápoles sí es campeón mexicano,” *Ring Mundial*, 14 July 1970, 42.

*Pidiendo a Dios del Cielo que vuleva otro
 Campeón, nosotros te lo pedimos, para bien de la nación.
 Sabemos bien que José no nos puede defraudar;
 Porque sabemos que es hombre de responsabilidad.
 Y mañana si Dios quiere, ya serás campeón.
 Y a nuestra patria vienes a dar.
 Ya cuando José se iba de México
 El avión iba a abordar, les dijo a los periodistas
 "El campeonato voy a traer"
 para México querido que ahora es mi patria.
 Y también para Cuco Conde y Kid Rapidez
 Que son los mejores manejadores del mundo
 Que Dios los ayude, siempre que caminen de acuerdo
 Y nunca se desaparten, que siempre el Señor vaya
 Con Ustedes⁷⁵*

Gentlemen, keep in mind what I am going to say.
 That today at the Forum in California, Mantequilla is going to fight
 And all of us Mexicans ask God that
 He win. We cannot go, but from here
 We are supporting you.
 Asking God of heaven that another champion comes back,
 We ask you for it, for the good of the nation.
 We know very well that José cannot disappoint us,
 Because we know that he is a responsible man.
 And tomorrow, God willing, he will be champion.
 And you are for our homeland.
 And when José left Mexico,
 As he was boarding the plane, he told the journalists
 "The championship I will bring"
 To the beloved Mexico that is now my homeland.
 And also for Cuco Conde and Kid Rapidez,
 Who are the best managers in the world.
 May God help you. May you always come to an agreement
 And never separate from each other, may the Lord always go
 With you.

These verses provide an opportunity to understand how boxing, Mexican nationalism, and Catholicism all converged into a cohesive ideology. The author assumed knowledge

⁷⁵ José Carlos Cardiel, "LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: VERSOS A 'MANTEQUILLA' (Escritos antes de su pelea con Cokes)," *Ring Mundial*, 11 June 1969, 28.

of his fellow Mexicans, who all apparently were praying for a Nápoles victory. He also claimed insight into Nápoles, who wanted to win the championship for Mexico, which he apparently now considered his homeland. Whereas the letters previously discussed allowed for the possibility of a binational Nápoles, this poem offered a more unified understanding of Mexican nationalism. However, it also highlights how Mexican boxing enthusiasts attempted to integrate him into the national imaginary.

Not all Mexicans accepted Nápoles as Mexican. One of the more fascinating critiques of Mantequilla's *mexicanidad* came from a reader who believed it was "infantile" to count Mantequilla as a Mexican champion. Invoking Nápoles' Cuban boxing style, he declared "The stylist is born, not made," thus asserting that Nápoles Cuban birth superseded his Mexican citizenship in determining his nationality, and accused the champion of playing "with popular sentiment when he puts on *charro* sombrero and says he loves Mexico and the Mexicans." The fan declared Nápoles' title to be Cuba's, because it was in the possession of a Cuban who happened to be "in Mexico by pure chance." He also boldly declared, "nobody can obligate him to love Mexico or the Mexicans."⁷⁶ Rodolfo García, the sports editor of Los Angeles' Spanish-language daily, *La Opinión*, attempted to explain why Ruben Olivares drew more fans for his matches than Nápoles: "Rubén Olivares is Mexican. Mantequilla Nápoles is Cuban. Settled in Mexico . . . he is very popular, the public adores him; but he is Cuban. [Of course] There would be more interest, among our own, to see Olivares than Nápoles."⁷⁷

One fan rejected Nápoles' "Champion without a Crown" moniker, insisting that "the

⁷⁶ Rodrigo Morales, "La Esquina del Fan: ¡ES CUBANO LEGITIMO! MANTEQUILLA JUEGA CON EL PUEBLO," *Ring Mundial*, 3 June 1970, 46.

⁷⁷ Rolando B. García, "Esquina Neutral," *La Opinión*, 23 October 1969, 10.

Cuban” had only defeated mediocre fighters during his stay in Mexico.⁷⁸

Nápoles’ stood out from his fellow Mexican boxers through his Cuban boxing style and by frequently fighting outside of Los Angeles and Mexico City. In December of 1970, “Mantequilla” traveled to Syracuse, N.Y. to fight fringe contender Billy Backus, best known for being the nephew of former welterweight and middleweight champion Carmen Basilio. *Excelsior* of Mexico City dedicated a great deal of attention to the fight and produced an insert that hyped the upcoming bout in a melodramatic fashion. Calling Syracuse, “the capital of the state of New York,” the pullout declared:

There, in the city with the name of the Greek Sicilian metropolis, alongside the very governor, Nelson Rockefeller, “Mantequilla,” the stylist, the man who devastates his rivals by means of precision, of intelligence, of homicidal instinct, of cat-like reflexes . . . [attributes that allow us] to foresee that he will be world welterweight champion for some time.⁷⁹

The compliments would continue as the insert referred to Nápoles as “the fighter without flaws,” and compared him to “the dancer,” “Sugar” Ray Robinson,” a boxer whom many consider to be the greatest boxer of all time. *La Opinión* of Los Angeles projected a less majestic image of Syracuse and quoted Nápoles on his daily routine while in Syracuse: “Here, there is nothing to do except train and watch television.”⁸⁰

The Mexican media particularly glorified his matches in France as opportunities

⁷⁸ Juan de Dios Orozco, “La Esquina del Fan: MANTEQUILLA ¡IDOLO DE BARRO!” *Ring Mundial*, 21 July 1968, 42-43.

⁷⁹ “‘Mantequilla’ Expone el Título, hoy ¿Entrena?” *Excelsior*, 3 December 1970. Insert.

⁸⁰ “‘Mantequilla’ se ha entrenado con empeno para Billy Backus,” *La Opinión*, 2 December 1970. 2.

for a Mexican citizen to make a positive impression on the ‘sophisticated’ French.⁸¹ In 1973, the newspaper *Excelsior* published a pullout entitled “Mantequilla Amazes Europe” that celebrated his easy victory over a French challenger in Grenoble. The insert claimed that Nápoles practiced “another type of boxing, more attached to the ideal of pugilism” and found “victory through ability, not savagery.” In addition, there were references to the Cuban amazing European boxing experts with his “quality, rhythm . . . and power,” as well as photographs of Mantequilla with captions such as “Thinking, always thinking” and “Always the owner of distance.”⁸² *Excelsior* emphasized to its readership that more subtle boxing impressed Europeans far more than the aggressiveness of the stereotypical Mexican “warrior” boxing style.

Another opportunity to impress the French arose when Mantequilla traveled to Paris and challenged Argentine Carlos Monzón for the world middleweight (160 lbs.) championship in February of 1974. The Monzón-Nápoles fight became an international event that pitted two world champions against each other in Paris, with purses that exceeded those of any prior middleweight championship bout.⁸³ *Excelsior* proclaimed the event a “miracle,” as a pair of Latin Americans shook “an unflappable city” that only trembled for large spectacles, and on the day of the fight declared, “in Paris, the city that

⁸¹ This fascination with Paris, dates back to the late nineteenth century, when “France was the foremost cultural and intellectual model” for Mexican elites. Mauricio Tenorio Trillo, *Mexico at the World’s Fairs*, 20.

⁸² “Mantequilla asombró a Europa,” *Excelsior*, 28 June 1973, Insert.

⁸³ Initially, the purses were announced as \$250,000 (US) for Monzón and \$150,000 for Nápoles. The day after the fight, however, it was announced that the Argentine middleweight had earned \$175,000 plus ancillary (movie, radio, and television) rights, while Mantequilla received a flat fee of the amount originally announced. “Monzon, Napoles in Title Clash,” *New York Times*, 8 November 1973, 64. Samuel Apt, “Monzon Stops Napoles in 7th, Keeps Title,” *New York Times*, 10 February 1974, 199. In comparison, Monzón made \$68,000 in his 1972 defense against little-known Denny Moyer (who made \$15,000) in Rome, a fight that actually had a higher attendance than his fight with Mantequilla (12,000 to 11,000). Michael Katz, “Monzon’s Victory is Jeered in Rome,” *New York Times*, 5 March 1972, 11(S).

dictates fashion, the fashion will be boxing.” *Excélsior* concentrated on the glamour and sophistication of Paris, even photographing Nápoles on a sightseeing tour of the French capital. The images of these adventures included a photo of Nápoles “curiously” observing the Louvre and other tourist attractions that had little to do with boxing. *Excélsior* used these excursions to increase the importance of the fight for Mexicans by creating an atmosphere of awe around Mantequilla and his accomplishments, calling the Monzón-Nápoles “a night of history in a city made of history.”⁸⁴ In addition to extolling the importance of the fight, this coverage included the press’s praise for Mantequilla and its portrayal of his iconic status in Mexican society. According to one article, “[i]n Mexico, where he enjoys the popularity of a national hero, José Nápoles, ‘Mantequilla,’ leads the life of a cinematographic star.”⁸⁵ The same article compared Nápoles’ boxing style to “Sugar” Ray Robinson and his mustache to that of Pancho Villa, while also calling him the last “of a glorious Cuban school that gave boxing phenomena such as Kid Gavilán.”⁸⁶

When Nápoles failed to fight a competitive match against Monzón, the Mexican press responded with outrage. Manuel Seyde of *Excélsior* even resorted to racist explanations for Nápoles behavior, calling Paris, “the paradise for men of color,” where a black man’s first impulse upon arrival was “to look closely at the vibrating white meat in a nightclub.”⁸⁷ Such blatantly racist remarks rarely appeared in mainstream Mexican newspapers in the 1970s and the Mexican media seldom ‘othered’ Nápoles when

⁸⁴ Márquez C., “Volver al pasado: un circo y dos gladiadores,” *Excélsior*, 7 February 1974, Insert.

⁸⁵ “De ‘Sugar Ray’ a ‘Mantequilla,’” *Excélsior*, 7 February 1974, 1(D).

⁸⁶ Ibid., 4(D).

⁸⁷ Seyde, “Temas del Día,” *Excélsior*, 7 February 1974, 2(D).

criticizing him. Light-hearted critiques were far more common, such as the cartoon in *Excelsior* entitled “Anti-Doping Test” [Figure 1] that featured Nápoles in an office supplying blood and asking, “Doctor, alcohol is not considered a stimulant, right?”⁸⁸ Similarly, a cartoon in *El Universal* mocked Nápoles’ penchant for Parisian cabaret dancers without resorting to racist tropes [Figure 2].



Figure 1. Cartoon mocking Nápoles’ drinking habits. Marino, “Prueba Antidoping,” *Excelsior*, 9 February 1974, 22(A).

⁸⁸ Marino, “Prueba Antidoping,” *Excelsior*, 9 February 1974, 22(A).



Figure 2. Cartoon mocking Nápoles' love for Parisian nightlife.
Malvido, "Al que le "Llovió [sic] Cuero," *El Universal*, 12 February 1974, 16(1).

Whether intentional or not, Mexican cartoonists usually presented Nápoles as lighter skinned than he actually was [See Figure three]. In figures four and five, two different cartoonist portray Nápoles much lighter than his African-American opponents, Curtis Cokes and Adolph Pruitt. In particular, Pruitt was drawn with stereotypical sambo features, particularly large white lips. Nápoles has white lips as well, but his skin color is much lighter, so the contrast is less. Furthermore, Nápoles never received the treatment of Mexican boxer Arturo 'Mulato' Zuñiga received in Figure six. A *moreno* Mexican, Zuñiga was much lighter than Nápoles, yet was portrayed as a classic sambo. Nápoles was a far more accomplished and well-known boxer than either Pruitt or Zuñiga. The phenomenon is explained perhaps by the Brazilian saying, "money whitens." While it

would be hard to prove that money whitened Nápoles, there is evidence to suggest that it prevented him from being portrayed as a stereotypical sambo in the Mexican media.



Figure 3. Nápoles after winning a boxing match. AGN, Hermanos Mayo Collection, Exp. 25,398

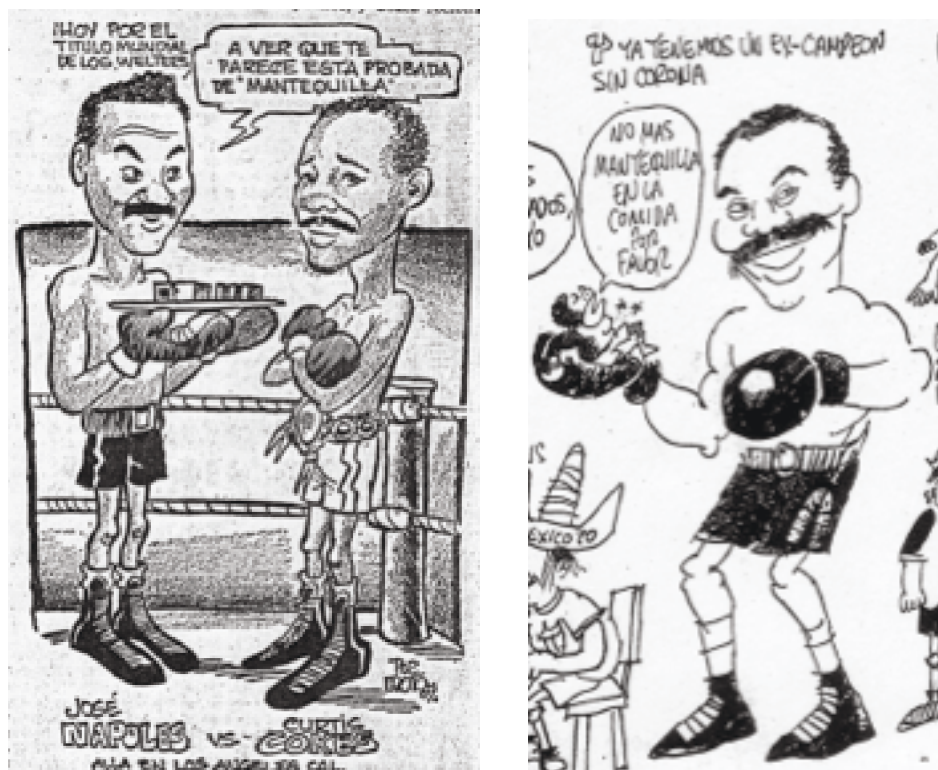


Figure 4. Cartoons promoting the Cokes- Nápoles match (left) and celebrating its result (right).
 Roto, Untitled, *El Universal*, 18 April 1969, 1(Deportiva).
 Marino, Untitled, *Excelsior*, 21 April 1969, 5(Deportes).



Figure 4. Cartoon Promoting Nápoles' fight with Adolph Pruitt.
 M.A.C., Untitled, *El Universal*, 9 June 1972, 1(2).



Figure 6. Cartoon of Afro-Mexican boxer “Mulato” Zuñiga. Iracheta, “Desde la Gran Carpa,” *El Universal*, 10 February 1974, 18(1).

Throughout these triumphs and defeats, Nápoles continued to assert his mexicanidad publicly. Following his disastrous loss to Monzón, the Cuban again expressed his desire to return to Mexico as soon as possible, telling *Excélsior*, “I’m dying to return to my people.”⁸⁹ Contrary to the opinion of most reporters, Mantequilla also believed that fortune was for Monzón and stated, I think that Mexicans should feel satisfied with the effort I made.”⁹⁰ As for a rematch, Nápoles declared, “I do not want it in Europe or in any other country, I want it in Mexico.”⁹¹

Nápoles’ unique standing within the Mexican nation also made him a popular

⁸⁹ Márquez C., “Nápoles, Tranquilo se Embolsó más de Millón y Medio,” *Excélsior*, 10 February 1974, 29(A).

⁹⁰ Jorge Escobosa L., “‘Quisiera que la Revancha Fuera en México’: ‘Mantequilla’ Nápoles,” *Excélsior*, 11 February 1974, 26(A).

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 23(A).

reference for Mexicans debating the mexicanidad of Mexican-American boxers. When Carlos Palomino, who was born in Mexico but grew up in the United States, won the world welterweight championship, one Mexican fan took issue with Mexican nationalist celebrations of this accomplishment. The reader classified the new champion as “gringo,” cited Mexicans’ celebration of Mantequilla Nápoles as justification: “All of Mexico considered that championship Aztec property. Now when the same case presents itself, but in reverse... boxing experts and fans consider the championship to be Mexico’s.”⁹² In response, *Ring Mundial* reminded the reader that Palomino had maintained his Mexican citizenship, therefore qualified as Mexican. In a bid to assert the mexicanidad of Nápoles, a fan mentioned the case of Mexican-American Mando Ramos, whose parent were Mexican but whose customs were “Garbachas.” According to the fan, Mexican fans booed Ramos in Los Angeles because “we all know he does not belong to us.” He also poked fun at Ramos’ recent arrest for marijuana possession by asking, “does ‘Mantequilla’ have to smoke marijuana to be considered Mexican?”⁹³

Debates over the authenticity of Nápoles and Mexican-American fighters increased when Mexican-born (but naturalized U.S. citizen) Armando Muñiz became a welterweight contender. In *Ring Mundial*’s first report on Muñiz, after he had defeated former Nápoles opponent Ernie Lopez, characterized the boxer as “the son of Chicanos or maybe his parents are of Mexican origin,” and declared, “without a doubt, [he] is North American and he seeks the championship of the world for the Stars and Stripes.”⁹⁴ They

⁹² Jorge Rountree, “LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: PALOMINO ES GRINGO,” *Ring Mundial*, 15 December 1976, 22.

⁹³ Piña, “La Esquina del Fan”, 47. “Garbacho/a” is a Mexican term that means foreign, specifically in relation to the United States and Europe.

⁹⁴ “FUTURO Campeón Mundial Welter?” *Ring Mundial*, 19 August 1973, 14.

were soon corrected by a reader from California who informed them that Muñiz was born in the Mexican state of Chihuahua, and therefore Mexican.⁹⁵ A letter from Guadalajara asked Nápoles to give a title shot to Muñiz, because he was, “Mexican, like your nationality by adoption.”⁹⁶ The discourses surrounding Nápoles’ March 1975 bout with Armando Muñiz, a native of the Mexican state of Chihuahua who became a naturalized U.S. citizen, further revealed the difficulties in asserting monolithic interpretations of *mexicanidad*. As the match loomed, *Ring Mundial* commented that fans were calling it a fight between the “*postizos*” (meaning fakes), as Nápoles was “a Mexican born in Cuba” and Muñiz “a *gringo* born in Mexico.”⁹⁷

The *postizos* faced each other in Acapulco in March of 1975. What was supposed to be an undemanding challenge of the Cuban’s crown evolved into a competitive affair that featured Muñiz getting the better of “Mantequilla.” The champion fought much of the match with two gaping wounds over his eye, one caused by a Muñiz head butt in the third and the other caused “apparently by another head butt” in the eighth round.⁹⁸ By the tenth round, the Cuban-Mexican connected on a series of illegal low blows that went unpunished in a lack of sportsmanship never before seen in Nápoles’ boxing tactics. The match ended in controversial fashion when, due to the severity of the cuts above Nápoles’ eyes, the referee halted the fight in the eleventh round and allowed the judges to decide the fight’s outcome. Muñiz appeared to have been winning the fight

⁹⁵ Juan Plascencia, “La Esquina del Fan: Mando Muñiz es mexicano,” *Ring Mundial*, 23 September 1973, 43.

⁹⁶ Marrelino González Sierra, “La Esquina del Fan: ¡OYE MANTEQUILLA!” *Ring Mundial*, 9 September 1973, 42.

⁹⁷ “NUESTRO PRONOSTICO: Muy Sencillo NAPOLES NOQUEARA,” *Ring Mundial*, 26 March 1975, 2.

⁹⁸ Mario Erasmo Ortiz, “Decisión Técnica Para Mantequilla,” *El Universal*, 30 March 1975, 11(1).

without much difficulty. When a lop-sided verdict in favour of Nápoles was announced, the audience protested.⁹⁹ Later, as Muñiz sought a rematch, he cited the support he received from the fans in Acapulco: “At the end, everyone was with me. My countrymen supported me because everyone knows that Nápoles is Cuban and I am Mexican.” The challenger declared his wish “to recover the world title for my country, because that crown continues being Cuban.” When asked about his U.S. citizenship, Muñiz replied that he had done it because he had “to eat and live,” but “my customs, family and my blood are Mexican.”¹⁰⁰

Some observers believed that the outcome of the fight revealed Nápoles’ entrenchment within Mexican society. Fernando Marcos declared that the bout resulted in a “nationalistic decision,” but that Muñiz could have emerged victorious had he just fought cleanly and avoided the head butts that caused the match to end hastily. Marcos asserted, “We were hoping for a boxer and they gave us a goat.”¹⁰¹ Another reader expressed his disappointment with the media’s coverage of the fight, accusing some sports writers of going to “the extremes of partiality” to justify the decision, asserting that this “protection” of Mantequilla benefited the “developed interests that are doing so much damage to our boxing.”¹⁰² Some fans interpreted the results more positively. A letter to *Ring Mundial* called the bout “a dirty fight,” but advised Nápoles to defend the “crown

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Luis B. Magaña, “Entrevista Exclusiva con MUÑIZ: ¡Nápoles me Tiene Miedo!...” *Ring Mundial*, 27 April 1975, 2-3.

¹⁰¹ Marcos, “Ahí Va Eso,” *El Universal*, 31 March 1975, 3(3).

¹⁰² Jesús Torres Salvador, “La Esquina del Fan: EL ROBO DEL AÑO,” *Ring Mundial*, 27 April 1975, 31.

that you won in clean form and have defended with valour and sportsmanship” again versus Muñiz “to demonstrate that you are a clean Mexican and a great champion.”¹⁰³

In the twilight of Nápoles’ career, there were fans who resented him for what they perceived as ungratefulness toward Mexico and its people. They particularly took offense at Nápoles’ carousing and their responses call to mind Lomnitz’s observations about the postrevolutionary Mexican nationalism’s obsession with foreign intrusion. One reader claimed that at the cabaret that Mantequilla owned, a regular was stripped of his clothing and thrown to the street. In response to this act, he suggested that Mexican authorities “cordially ‘invite’” Nápoles to leave Mexico, so he could “mock the hospitality and kindness of other people.”¹⁰⁴ Instead of being grateful to Mexico for giving him the opportunity to become a world champion and millionaire, the reader insisted that Nápoles had trampled on the dignity of Mexicans. An anonymous letter took umbrage with Nápoles’ lack of giving back to Mexican boxers. Declaring Mexican boxing as being “in crisis,” this reader asked why Nápoles had not dedicated himself “to teaching all that he knows in some government-owned gymnasium,” adding that he believed that Nápoles owed “something to our Mexico.”¹⁰⁵ Prior to the Muñiz fight, another fan called Nápoles “a great champion,” but wished the Cuban immigrant would give a Mexican welterweight (preferably Muñiz) a chance to win the world championship, as Nápoles had not fought a Mexican in a long time.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Eliseo Castro and Miguel Castro, “¡EL NOCAUT! DE LOS LECTORES: Mantequilla... Dale la Revancha!” *Ring Mundial*, 31 April 1975 [sic], 16.

¹⁰⁴ Fernando Martínez I., “¡EL NOCAUT! DE LOS LECTORES: ¡CORRAN DE MEXICO A MANTEQUILLA!” *NOCAUT... Sólo Box*, 21 January 1976, 22.

¹⁰⁵ Anonymous, “¡EL NOCAUT! DE LOS LECTORES. ¿POR QUE NO SE DEDICA EL MANTECAS A ENSEÑAR BOXEO?” *NOCAUT... Sólo Box*, 11 September 1975, 14.

¹⁰⁶ Salomón Zárate Galindo, “¡EL NOCAUT! DE LOS LECTORES: ¡MUÑIZ EL RIVAL IDEAL!” *NOCAUT... Sólo Box*, 16 January 1975, 16.

Some critiques were more confrontational or even racist. One anonymous reader complained about that “journalists have us fed up with Mantequilla... who really is not as good as they say,” then offered his phone number if Mantequilla wanted to hear his critiques “in live voice.”¹⁰⁷ Another fan stated that, although he always supported Nápoles, the fighter was not as great as his supporters claimed, saying that Nápoles had a good punch a “certain innate ability” that was present “in the men of his race ...but nothing more.”¹⁰⁸ One fan from Texas who lost faith in Mantequilla after his loss to Monzón, reiterated the phrase: “A black man with status has no use.”¹⁰⁹

Some Mexican boxing fans were quite critical of Nápoles’ exploits in film and singing, and viewed the qualities of a *galan* (leading man) as incongruous with boxing. One reader warned Mantequilla to not forget how to box, as people only laughed at his jokes “because he has money and is the champion.”¹¹⁰ One fan blamed the movie Nápoles made with El Santo for instilling in him a belief that he was “very superior,” as he “hardly trains and he believes that all of us are obligated to support and applaud him.”¹¹¹ Another fan critiqued Nápoles because he was “not content with [just] being a lady-killer” and had turned to singing romantic songs in his bar and wanted admiration for

¹⁰⁷ Anonymous, “¡EL NOCAUT! DE LOS LECTORES: ¡Ya Caen Gordo con su Mantequilla,” *NOCAUT... Sólo Box*, 11 September 1975, 14.

¹⁰⁸ Ricardo Garmendía Solana, “La Esquina del Fan: A NAPOLES LE ENRAN [sic] TODOS,” *Ring Mundial*, 16 December 1975, 31.

¹⁰⁹ “Negro con capa no sirve para nada.” E. Pérez, “La Esquina del Fan: No te Rajes MANTECAS,” *Ring Mundial*, 23 June 1974, 31.

¹¹⁰ Marcelino Flores García, “La Esquina del Fan: FINAL DE PELICULA,” *Ring Mundial*, 14 April 1974, 31.

¹¹¹ Miguel Santana Páez, “La Esquina del Fan: Mantequilla: Sigue Haciendo PELICULAS,” *Ring Mundial*, 20 April 1975, 31.

doing so, just as he had done with *La venganza de la llorona*, “with that other old relic that is El Santo.”¹¹²

It should be noted that Nápoles frequently appeared on Mexican television in the 1970s outside the context of boxing. Several times he appeared inebriated, although there was no mention of this in the television report. Sometimes, he was at a cantina. Other times, he was partying with Mexican elites, such as former president Miguel Alemán, television mogul (Televisa) Rómulo O’Farril, and the former governor of the state of Mexico, Carlos Hank González.¹¹³ Other television segments featured an inebriated Nápoles singing at his bar and restaurant, Bar Mantequilla Nápoles, or socializing with famous Mexican actors, like Mauricio Gárces.¹¹⁴ In his later years as world champion, Nápoles declined as a boxer, but became more famous as a celebrity, which brought with it a lifestyle detrimental to a boxer. On one hand, Nápoles’ detractors may have been frustrated with the visible social advancement of a black foreigner at a time of economic uncertainty. On the other hand, they have been frustrated by his declining performances that were attributable to his public self-destructive behavior.

Nápoles and Rubén Olivares were the two most popular boxers during the second Golden Age. For Mexicans intent on finding role models for the nation’s youth, they presented a conundrum. While they attracted positive international attention for Mexico through their boxing achievements, both fighters also developed reputations for spending more time in the bar than in the gymnasium. When they lost, Mexican newspapers were

¹¹² Venancio Torres Rodríguez, “La Esquina del Fan: LA PACHANGA LOS ACABO,” *Ring Mundial*, 23 December 1975, 31.

¹¹³ Untitled, Televisa Archive, Tema Boxeo, Exp. TC 809 [n.d.].

¹¹⁴ Untitled, Televisa Archive, Tema Boxeo, Exp. TC 814 and TC 817 [n.d.]

quick to critique and mock their drinking habits [See Figures seven and eight]. When they won, often in spectacular fashion, Mexican observers often were perplexed as to what moral to draw from the situation. One Mexican journalist expressed alarm that “the asylums and jails are filled with boys that one day thought it possible to do what Nápoles and Olivares have carried out, but without their pugilistic abilities.”¹¹⁵ Nápoles’ libertine lifestyle may have alienated him from certain Mexican boxing fans, but it also may have helped make him appear more Mexican to others. Reflecting on Mexico’s boxers, cultural critic Carlos Monsivaís recalled fond memories of “Ricardo Pajarito Moreno, Rubén Púas Olivares, José Toluco López, Mantequilla Nápoles... What stories! Those sleepless nights and those relentless days! What punches and what attacks and what collapses (psychological and otherwise)!”¹¹⁶ Nápoles’ Cuban birth and boxing style may have separated him from his Mexican peers, but his actions outside the ring may have made it easier for Mexicans to incorporate him into the national culture.

¹¹⁵ Fernando Marcos, “Vida Deportiva,” *Siempre!*, 14 August 1974, 67.

¹¹⁶ Monsivaís, 28.

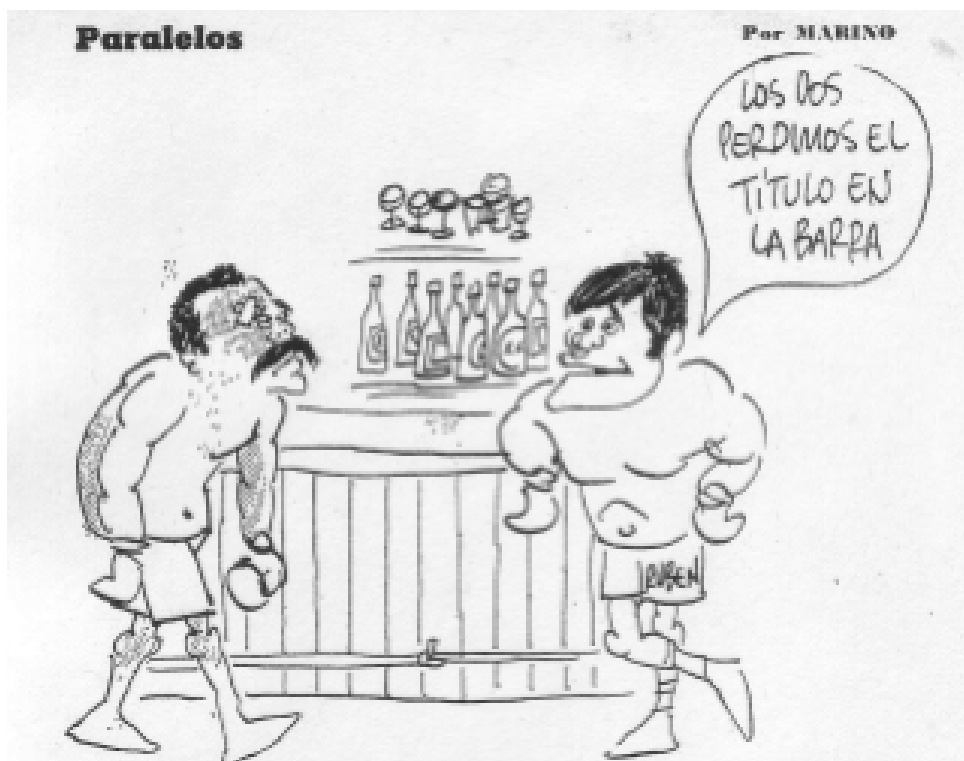


Figure 7. Cartoon blaming the drinking habits of Nápoles and Olivares for their recent losses. Olivares tells Nápoles, “We both lost the title in the bar.”
Marino, “Paralelos,” *Excelsior*, 5 December 1970, 1(D).



Figure 8. Cartoon blaming alcohol for Nápoles’ and Olivares’ recent losses. The beer bottle yells, “I beat them! I beat them!”
Marino, Untitled, *Excelsior*, 7 December 1975, 4(Deportes).

Nápoles boxed his last match on December 6, 1975 against English challenger

John Stracey. Although his pugilistic talents had visibly declined, many Mexicans still considered Nápoles the favorite. One Mexican boxer insisted that Stracey's "European" style of boxing could not compare with Nápoles' style.¹¹⁷ Stracey, however, knocked out Nápoles in the sixth round. A writer for *Excélsior* summarized Nápoles' last moments in the ring: "He, who was a great boxer, had to convert himself into a crude fighter. Without mobility, without strength, without endurance. It was painful to watch him yesterday after knowing him at his peak."¹¹⁸ In *El Universal*, however, Fernando Marcos asserted that Nápoles finished his career with valour: "'Mantequilla' lost the belt; but José Angel Nápoles wanted his fall to be worthy of his great record. He fought like a wild boar, he fought like a man, and succumbed before a fighter younger, but not better, than him." Marcos recalled Nápoles fondly as "Cuban by birth, Mexicanized by devotion, not only to a country, but to its customs, its virtues and its vices, its way of being."¹¹⁹ His tribute emphasized Nápoles' toughness and willingness to take risks more than his boxing ability, calling to mind Octavio Paz's contention that Mexicans "admire fortitude in the face of adversity more than the most brilliant triumph."¹²⁰ Marcos' comments reveal how Nápoles opened space within Mexico's mestizo nationalism by stressing how his adaptation to Mexican cultural mores and his own personal qualities made him Mexican, rather than a mixed indigenous and Spanish biological background or birth within the nation's boundaries.

¹¹⁷ "Todos Coinciden: Ganarán 'Mantequilla' y Zamora," *El Universal*, 6 December 1975, 8(5).

¹¹⁸ Ramón Márquez C., "Catorce Disparos," *Excélsior*, 7 December, 1975, 3(Deportes).

¹¹⁹ Marcos, "Ahí Va Eso," *El Universal*, 7 December 1975, 3(5).

¹²⁰ Paz, 31.



Figure 9. Nápoles (right) versus Stracey at the Toreo de Cuatro Caminos. AGN, Hermanos Mayo Collection, 31,314, 6 December 1975.

Epilogue and Conclusion

Since his retirement from boxing, Nápoles has remained in Mexico, and he currently lives in Ciudad Juárez. Although he earned large purses in his career, Nápoles spent all his money from his boxing career on alcohol, women, and bad investments. Over the years, he has taken to singing in nightclubs and, recently, he has dabbled in training boxers, including an Afro-Cuban immigrant and an Afro-Honduran immigrant.¹²¹ Nearly thirty-five years after his retirement, Nápoles maintains that, although he did not have the wealth he once had, he has no complaints about life in Mexico: “In truth, it is very satisfying that people stop me on the streets to say hello, to comment about some fight I had, or ask me for an autograph. Also... if I am invited to a function and I am

¹²¹ Alberto Contreras, “Pelea de Boxeador de ‘Mantequilla’: Contra Cristian Bejarano,” *ESTO en línea*, 1 February 2007, n. pag. Castellanos G., “Victoria de Bejarano: En Chihuahua,” *ESTO en línea*, 6 March 2007, n. pag.

present, the public stands on their feet to applaud me. None of that can be bought.”¹²²

Years after his last bout, the mention of Nápoles still elicits positive responses from Mexican boxing fans. One chronicler dotingly recalled Nápoles as “The Black King of Mexico,” who demonstrated to Mexican audiences “his angelic boxing, if angels do box, full of purity, as refined as velvet,” who also was “a merciless puncher in the ring.”¹²³

Reflecting on his time in Mexico to a Cuban writer, however, Nápoles presented a far different scenario. He claimed that he missed Cuba “and with great nostalgia,” that his first years in Mexico his feelings of separation “were very painful,” and that he continued to feel the pain of this separation despite having several children in Mexico.¹²⁴ Despite his public declarations of affection toward Mexican boxing fans, Nápoles confessed to his Cuban interviewer “that on more than one occasion I silently dedicated my triumphs to the people of Oriente [the province where Nápoles was born], to my people.”¹²⁵ Nápoles, then, changed his narrative of assimilation and migration depending on the audience he was addressing. To Mexican audiences, he was an assimilated immigrant, grateful for the opportunities he received and the acceptance given to him by Mexicans. To Cuban audiences, he was a nostalgic and wistful exile yearning to return to his homeland, despite the fact he never returned to Cuba nor ever attempted to live amongst large numbers of Cuban exiles.

The boxing career of José Nápoles provides a prime example of the instabilities inherent in identity construction at both the personal and national levels. To overcome

¹²² Garmabella, 312-313.

¹²³ Roberto Valero Berrospe, *Historia del boxeo mexicano: A través a sus campeones* (Mexicali, B.C., Mexico: Gobierno del Estado de Baja California, Instituto de la Juventud y el Deporte, 1993), 65.

¹²⁴ Báez, 92.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 93.

his Cuban birth, Nápoles had to rely upon performance inside and outside the boxing ring to assert his place within Mexican society. Nápoles may have been proof that many Mexicans could accept a black man as one of their own in a mestizo nation. However, they never associated him with the nation's Afro-mestizo population, and continued to maintain the incongruity of the words 'black' and 'Mexican.' The 1970s may have been a golden era of Mexican boxing, but, as seen with Nápoles, the phrase 'Mexican boxing' was a contested and unstable one. Despite these cronic instabilities, world champion boxers like Nápoles continued to represent Mexican stability and international advancement. They also brought moments of joy to Mexicans of several classes, as evidenced by the follow poem from a female fan of Nápoles, published in *Nocaut* almost two years after his last boxing match. Unlike the submissions of Amparo Morales, this poem did not elicit concerns about women's suitability to watch boxing and it emphasizes the positive aspects of Mexican boxing:

*Mantequilla Nápoles el
Amo de todos los
Novatos y profesionales
Todos sobre el ring o
En cualquier otro lugar siempre te*

*Quieren como el mejor boxeador
Unico en todo el
Interior de
La República Mexicana y
La Frontera del país,
Ante ti nadie será nadie.*

*Nápoles es tu apellido,
Antes y después de la
Peleas siempre te veneran
Oh gran campeón sólo tu puedes
Lograrlo todo sobre el ring,*

*El rey eres tú y
Siempre lo seras.*¹²⁶

Mantequilla Nápoles the
Love of all the
Novices and professionals
Everybody in the ring or
In whatever place always

Loves you as the best boxer
Unique in the all the
Interior of
The Mexican Republic and
On the border of the country,
Compared to you, everybody is a nobody.

Nápoles is your last name,
Before and after the
Fights they always venerate you
Oh great champion only you can
Achieve everything in the ring,
You are the king and
You always will be.

¹²⁶ Carolina Fuentes Trigos, “¡EL NOCAUT! DE LOS LECTORES: PARA JOSE,” *Nocaut... Sólo Box*, 23 September 1977, 16.

Conclusion and Epilogue

It was obvious by the end of 1975 that the generation of boxers from the late 1960s had started to wane in their dominance. Olivares and Nápoles had both lost their world championships, never to regain them. One fan from the city of Toluca told *Nocaut*, “It is urgent that new idols appear.”¹ Olivares and Nápoles both had presented themselves in an image of everyday guy. In the mid 1970s, a new generation of boxers emerged. Compared to their predecessors, they were more professional in their preparation and less accessible to the public. This change in attitude among Mexican boxers reflected a change in the business of boxing. Boxing purses grew exponentially large in the 1970s, bumping boxers into a new social bracket and attracting different types of people to the sport. The new generation was not as charismatic as older generations of Mexican boxers, much to the dismay of one Mexican boxing fan, who wished for true idols, “not commercialistic, at times prefabricated, world champions!”²

This change towards professionalism concerned some fans. A reader from the state of Michoacán complained about this change: “Now, in my opinion, I think that currently the majority of Mexican fighters... when they become popular fall into the grave defect of becoming divas.” He continued, “truth is, they are [fashion] models, not macho fighters.”³ *Nocaut* explained the difference in the boxers: “The new fighters come with a different mentality. More commercial if you will, but more professional. Better

¹ Héctor Chávez Durán, “¡EL NOCAUT! DE LOS LECTORES: CAYERON LOS IDOLOS,” *Nocaut... Sólo Box*, 23 December 1975, 22.

² Antonio Ortiz, “LA ESQUINA DEL FAN: ¡TENEMOS CAMPEONES, PERO NO IDOLOS!” *Ring Mundial*, 24 January 1977, 24.

³ Francisco Fuentes Ramírez, “¡EL NOCAUT! DE LOS LECTORES: LOS PELEADORES MEXICANOS SON VEDETTES,” *Nocaut... Sólo Box*, 10 July 1974, 14.

managed than proud and valiant, [but better able to handle] such a demanding and many times ungrateful profession.”⁴ The 1972 Olympic silver medalist and one-time WBA Bantamweight champion, Alfonso Zamora, exemplified this change when he told *Ring Mundial* that his major aspiration was “To earn as much money as possible and then retire. I do not want to stay for a lot of time. I know that I can last three or four years in this. Well managed, I will leave with assets that will help my family a lot and I will start a business.”⁵

Despite these differences, the new generation of boxers continued to support the Mexican president, just like Nápoles, Olivares, and boxers before them had done. In November of 1976, José López Portillo invited the six Mexican world champions to his presidential inauguration. According to Miguel Canto, “It gave me a lot of pleasure. I felt content that we athletes were being taken into account in such a transcendental act for the country. I believe it is an honor that... they had invited us.” Canto expressed support for López Portillo, “far from being a simple act of change of powers, I think that this is a decisive step for the future of Mexico. I have read a lot about the campaign that López Portillo did, about his plan of work, and I think that the ideas that he brings are very good, precisely needed to straighten out the country in this time of crisis, when Mexico has been affected by a world problem, inflation and shortages, and the increase of prices. A phenomenon that is global.” Canto’s fellow Yucatecan, Gutty Espadas, echoed similar sentiments: “I think that for us, the Mexican world champions, it is a privilege to attend this event... this change of powers will be one of the most important that there has been

⁴ “¿HA RESURGIDO EL BOXEO MEXICANO?” *Nocaut... Sólo Box*, 24 April 1974, 3.

⁵ “UN ROUND CON ALFONZO ZAMORA: El que va Piano va LONTANO,” *Ring Mundial*, 28 Octubre 1973, 11.

in the country in many years... the country is going to change hands when the situation in the world has affected Mexico and it is necessary to we all work with more enthusiasm to boost the country's economy.” Carlos Zárate of Mexico City likewise iterated his enthusiasm for receiving the invitation: “It is one of the most respectful situations that an individual could hope to be in, athlete or not, because we Mexicans do a lot of work to be treated as an example for other athletes and citizens.” Zárate characterized the new Mexican president as having “the sufficient experience to bring success to our country. For that I believe he will be a worthy successor to the great men who have passed through the presidential seat.”⁶

Although the late 1970s still spelled economic uncertainty for Mexico, the hope that Mexican would modernize and advance and the belief that boxers signified these continued. In an interview with a Spanish newspaper in 1976, Luis Spota argued that boxing would disappear completely in twenty years because the sport had “remained only because of the Third World, but when the economic conditions of the Third World improve, fighting will be less attractive.”⁷ Thus, even to those who did not see boxing as symbolic of modernity believed it meant that Mexico was in the process of achieving this desired status. In the end, boxing did not signify first-world advancement. What it signified was that Mexico had gone through a process of industrialization and capitalization that did not guarantee the same levels of affluence that the United States, Europe, and Japan had experienced. The fact that it produced its most accomplished

⁶ “LOS CAMPEONES MUNDIALES EN EL RELEVO PRESIDENCIAL,” *Ring Mundial*, 14 November 1976, 6.

⁷ “Información Deportiva: Predice que el boxeo sólo le quedan veinte años de vida,” *A.B.C.*, 15 June 1976, 48.

boxer, Julio César Chávez, during the Lost Decade that followed the 1982 Debt Crisis further cemented this.

As Yucatecans, Canto and Espadas also represented an important shift in Mexico's boxing landscape. Just like other aspects of Mexico's economy and entertainment industry, Mexico City started to lose its grip on the production of boxers in the mid 1970s. Mexico City boxers proliferated in the late 1970s with Carlos Zárate, Lupe Pintor, and Pipino Cuevas holding world champions, but by the early to mid 1980s, Mexico's provinces produced more world champion boxers than its capital. Julio César Chávez, from Culiacán, Sinaloa became a transcendental figure in the 1980s and early 1990s, building off the fame and tradition of his predecessors from the capital. In February 1993, over 130,000 fans came to see him defeat North American Greg Haugen in Mexico City's Azteca Stadium.⁸ Chávez maintained a close relationship with WBC president José Sulaimán, Mexican president Carlos Salinas de Gortari (who touted his relationship with Chávez while introducing economic austerity measures on the economic populace), and U.S. promoter Don King. Despite his massive celebrity and success, Chávez never symbolized national progress. He fights elicited passionate celebrations of Mexican nationalism and masculinity, but they did not serve as 'proof' that Mexican would achieve First World status.

The last Mexican boxer to symbolize this international assent was Salvador Sánchez. He was born in raised in a small town outside of Mexico City, but lived close enough to train at a gym in the Mexican capital when he was a teenager. Sánchez

⁸ Michael Martinez, "Chávez Knocks Out Haugen in Fifth," *New York Times* 21 February 1993, 1(S).

represented the professional turn in the sport as he did not come from an impoverished background. Instead, he became fascinated with the sport when he started *secundaria* in Mexico City, visiting boxing gyms and observing before he became a participant.

Sánchez cemented his status as a Mexican boxing legend in the early 1980s by defeating boxers like North American Danny López and Puerto Rican Wilfredo Gómez, who had defeated several high-quality Mexican opponents in the late 1970s. When he successfully defended his title against Ghanaian Azumah Nelson on July 21, 1982, he became the first Mexican ever to headline a boxing card at Madison Square Garden. Twenty days later, the Mexican government informed its creditors that it could not fulfill its debt payment obligations. At four in the morning, the day following this announcement, Salvador was driving 120 miles per hour on the highway that connected Queretaro to San Luis Potosí. Sánchez unsuccessfully attempted to pass a truck and died on impact with the much larger automobile. Within twenty-four hours, Mexico entered the Debt Crisis and its goals for entry into the first world and Mexico City's era as the hub of boxing in Mexico came to an abrupt end.

Unfortunately for Mexico, it does not appear that other nations necessarily thought better of Mexico as a result of these successes. After Welshman Johnny Owen tragically died in Los Angeles after a one-sided encounter with world champion Lupe Pintor in 1980, British writer Hugh McIlvanney portrayed Owen as having to face the champion "in front of a screaming mob of his countrymen, whose lust for blood gives the grubby Olympic Auditorium the atmosphere of a Guadalajara cockfight, multiplied a

hundred times.” McIlvanney described Pintor as a “powerful Mexican” who arose out of conditions that created a special breed of boxer:

No fighters in the world are more dedicated to the raw violence of the business than Mexicans. Pintor comes out of a gym in Mexico City where more than a hundred boxers work out regularly and other queue for a chance to show that what they can do in the alleys they can do in the ring. A man who rises to the top of such a seething concentration of hostility is likely to have little interest in points-scoring as a means of winning verdicts.

He did not portray the Mexican as having a weak and unathletic body (much to the happiness of Post-Revolutionary elites), but McIlvanney did not portray boxing pugilistic success as a result of Mexican national progress or modernity, but rather a product of “a seething concentration of hostility.”⁹

In the end, boxing did not transform Mexico. In this way, it echoes Clifford Geertz’s observations of the Balinese cockfight, but on an international level. Reflecting on the cockfight, Geertz contended that the event in and of itself changed nothing in the town that he studied. Despite the outcome of the cockfight, the status of the cock owners never changed substantially. Geertz viewed the cockfight as a allegory, image, and metaphor, as a way to display social passions.¹⁰ In this view, the cockfight served as an interpretive function, or “a story they tell themselves about themselves.”¹¹ Ultimately, boxing allowed Mexicans to tell stories to themselves about their nation’s place in the community of nations following the Second World War. Boxers served of images of a virile and modern nation that was ascending and advancing toward First World status and

⁹ Hugh McIlvanney, ““When Johnny Owen’s Courage Let Him Down” *Sports Journalists Association*, 4 September 2012, n. pag.

¹⁰ Clifford Geertz, “Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight,” *Daedalus* 134, 4 (2005): 78.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 82.

were doing so in a distinctly Mexican way. Boxers allowed Mexicans to tell tales of Mexican greatness when they performed admirably in the ring and stories of Mexican national stability when their performances outside the ring coalesced with mainstream notions of Mexican masculinity. When Mexican boxers failed to properly display both their roots and their wings (using Beck's terminology), they received the criticism from various segments of Mexican society, depending on what expectations they violated. The overall picture, however, was one of optimism and the story we can gather from boxing is that it signified the optimism and hope Mexicans felt about their nation in the time between World War II and the debt crisis of 1982.

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Fellowships, Scholarships, and Awards

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