

UNIVERSITY OF CAPE COAST

THE "CRAFT OF BRUISING" AND THE LIFE OF AZUMAH
"PROFESSOR OF THE RING" NELSON – A SOCIAL HISTORY OF
GHANAIAN BOXING
(VOLUME ONE)

BY

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Doctor of Philosophy degree in History

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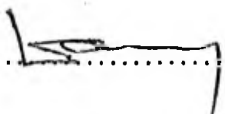
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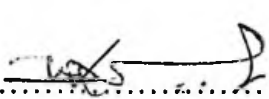
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ABSTRACT

This thesis explores how boxing emerged in Ghana from both indigenous and foreign (British) inventiveness, how it has shaped aspects of Ghana's popular culture, and also examines boxing's social meaning and impact in the colonial and postcolonial milieux.

Furthermore, this work expands the popular conception of boxing as a "culture of the underprivileged" to embrace its vital significance as a stimulus to social mobility. On that trajectory, this work rethinks another socio-cultural meaning of boxing as a "sado-masochist" manifestation, which is counterproductive to "civilized" human culture,¹ by intellectualising it as a positive shaper of personal and national identities.

Additionally, this study discusses how boxing was resourcefully used by the Ga-Mashie *ethnie* of Ghana, for cultural and economic empowerment, the roles that its boxers, especially Azumah Nelson, have played in shaping the history and form of Ghana's "popular culture." and it uses Bourdieu's concept of *Habitus* to investigate the proverbial gravitation of the *ethnie* to boxing.

¹ For example the World Medical Association (W.M.A.) at its Thirty-fifth Assembly in October 1983, issued and passed a declaration against boxing. The declaration revealed the Association's concern that "[Boxing is a dangerous sport]. Unlike other sports, the basic intent of boxing is to produce bodily harm to the opponent. Boxing can result in death and produces an alarming incidence of chronic brain injury [For this reason, the World Medical Association recommends that boxing be banned]." (See "WMA Statement on Boxing," (Adopted by the 35th World Medical Assembly, Venice, Italy, October 1983 and editorially revised at the 170th Council Session, Divonne-les-Bains, France, May 2005), online, <http://www.wma.net/en/30publications/10policies/b6/index.html> (Information was retrieved on October 4, 2010).

Whilst the W.M.A. must have been aware that a number of sporting activities involved high risks, an influential lobby within the medical profession deemed the case of boxing a special one, which justified the strictest attention and restriction because crudely the nature of boxing "implies that extra points are given for brain damage." See British Medical Association, *The Boxing Debate*, London: B.M.A. 1993, p.10, as mentioned in Jack Anderson, *The Legality of Boxing: Punch Drunk Love?* Oxon: Birbeck Law Press / N.Y., Routledge-Cavendish, 2007. See also chapter 5 and 6 of *The Legality of Boxing: Punch Drunk Love?* which debates "The Physical and psychological dangers of boxing," and "Philosophical and Ethical Consideration" respectively.

Moreover, the thesis interrogates the “ghetto” beginnings and legendary career of ex-champion and the International Boxing Hall of Fame inductee, Azumah Nelson, and highlights how “ghetto” boxers can internationalise Ghana, and transcend social obscurity to affluence and fame. The work nourishes the intellectual discourse on identity creation and social empowerment through the popular culture of sports.

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I thank you my father and mother for instilling in me the “spirits” of *Kujichagulia* (self-determination/confidence), *Imani* (faith/conviction), *Nia* (purpose), *Umoja* (harmony with humanity), *Ujima* (communal effort and duty), *Ujamaa* (communal/collective economics), and *Kuumba* (inventiveness). These principles have profoundly assisted my academic pursuits and journey and have placed me at 33⁰ x 33. They gave me the strength to undertake this study. I thank you very much Atm-Imn-Ra for your assistance and guidance.

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De-Valera N.Y.M. Botchway,

2011.

DEDICATION

To the powerful youth of Africa. Marcus says: “Up you Mighty Ones, you can accomplish what you will.”

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

- (A.B.C.) African Boxing Confederation
- (A.B.C.) American Broadcasting Company
- (A.B.U.) African Boxing Union
- (A.F.L.) Australian Football League
- (A.F.R.C.) Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
- (A.I.B.A.) Association Internationale de Boxe Amateur
- (A.M.A.) Australian Medical Association
- (A.N.F.) Azumah Nelson Foundation
- (A.R.P.S.) Aborigines Right Protection Society
- (A.R.S.) Apostles Revelation Society
- (A.S.) *Africa Sports*
- (B.B.B.C.) British Boxing Board of Control
- (B.B.C.) British Broadcasting Corporation
- (C.B.A.) Commonwealth Broadcasting Association
- (C.B.C.) Commonwealth Boxing Council
- (C.B.E.) Commander of the Order of the British Empire
- (C.B.S.) Columbia Broadcasting System
- (C.D) Compact Disc
- (C.E.O.) Chief Executive Officer
- (C.O.S.) Central Organisation of Sports
- (C.P.P.) Convention Peoples Party
- (C.S.A.C.) California State Athletic Commission
- (C.Y.O.) Catholic Youth Organisation

- (D.A.B.A.) District Amateur Boxing Associations
- (D.G.) *Daily Graphic*
- (D.S.O.) Distinguished Service Order
- (D.V.D.) Digital Versatile/Video Disc
- (DFID) Department for International Development
- (ECOFEST) Eco-Tourism Festival
- (EThOS) Electronic Theses Online System
- (F.C.) Furley Collection
- (G.A.B.A.) Ghana Amateur Boxing Association.
- (G.A.F.A.) Ghana Amateur Football Association
- (G.A.S.C.) Ghana Amateur Sports Council
- (G.B.A.) Ghana Boxing Authority
- (G.B.B.C.) Ghana Boxing Board of Control
- (G.B.C.) Ghana Broadcasting Corporation
- (G.B.P.S.) Ghana Boxing Promotion Syndicate [Council]
- (G.C.A.B.A.) Gold Coast [Colony] Amateur Boxing Association
- (G.C.A.S.C.) Gold Coast Amateur Sports Council
- (G.C.B.B.C.) Gold Coast Boxing Board of Control
- (G.D.P.) Gross Domestic Product
- (G.F.A.) Ghana Football Authority
- (G.N.A.) Ghana News Agency
- (G.S.) *Graphic Sports*
- (G.T.) *Ghanaian Times*
- (GANEF0) Games of the New Emerging Forces

- (H.B.O.) Home Box Office
- (H.I.V.) Human Immune Virus
- (H.S.G.) Historical Society of Ghana
- (I.B.A.) International Boxing Authority
- (I.B.C.) International Boxing Council
- (I.B.F.) International Boxing Federation
- (I.M.F.) International Monetary Fund
- (I.O.C.) International Olympic Committee
- (JSTOR) Journal Storage
- (K.B.E.) Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire
- (K.O.) Knockout
- (L.P.R.R.) London Prize Ring Rules
- (M.) *Mirror*
- (M.B.E.) Member of the Order of the British Empire
- (M.C.C.) Marylebone Cricket Club
- (M.D.) Majority Decision
- (N.A.B.F.) North American Boxing Association
- (N.B.C.) National Broadcasting Company
- (N.C.B.W.A.) National Congress of British West Africa
- (n.d.) No Date
- (N.L.C.D.) National Liberation Council Decree
- (n.p.) No Publisher
- (N.S.C.) National Sports Council
- (N.S.C.) National Sports Council

- (N.Y.C.) National Youth Council
- (O.B.E.) Officer of the Order of the British Empire
- (P.) Point
- (P.B.C.S.B.) Professional Boxing and Combat Sport Board
- (P.D.F.) Portable Document Format
- (P.D.G.) *People's Daily Graphic*
- (P.N.D.C.) Provisional National Defence Council government
- (P.N.P.) People's National Party
- (P.P.V.) Pay Per View
- (P.R.A.A.D.) Public Records and Archives Administration Department
- (R.A.B.A.) Regional Amateur Boxing Associations
- (R.A.F.) Royal Air Force
- (S) *Statesman*
- (S.B.) *Sportsbeat*
- (S.D.) Split Decision
- (S.E.) *Sporting Events*
- (S.M.C.) Supreme Military Council
- (S.M.C.D.) Supreme Military Council Decree
- (S.O.S.) Save Our Souls
- (S.S.) *Super Sports*
- (S.T.) *Sporting Times*
- (S.W.A.G.) Sports Writers Association of Ghana
- (T.G.) *Gossip*
- (T.G.V.) *Ghanaian Voice*

- (T.K.O.) Technical Knockout
- (T.S.S.) *Sports Star*
- (U.A.R.) United Arab Republic
- (U.C.C.) University of Cape Coast
- (U.K.) United Kingdom
- (U.N.) United Nations
- (U.S.A.) United States of America
- (U.S.F.) University of South Florida
- (U.S.S.R.) Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
- (U.T.C.) United Trading Company
- (UNESCO) United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
- (V.H.S.) Video Home System
- (V.I.P.) Very Important Personality
- (W.B.A.) World Boxing Association
- (W.B.C.) World Boxing Council
- (W.B.F.) World Boxing Federation
- (W.B.O.) World Boxing Organisation
- (W.M.A.) World Medical Association
- (W.N.B.A.) Women's National Basketball Association
- (W.U.S.A.) Women's United Soccer Association
- (Y.M.C.A.) Young Men's Christian Association

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Sports transcend mere games that people execute. They are endowed with enormous political, cultural, economic and social powers to influence people's lives in different ways. The history of popular sports in different localities in the world, especially in the West, has received some scholarly attention, particularly from non-African and non-Africanist historians, as evidenced by the considerable number of studies that have been conducted on that aspect of social endeavour.

In Ghana, sports are well-loved aspects of life. Some are of local origin and others, starting from the era of European contact, were assimilated from other parts of the world.

Apart from football (soccer), boxing is the most popular sport in Ghana. It was introduced and formalised as a popular sport in the country *circa* the 1930s by the British colonial administration. One of the reasons for its formalisation into mainstream popular culture in the colonial territory was the colonial administration's attempt to stem the violence that was associated with an ancient indigenous type of organised fisticuff sport called *Asafo Atwele*. Originally created and initiated in Accra, the colonial capital town and the region of the Ga ethnic group, *Asafo Atwele* was a brainchild of and popular among the respected Ga-Mashie division/community in the colony of Gold Coast. Since the 1930s, organised popular boxing, as a sport, has taken root in Ghana, especially in Accra, where the Ga-Mashie *ethnie* resorted to the European style when their free-for-all bare-knuckle fight – *Asafo Atwele* – was banned.

In terms of participation and excellence, the Ga, especially those from the “slum” Bukom division of the Ga-Mashie locality, dominated the sport. Principally, Ga-Mashie, especially Bukom, has continued to be a factory of many and great boxers in Ghana.

The sport was used by such slum-dwelling participants, especially in Accra, and other urban centres, as a tool of social mobility for the human agent and their society. This popular culture was not just a continuation of the *Asafo Atwele* ancient martial art. Within the confines of colonialism, and its aftermath, it has provided a platform for the negotiation of personal and social advancement and identity, and positive transformations in life, as strength and skills were exhibited to gain social recognition, wealth, and respect within localities. It served and has continued to be an avenue to make quick money, travel to *abrokyiri*¹ or abroad, particularly to England, which in the colonial era was a prestigious thing to do. Lastly, it was subtly employed, by local boxers who hoped to compete with European boxers on the international stage, to challenge notions of colonial and European administrative authority and racial superiority, which pervaded the colonial period.

The history of boxing in Ghana, which takes its source in the colonial era, contains stories that project and are about the emergence of some notable boxers and world class champions. The list includes Roy “the Black Flash” Ankrah who won the British Empire featherweight title in 1951, Floyd Klutei “the Real” Robertson who held the Commonwealth featherweight title in the 1960s, Ike Quartey, Snr., a silver medallist at the Rome Olympics in the 1960s, and David Kotei, (hereafter D.K. Poison or D.K.), who in 1975

¹ The Twi equivalent is *abrokyire*.

pioneered the winning of the World Boxing Council (W.B.C.) featherweight title. In 1984, Azumah “Zoom Zoom the Professor” Nelson, won the W.B.C. featherweight title and added the super-featherweight title in 1988. He dominated that level until 1996. Nana Yaw Konadu shot into continental and international fame in 1986 when he won the African Boxing Union (A.B.U.)² flyweight title. Within ten years he annexed titles including the Commonwealth flyweight, African bantamweight, W.B.C. International super-flyweight, International Boxing Council (I.B.C.) super-flyweight, and World Boxing Association (W.B.A.) World bantamweight.

The examples set by these luminaries, inspired other contemporary Ghanaian boxing greats who between 1992 and 2001 claimed many coveted international boxing titles. Ike “Bazooka” Quartey became the W.B.C. International light-welterweight champion in 1992 and took the W.B.A. World welterweight in 1994. Alfred “Cobra” Kotey became the World Boxing Organisation (W.B.O.) bantamweight champion in 1994 and clinched the W.B.C. International super-bantamweight title in 1995. Alex “Ali” Baba clinched the W.B.C. International flyweight title in 1996. In the first decade of the twenty-first century Joseph Agbeko, snatched the World Boxing Federation (W.B.F.), and the International Boxing Federation (I.B.F.) bantamweight titles.

These personalities earned fame, social recognition and popular admiration but they also helped to shape Ghanaian popular culture through sports. Some became fitness and health instructors and philanthropists, built

² In 1987, the African Boxing Union was renamed as the African Boxing Confederation (A.B.C.) and had Mr. T. Houichi of Tunisia as president and Chief Ralph Akin Ogunbufunmi of Nigeria as president of the Professional Commission of the A.B.C. (See “A.B.U. is Now A.B.C.,” *People’s Daily Graphic* (hereafter *P.D.G.*), November 12, 1987, p. 15.

sporting gyms and other social infrastructure, set up businesses to give jobs to people, and led popular campaigns against diseases like malaria. Their acquired statuses have served as inspiration to people in different ways, and in diverse ways and degrees their works have contributed to the country's historic quest for positive socio-economic transformations in the lives of individuals and communities.

Remembered by sports and boxing *aficionados* some have had their names and accomplishments incorporated into the lyrical compositions of some popular anthemic songs. While some have become household names, and others have had their feats and memories etched in newspapers, magazines, and feature video documentaries, some sports centres and boxing gyms have also been named after some to immortalise their memory in the country.

Statement of the Problem

The historiography of Ghana, with reference to the colonial and a considerable portion of the postcolonial period, *circa* the first fifty years, reveals a field where political and economic history has received tremendous attention. This may even be true of the continental scene where historians have only made little impact on the interdisciplinary field of social and cultural history, and urban history. Within the Ghanaian context, the areas of social and cultural history have not received much attention, due to what can be referred to as “political and economic history bias.” This situation has created a prevailing glaring lacuna in the historiography of Ghana. Within the postcolonial dispensation, grants and scholarships for researches, mainly, have not been directed to cultural and social history because they are perceived as

not development-inclined and applied research oriented. This is counterproductive to Ghanaian historiography and can atrophy the humanities as a whole. Many historians who, therefore, desire to have some support from most of the scholarship facilities are compelled to veer to pursue researches into political and economic history, since political and economic interpretative narratives are deemed popular if not “progressive.” Even though, history of popular culture, which falls under the purview of social history, has in the last few years become fashionable on the historiographical scene at the international level, it is yet to receive the same attention in Ghana.

The resuscitated Historical Society of Ghana (H.S.G.), since 2001, has continued to advocate for history as a discipline to be promoted in the country’s formal educational centres. It has also advocated for social and cultural history by calling on both old and young historical researchers to take greater interest in those areas. The stress has been on the nurturing of the tradition of biographies and areas like public and urban history. Such an ambition can only be achieved if encouragement and opportunities are given to interested and determined historians to hone, at a higher level of training, their interests, skills and understanding in the area of social and cultural history.

This growing concern for the creation of a historiographical diversity in Ghana and Africa has encouraged this Ph.D. research in social and cultural history. This thesis initiates one of the needed shifts from the monotony of political and economic history research and interest which has largely been a defining feature in the historiographical tradition of Ghana and by extension Africa.

A look at the nineteenth and twentieth centuries historiographical tradition of countries like the U.S.A. and the U.K., for the sake of argument, reveals an area where the life of the makers of popular culture of sports, especially boxing, have received much attention. Such studies have investigated and presented the forces that conditioned their personalities, and legacies to their immediate communities, country and humankind as a whole. Such studies have revealed how such persons, in their capacity as popular icons and ordinary people, in different ways, influence their societies.

The construction of historical reports and video documentaries of aspects of popular culture, especially sports, cannot be complete without the protagonists of these socio-cultural institutions. The history of boxing in the U.S.A. would be deficient without the boxers who acted in the rings like Jack Johnson, Joe Louis, Rocky Marciano, Muhammad Ali alias Cassius Clay, and Mike Tyson. Due to that reason, academic interest in popular culture, over the years has not neglected those human agents. Furthermore, Hollywood filmmakers, finding the lives of these characters as inspiring, interesting and intriguing have produced and continue to create movies and documentaries on many of these personalities and their lives. Some of these works are *Cinderella Man*,³ *Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson*,⁴ *Tyson*,⁵ *Gentleman Jim*,⁶ *Muhammad Ali, the Greatest: a film*,⁷ *Ali*,⁸

³ *Cinderella Man*, directed by Ron Howard. D.V.D., Universal City, California: Universal Picture, circa 2005.

⁴ *Unforgivable Blackness: The Rise and Fall of Jack Johnson*, directed by Ken Burns. D.V.D., Alexandria, Virginia: PBS Home Video [distributor], 2005.

⁵ *Tyson*, Culver City, California: Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, circa 2009.

⁶ *Gentleman Jim*, directed by Raoul Walsh. D.V.D., Burbank, California: distributed by Warner Home Video, 2007.

⁷ *Muhammad Ali, the Greatest: a film*, directed by William Klein. D.V.D., [France]: Arte Video; [Chicago] distributed by Facet Video, circa 2002.

and *Muhammad Ali: Heavyweight Champion*.⁹ Such works would not have been complete without the assistance of academic-supported biographical researches. In other words, to produce such blockbuster materials, filmmakers have depended on some information derived from some biographies churned by academic researches.

The history of sports and boxing in Ghana, and their contribution to nation building cannot be complete without the lives of its main gladiators. Out of the plethora of qualified choices, Azumah Nelson, who in June 2008 returned from retirement to fight, his long-time Australian rival Jeff Fenech, to raise funds to undertake some philanthropic work in Ghana, has been chosen as the biographical subject of study in this thesis. This is because of his luminary role in the development of popular culture in Ghana, and his sporting excellence in the discipline of boxing and his well-known character as a philanthropist and social activist. The ramifications of the intended study of Azumah Nelson would encourage the writing of instructive scholarly biographies of the popular icons that we celebrate.

Considered a national hero in Ghana, Azumah Nelson, apart from his serological ancestry to Ga-Mashie, is a descendant of Afro-Brazilian returnees who created the Tabon community in Accra after repatriating in the nineteenth century to Ghana and other parts of West Africa like Nigeria. In Nigeria they set up the Lagosian community of the Aguda or Amaro. Possessing devastating punches, extraordinary energy and lightening swiftness, he, from 1984 to 1996, dominated the levels of the W.B.C. featherweights. Boxing

⁸ *Ali*, directed by Michael Mann. D.V.D., [United States]: Columbia Tristar Home Entertainment, 2002.

⁹ *Muhammad Ali: Heavyweight Champion*, produced and directed by Rhonda Fabian, and Jerry Baber. V.H.S., Bala Cynwyd, Philadelphia: Schlessinger, circa 1994.

pundits considered him as the greatest boxing champion born in Africa and one of the greatest boxers of all time. He was rated as one of the top hundred boxers of the world of the twentieth century.¹⁰

He was the first continental African to be inducted into the prestigious International Boxing Hall of Fame to join the pantheon of “apotheosised” world-class greats of the “noble art of self-defence” like Jack Johnson, Benny Leonard, Jack Dempsey, Henry Armstrong, Sugar Ray Robinson, Archie Moore, Muhammad Ali, Rocky Marciano, among others. The life of this man is worth studying. Emerging from the slums of historical Bukom in Accra to international limelight as a fine boxer, he overnight became a million dollar entrepreneur and historical figure.

Aim and Objective of the Study

This thesis primarily sets out to investigate, and has investigated, the social history of the popular culture of boxing as a sport, and its role in contributing to shaping identities and positive socio-economic transformations in Ghana through the life, work and experiences of Azumah Nelson.

Accomplished sports personalities, like Azumah Nelson, in the sphere of boxing, have promoted the name of Ghana on the international diplomatic and sporting scene. Through charity and the establishment of businesses, some provided jobs which brought social and economic mobility for other people. They also helped, whenever they undertook sporting tasks in the name of the country, to foment social cohesion by bringing people together, in the spirit of patriotism and support, as a nation. Azumah Nelson’s out-of-the-ring success

¹⁰ See *Zoom Zoom – The Professor: The career of Azumah Nelson*, directed by Sam A. Kissie. D.V.D., Sankofa Pictures, Geodrill, and the Azumah Nelson Foundation, 2010.

in life has proven that boxing is not just entertainment but also a business that can improve the lot of the socio-economically desperate and less fortunate in society.

Surprisingly, boxing and popular sports in African societies, and the socio-economic contributions of the actors to society have not been the focus of many historians, particularly those within African academia. It is a burgeoning genre of historical enquiry in African history and Africana Studies. Yet the social, economic and political contributions that this popular culture and its actors make are obvious and historical.

Any meaningful academic exposé, like this thesis, on the experiences and ideas of legendary sports figures can provide inspiration and lessons to lovers of sports and insights that can positively help policy makers to overhaul the sports industry in Ghana and Africa as a whole.

Without popular culture like music, sports, acting, and fashion, society, within space and time, will have little meaning. And most importantly, society, without the human agents who animate popular culture, will be a boring human construction. These agents release people from the stress and tension, which they are bedevilled with from the routine of work, familial responsibility and different social problems. Additionally, boxers and sports personalities in general do contribute to positive socio-economic growth and advancement in their communities. Social growth is not only a conceptual manifestation, which, outwardly, must be measured only in economic terms and represented by high Gross Domestic Product (G.D.P.), social infrastructure levels, among other economic variables. At any rate, sports contribute tremendously to G.D.P. levels in communities, through the

manufacture of sporting equipment, provision of services related to sports, patronage fees, taxes on athletes, use of sports celebrities to enhance and promote the advertising business and so on. However, social growth and development can, and must also be measured in terms of social equilibrium, represented by the provision of peace, good health and good social relations. If all these can lead to social stability, which is “development,” then the popular culture of sports, which can foment togetherness, peace and we-feeling both on the global and national levels, must receive serious sociological, political and historiographical attention.

As an important aim of the study, within the biographical dimension of this thesis on the boxing legend, the work has explored the forces that helped shape his life, dreams, career, his major fights, victories, and defeats. The work examines his contribution to society as a businessperson and philanthropist and has interrogated, emphasised and brought to light for public knowledge and intellectual consumption, his legacy to modern day prize-fighting, popular culture and sports as a whole.

From its historical investigation of the correlation between boxing and sports as a whole, and personal, group and national socio-economic and political growth, this study has fulfilled an important objective that undergirded the research. Within the pages of the thesis can be found clues and suggestions about how sports and boxing can be developed in Ghana and Africa as outlets for recreation and yielders of positive economic returns for general social advancement. This aspect of the work is a contribution to the unending search, by Ghanaian and African governments, for innovative ideas to promote social developmental policies and agenda.

Argument/Proposition

This thesis, which intermittently makes references to famous sports icons, like Muhammad Ali who, making boxing a financial and political tool, took “boxing from the back pages to the front pages of newspapers,” posits that boxers can yield great revenue, social cohesion, and positive social transformations in their communities. Like this thesis, researches into popular culture, which are human-centred and society-oriented, should add informing insights and ideas to existing knowledge and understanding about the human being who is “society” and directs society. Perceiving sports, as a natural concomitant of social interaction, capable of promoting and consolidating social harmony and economic growth, and sportspersons as inspirers of creativity and determination, this thesis started and rests on some fundamental propositions. The detailed arguments of this document reside in two basic observations about boxing in Ghana. First, boxing in Ghana during the colonial and postcolonial periods, within the frame of the popular culture of sports, was, and has been a tool, which has been used by groups, and outstanding individual sporting personalities, for example Azumah Nelson, for the mediation and negotiation of personal, group and national identities. Second, sporting personalities, with particular reference to Azumah Nelson, do make tremendous contribution to social-economic and cultural advancement of a nation, and in the context of this study Ghana.

Research Questions

The origins and development of boxing as a sport transplanted to Gold Coast (Ghana) from England and how it took roots and gained acceptance in Gold Coast as a modern sport have been explored and discussed within the

pages of this thesis. This leads to the second part of the study, where in a biographical way Azumah Nelson's life, career and social work, and his relationship, as an individual, with society, are turned "inside out," and the findings presented in an analytical history narrative. This thesis has interrogated the historical and cultural context of the indigenous ethnic society into which he was born and how, as a person in society, these shaped his psyche and social orientation. In addition, in this segment of the thesis, an interrogation has been made into the social, economic and political milieu within which he grew and lived, especially during his formative years as a boy, adolescent and youth. This is to say that his personality and character traits, and the situational environment, comprising the people and the prevailing social and political ideology that surrounded him as a ghetto youth, have been examined. The forces which influenced him to take boxing as a profession and the psychology, which encouraged him to go all out to become a world champion, have been discussed in this thesis.

This thesis has been able to present a narrative on these dimensions because answers were found for certain fundamental questions which guided the research and conceptualising of this thesis on boxing and Azumah Nelson. Such fundamental question included: **(a)** *Why did the British introduce boxing and what was its political, social and economic significance for the colonial administrative machinery?* **(b)** *Were sports, in general, a tool for social and political colonial control?* **(c)** *Why and how did it take roots in the country and where did it start?* **(d)** *What socio-cultural motif did, sports and boxing represent for the African of Gold Coast and the postcolonial Ghanaian?* **(e)** *Who played what pioneering role(s) in the consolidation of boxing?* **(i)** *What*

was its social significance in Gold Coast and independent Ghana and why did the “noble art of self-defence” become popular among the Ga, especially Ga-Mashie and its slummy vicinities such as Bukom, where Azumah Nelson emerged onto the boxing stage. (g) How has Azumah influenced the processes of personal and social empowerment for many in Ghana and how can his life examples and experiences be utilized for further development of boxing as a profession? (h) What is Azumah’s perception about Ghanaian boxing and sports and, how can their potentials, for national advancement, be improved and promoted?

The answers to these questions, among others, have significantly contributed in the building of the narrative of this study. Question (i), for example, has elicited answers and information that have contributed in forming part of the texture of this thesis. These answers have reflected at once a significant measure of an ethnic group’s achievements and contribution to the shaping of popular culture in Ghana, and they have showed how certain so-called “underprivileged” and “less fortunate” people and communities have contributed to the growth of national sports.

Another question that was foundational to this study was: *(j) Why did Azumah Nelson, a Ga ghetto boy, following the examples and international accomplishments of pioneer Ga boxing champions like Roy Ankrah and D.K. Poison, pursue a career in the so-called “sport of the desperate”?* This question has elicited answers that throw light on the reason why Azumah Nelson joined a sport and profession which can be deemed as glamorous, empowering, artful and lucrative and as debasing, brutal and costly. It has helped to explain, in this thesis, why Azumah Nelson went into and spent his

youthful days as an active participant in a sport that from another viewpoint, in all approximates resembles, in all its “crudeness” and “brutality,” the ancient gladiatorial spectacle, in which slaves fought to the death for the pleasure and profit of others. Other questions were: *(k) Was Azumah Nelson, in a masochist spirit, attracted to the sport because of the bodily pains that could be derived from it or, considering his ghetto background, he was attracted by the quick fame, wealth and other social benefits the sport could offer? (l) Did Azumah Nelson gain anything and realise his dreams in boxing, and what did he do with such fulfilments and accomplishments?*

Contextually, Azumah Nelson’s life story fits well into the social and cultural history of Ghana, and it finds a good place in the history of popular culture, especially sports in Africa. However, it also fits nicely into the general history of the Brazilian returnees – Tabon – to Ghana, and other parts of the West Coast of Africa. Since their return, they have contributed to the struggle for independence from British colonial rule, development of Western formal education, economics, politics, culture, music, sports and other areas of social endeavour in West Africa.

This thesis about Azumah Nelson’s life, career, and diverse contributions to Ghana and Africa adds to the academic literature on history and culture within the contexts of African and Africana history and studies. Additionally, it contributes to prevailing international intellectual discourse on and about the historic and contemporary contributions of people of the African diaspora in building a Black Atlantic in parts of Africa.

This thesis on Azumah Nelson has been worth the energy and time because “Biography, especially of the great and good, who have risen by their

own exertions and eminence and usefulness, is an ennobling study. Its direct tendency is to reproduce the excellence it records.”¹¹

Review of Related Literature

Scholarship and academic literature that provide a deeper historical enquiry into and analysis of Azumah Nelson’s experiences in boxing, within the context of the history of sports and boxing in Ghanaian popular culture, is lacking. The construction of this thesis has been the outcome of the researcher’s desire to fill that historiographical lacuna. It became apparent to the researcher that no major work had been done and no volume existed on Azumah Nelson in the *corpus* of existing scholarship – especially history books and/or scholarly articles of biographical substance, about sport personalities, especially, boxers. The internet provided a few scattered skeletal journalistic biographical frames on him. Including one on the website of the Azumah Nelson Foundation, these frames, obviously posted as quick reference materials for sport commentators and aficionados, ranged from one to three or four pages. They tended to recount his boxing exploits as far as wins, and defeats were concerned. The profile provided by the Azumah Nelson Foundation, which is a philanthropic establishment, also contained information about the aims of the foundation. Unlike some interesting major works by Remnick, Evans and Ifaturoti on famous sport personalities like Muhammad Ali,¹² Joe Louis,¹³ and Dick Tiger,¹⁴ which have explored

¹¹ See C.N. Catrevas, Tryon Edwards, Jonathan Edwards, and Ralph Emerson Browns, (eds.), *The New Dictionary of Thoughts: A Cyclopedia of Quotations*, New York: Standard Book Company, 1966.

¹² One of the numerous works on him is David Remnick’s *King of The World: Muhammad Ali and the Rise of an American Hero*, New York: Random House, 1998.

¹³ Art Evans, “Joe Louis as a Key Functionary: White Reactions Toward a Black Champion,” *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 1, (Sept., 1985), pp. 95-111.

different dimensions of their professional and civil lives and contextualised them in their special social and historical circumstances, there is none on Azumah Nelson. No work was found which had placed Azumah Nelson within the history of Ga-Mashie and Ghana, and examined his ethnic cultural background, personality, career, and fighting techniques, from a historical, biographical, sociological and theoretical angle.

Remnick explored Ali's successes in the ring, conversion to the Nation of Islam, problems with the U.S.A. government over his refusal to conscript to fight in Vietnam, his radical views on racially polarised U.S.A. and the political power structure of the U.S.A. His work has provided a window through which the celebrity life of Ali, and its dynamic intercourse with American domestic politics, can be appreciated. The work of Art Evans on Joe Louis displayed Louis, an African American, as an important "key figure," that is, in Olsenian terms, an actor who performs crucial activities for the total system,¹⁵ in the U.S.A. during the 1930s. Through the professional life of Louis and particularly his match with Max Schmeling, Evans explored racism in the U.S.A. Operating within the context of the U.S.A., Evans attempted to use the experiences of Louis to illustrate the general responses of dominants towards racial minorities when the latter occupies key functionary positions traditionally reserved for the former. He argued that although the athlete satisfied an important political ambition of white America, when he defeated Schmeling, who "white" America perceived to represent Nazism, he did not

¹⁴ Damola Ifaturoti, *Dick Tiger: The Life and Times of Africa's Most Accomplished World Boxing Champion*, Princeton, N.J.: Sungai Books, 2002.

¹⁵ M.E. Olsen, *The Process of Social Organisation: Power In Social Systems*, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1978, pp. 25-26.

escape the attacks of pathological racism which was endemic in the white community of the U.S.A.

Ifaturoti's work revealed the life of the Nigerian born, three-time world boxing champion, Richard Ihetu, alias Dick Tiger, following nearly three decades after his death in December 1971. The biography placed Tiger's international success as a professional African boxer in a historical perspective, side by side with his selfless and courageous partisan role in the Nigerian-Biafran Civil War, for which he virtually sacrificed all that he had struggled for and earned. This pioneering book dedicated to the subject's life and times, revealed the fascinating facts regarding his social background, which even went back into pre-colonial Nigeria, humble origins and rise, following professional sojourns in England and America, to world prominence and acclaim in boxing. It captured his confrontation with the central political authority, due to his principled stand on the Nigerian Civil War, as a supporter of the Biafran movement and finally, the circumstances surrounding his premature death when he was 41 years old. Ifaturati's book, which enriches the presently limited biographical literature on modern African sporting legends and heroes, showed Dick Tiger not only as a sport personality but also as an influential icon who used his area of renown to influence the progressive politics of his country. This iconic biography revealed an interesting athlete-in-politics situation in Nigeria. Although, these major works were not about Azumah Nelson, they demonstrated to the researcher that biographical studies on sport personalities could be contextualised within different areas of social endeavours. The thesis, in its efforts to locate Azumah Nelson at the centre of its discussion on boxing, society, and nation building, has drawn on the

insights of the historiographical and conceptual trajectories of Remnick, Evans and Ifaturoti about how they centred and located their sport icon subjects, within certain socio-economic and political matrixes. They revealed to the researcher of this thesis that Azumah Nelson's professional and personal life could be explored in multifaceted spheres of life and his image as a "key figure" could be examined in relation to its influence as on the social, economic and politics of Ghana.

Within the arena of sports, particularly in colonial environments and the U.S.A., the issue of race, particularly problems of racial group exclusion and tokenism, has received some scholarly research. Some have investigated such issues through biographies where the lives of members of the minority nationality who excelled in sports within this environment were examined and the forces of racial discrimination and racism that militated against them uncovered. Examples of works consisting of both retrospective and current issues that assess opportunities for participation, based on race, are some biographical profiles and biographies of famous black African athletes like Jackie Robinson in baseball,¹⁶ Arthur Ashe in tennis,¹⁷ and Tiger Woods in golf.¹⁸ They have discussed the earlier practices of segregation and the contemporary state of progress in sports in the U.S.A. These made the researcher of this thesis to find out whether or not excellence of early African American boxers and latter day Ghanaian boxers like Azumah Nelson in boxing, engineered racial tension during and in local and international

¹⁶ R. Kahn, "Box score: Has Baseball Fulfilled Jackie Robinson's Promise?" *New Yorker*, April 14, 1997, pp. 5-6, and J. Tygiel, *Baseball's Great Experiment: Jackie Robinson and His Legacy*, New York: Vintage Books, 1983.

¹⁷ A. Ashe and A. Rampersad, *Days of Grace*, New York: Knopf, 1993.

¹⁸ J. Feinstein, *The First Coming: Tiger Woods – Master or Martyr*, New York: Balantine Books, 1998.

competitions. Although those works did not capture issues that were directly related to boxing in Ghana and Azumah Nelson they have however inspired this thesis to look at the issue and ramifications of racial identity, participation, and meaning in the context of sports in British colonial territories, and particularly boxing in colonial Gold Coast and postcolonial Ghana. This has enriched the analysis and narrative of this thesis.

A number of scholarly works, which largely have theorised on the sociology and psychology of aspects of the culture and institution of sports and their relationship with society, were found to exist within the context of the cognate disciplines of sociology and cultural study of sports. Among the inexhaustible and impressive bibliography of such works which were found to have examined sports in the context of non-African societies included, Lynn and Gray Poole,¹⁹ R. Thompson,²⁰ W.F. Mandle,²¹ T. Mason,²² J. Hargreaves,²³ Shirley Glubok and Alfred Tamarin,²⁴ V. Paraschak,²⁵ David Remnick,²⁶ G. Jarvie,²⁷ J. Maguire,²⁸ R.D. Mandell,²⁹ J. Parry and N. Parry,³⁰

¹⁹ Lynn Poole and Gray Poole, *History of Ancient Olympic Games*, London: Vision Press, 1963.

²⁰ Richard Thompson, *Race and Sport*, London: Oxford University Press, 1964.

²¹ W.F. Mandle, "Sport as Politics: the Gaelic Athletic Association 1884-1916," in R. Cashman and M. McKernan, (eds.), *Sport in History. The Making of Modern Sporting History*, St. Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1979, pp. 99-123.

²² T. Mason, (ed.), *Sport in Britain - A Social History*, Cambridge University Press, 1989.

²³ J. Hargreaves, *Sport, Power and Culture*, Cambridge: The Polity Press, 1986.

²⁴ Shirley Glubok and Alfred Tamarin, *Olympic Games in Ancient Greece*, New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1976.

²⁵ V. Paraschak, "Sport, Festivals and Race Relations in the Northwest Territories of Canada," in G. Jarvie, [ed.], *Sport, Racism, and Ethnicity*, London: The Falmer Press, 1991, pp. 74-93.

²⁶ David Remnick, *Ibid.*

²⁷ G. Jarvie, "Sport, Popular Struggle and South African culture," in G. Jarvie, (ed.), *Sport Racism, and Ethnicity*, London: The Falmer Press, 1991, pp. 175-189.

²⁸ J. Maguire "Sport, Racism and British Society: A Sociological Study of England's Elite, Male, Afro-Caribbean Soccer and Rugby Union Players," in G. Jarvie, (ed.), *Sport Racism, and Ethnicity*, London: The Falmer Press, 1991, pp. 94-123.

²⁹ R.D. Mandell, *Sport - A Cultural History*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1984.

³⁰ J. Parry and N. Parry, "Sport and the Black Experience," in G. Jarvie, (ed.), *Sport Racism, and Ethnicity*, London: The Falmer Press, 1991, pp. 150-174.

and L. Shipley.³¹ Others were B. Bradley,³² R. Lipsyte,³³ M. Smelser³⁴ Robert F. Wheeler,³⁵ B. Majumdar,³⁶ B. Stoddart,³⁷ R.E. Washington and David Karen,³⁸ Art Evans,³⁹ D.B.,⁴⁰ Stephen G. Jones,⁴¹ Jennifer Hargreaves,⁴² G. A. Sailes,⁴³ E.T Pauker,⁴⁴ N.B. Crowther,⁴⁵ H. Edwards,⁴⁶ J. Olsen,⁴⁷ Cheryl Roberts,⁴⁸ R. Holt,⁴⁹ and Michael B. Poliakoff.⁵⁰

Africa has not attracted the foci of these major works, which have mostly examined the social, economic, and political dimensions of sports. Not directly linked to a biography on Azumah Nelson, many proved to be informative in the theoretical sociological and psychological issues about sports which they discussed. Peripherally and indirectly they have contributed

³¹ L. Shipley, "Boxing," in T. Mason, (ed.), *Sport in Britain - A Social History*, Cambridge University Press, 1989.

³² Bill Bradley, *Life on The Run*, New York: Quadrangle, 1976.

³³ R. Lipsyte, *Sports World: An American Dreamland*, New York: Quadrangle, 1975.

³⁴ Marshall Smelser, *The Life that Ruth Built: A Biography*, New York: Quadrangle, 1976.

³⁵ Robert F. Wheeler, "Teaching Sport as History, History through Sport," *The History Teacher*, Vol. 11, No. 3, (May, 1978), pp. 311-322

³⁶ Boria Majumdar, "The Vernacular in Sports History," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, No. 29, (Jul. 20-26, 2002), pp. 3069-3075.

³⁷ Brian Stoddart, "Sport, Cultural Imperialism, and Colonial Response in the British Empire," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 30, No. 4 (Oct., 1988), pp. 649-673.

³⁸ E. Robert Washington and David Karen, "Sport and Society," *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 27, (2001), pp. 187-212.

³⁹ Art Evans, *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ D. B., "The Blacks and the Whites in Sport," *Africa Today*, Vol. 17, No. 6, Racism in Sport (Nov. - Dec., 1970), pp. 2-5.

⁴¹ Stephen G. Jones, "State Intervention in Sport and Leisure in Britain between the Wars," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 22, No. 1, (Jan., 1987), pp. 163-182.

⁴² J. Hargreaves, "Heroines of Sport: The Politics of Difference and Identity," *Gender and Society*, Vol. 16, No. 2, (Apr., 2002), pp. 273-274.

⁴³ Gary A. Sailes, "The Myth of Black Sports Supremacy," *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 4, (Jun., 1991), pp. 480-487.

⁴⁴ Ewa T. Pauker, "Ganefo I: Sports and Politics in Djakarta," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 5, No. 4, (Apr., 1965), pp. 171-185.

⁴⁵ Nigel B. Crowther, "Studies in Greek Athletics, Part I," *Classical World*, Vol. 78, No. 5, (May-June 1985), pp. 497-558, and Nigel B. Crowther "Studies in Greek Athletics, Part II," *Classical World*, Vol. 79, No. 2, (Nov.-Dec. 1985), pp. 73-136.

⁴⁶ Harry Edwards, *Revolt of the Black Athlete*, New York: The Free Press, 1969.

⁴⁷ J. Olsen, *The Black Athlete: A Shameful Story*, New York: Time-Life Books, 1968.

⁴⁸ Cheryl Roberts, "Black Women, Recreation and Organised Sport," *Agenda*, No. 17, Recreation and Leisure, (1993), pp. 8-17.

⁴⁹ Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989)

⁵⁰ Michael B. Poliakoff, *Combat Sports in the Ancient World: Competition, Violence and Culture*, (Sports and History Series), New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989.

to the construction of this thesis, because some of the theoretical issues that they discussed widened the perspective of the researcher. These gave the researcher and have provided this thesis a window of theoretical understanding and perspective of interpretation about the sociological and psychological forces which, aside physical historical events, animated aspects of boxing history in Ghana and Azumah Nelson's history in that sport.

Woefully insignificant in number were the major works that were identified which focused on the cultural and social history, and sociology and psychology of sports, recreation, leisure and biography on sportspersons in Africa. None of them touched on the biography of Azumah Nelson, which is the central theme in this thesis.

The few identified studies, like W.J. Baker and J. A. Mangan,⁵¹ E. A. Wagner,⁵² Ali A. Mazrui,⁵³ Anthony Deku,⁵⁴ E. Akyeampong and Charles Ambler,⁵⁵ E. Akyeampong,⁵⁶ and K.T. Vieta,⁵⁷ that touched on leisure, recreation, the relationship between sports and society, politics and economics and, sport personalities in Africa and Ghana, for that matter, did not focus on Azumah Nelson.

⁵¹ W. J. Baker and J.A. Mangan, (eds.), *Sport in Africa: Essays in Social History*, New York and London: Africana Publishing Company, Holmes and Meier, 1987.

⁵² E.A. Wagner, (ed.), *Sports in Asia and Africa: A Comparative Handbook*, New York: Greenwood Press, 1989.

⁵³ Ali A. Mazrui, "Boxer Muhammad Ali and Soldier Idi Amin as International Political Symbols: The Bioeconomics of Sport and War," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 19, No. 2, (Apr., 1977), pp. 189-215.

⁵⁴ Anthony Deku, *Sports Development and Organisation in Ghana*, Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1969.

⁵⁵ Emmanuel Akyeampong and Charles Ambler, "Leisure in African History: An Introduction," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 35. No. 1, 2002, pp. 1-16.

⁵⁶ 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*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 2002, pp. 39-60.

⁵⁷ K.T Vieta, *The Flagbearers of Ghana: Profiles of One Hundred distinguished Ghanaians*, Accra: EMC Publications, 1990.

In its collection of original essays by Africanists, *Sport in Africa* was found by the author of this thesis to have explored the social and cultural role of sport in Africa. Although Baker and Mangan, who edited the volume and contributed essays, are not known as African specialists, they assembled a valuable collection which treated “sport in inclusive rather than exclusive terms, covering a wide range of recreational and competitive activities” in the pre-colonial, colonial, and postcolonial phases of principally Anglophone “black” African history. In the first themed section, “Indigenous Traditions” John Blacking, touching on games and sports in pre-colonial Africa, brought to the fore the point that “sport” is a relatively problematic modern concept of debatable merit. Sigrid Paul provided a satisfactory illustration of recent Germanic scholarship in her paper on the social functions of wrestling. This paper, which examined the old and widespread practice of wrestling in terms of its social roles, showed that to the individual, wrestling brought prestige, rank, and status. It was a means of upward mobility. To groups it brought identity and solidarity. Wrestling was also a way to dramatize sex roles. Western observers who wrote about African wrestling, Paul argued, usually missed such attributes. In the estimation of this thesis, it is possible that it was the same lack of a complete appreciation of the functionality of combat sports that made the British colonial administrators, in the cultural milieu of Gold Coast, to see the indigenous fisticuff sport – *Asafo Atwele* – of Ga-Mashie as violent and to abolish it. In “The Biggest Game of All: Gambling in Traditional Africa” Thomas Reefe, realising that gambling has a play dimension, but is also closely linked to economics, religion, status, law and gender differentiation, concluded the section with a useful survey on that

activity, which although it has shaped African attitudes toward life, including politics and sport, had been virtually invisible in the analytical literature about Africa.

This thesis found the “Colonial Ways,” section of the work of Baker and Mangan refreshingly informative. The discussions in there highlighted how the colonizers in their attempt to select and control their own officials, as well as their subjects, used sport. These brought into focus the issue of sports and social and political control. Drawing on primary experience, Kirk-Greene indicated how officials for the British colonial service were selected for demonstrating character normally on the grounds of their sporting competence. John MacKenzie’s essay which demonstrated, especially in Zimbabwe, how the imperial “reserves policy turned game into a spectacle for tourists and a source of sport to the privileged few” had a special inclination to the school of hegemony theory. It showed that the European control of power redefined what were legitimate economic and recreational activities and for which classes. Terence Ranger, focusing on black boxing bouts in Salisbury in 1938, also showed how the imposition of an alien sport could fail to achieve the desired social control, as the recipient groups adapted the new practices to their own traditional culture and perceived needs. These writings reinforced the researcher’s contemplated notion and comprehension of sports as agencies of hegemony. Insights into that notion enabled the researcher to theoretically conceptualise and historically contextualise the phenomenal historic relationship of sports and hegemony within the explored history of boxing in Ghana and its relationship with the British agenda of cultural imperialism and colonialism in Gold Coast in this thesis. The last theme of the book,

“Contemporary Trends,” featured Ali Mazrui’s reflections on the gender gap in sport and demonstration that sport in contemporary Africa derived from Indigenous, Western, and, in some places, Islamic influences. Their interaction, specifically in defining the role of women in sports, had been one of Africa’s dynamic and unfinished processes. In that essay, he not focusing on boxing or soccer, argued for new categories of female sport – namely marathon walking, weight lifting, and purposeful and balanced carriage – as a means of increasing female participation. Bill Baker closed with a perceptive analysis of “the meaning of sport for national identity and unity, for international visibility and prestige, and for pan-African cohesion, and leverage” a situation with parallels in other parts of the world. The researcher of this thesis found the volume of Baker and Manger interesting and educative, yet, there was no space in the work for the study of personalities who have animated the culture of sports in Africa. Clearly a person like Azumah Nelson did not feature. Viewing sport as part of popular culture, which is “a site of ideological struggle where individual lives and experiences are involved in a process of interpretive negotiations with the surrounding social structure,”⁵⁸ this anthology, in the view of this thesis, could have given the theme of sport in Africa a broader thematic coverage and unity, by devoting a chapter or two to biographies of sport personalities. It would have revealed the dynamics of the individual human agency to the development of specific sports in Africa. However, the quality of the essays was found to be so high and the pieces of ideas they have assembled were so complex and

⁵⁸ D.C. Andrews and J.W. Loy, “British Cultural Studies,” *Quest*, 4, 2, 1993, p. 269.

informative that as this thesis took shape, through research, analysis and writing, the researcher was grateful that such essays were available.

Sport in Asia and Africa: A Comparative Handbook comprised essays written by a variety of scholars from diverse disciplines. They explored the historical and contemporary, the educational and sociological as well as the geographical and political dimensions of traditional and modern sports in seven Asian and five African countries. These case studies were Yemen Arab Republic, Japan, South Korea, People's Republic of China, Thailand, Philippines and Malaysia, Egypt, Botswana, Zaire, Nigeria and Kenya. Although the book did not develop any theory on the diffusion and practice of sport in Asia and Africa and did not focus on the Ghanaian experiences, the common outline of the arguments of the contributing authors allowed certain discernible patterns to emerge, which served as ideas that could help as the basis for theory building to the improvement of sport sectors of African and Asian countries.

The works of Deku, Akyeampong and Vieta specifically touched on aspects of sport history in Ghana. Deku's work outlined the stages of organisation of competitive "modern" sport within the national setting, where constructions like football, athletics, boxing, lawn tennis (tennis) table tennis, basketball, hockey, handball, swimming, cycling, cricket, chess, netball, volleyball, draught and softball were selected, particularly after independence, as tools for national growth. Akyeampong's "Bukom and the Social History of Boxing in Accra: Warfare and Citizenship in Precolonial Ga Society" explained that organised Western-style boxing met an organised indigenous pugilistic sport among the Ga. He contended that the indigenous fisticuff sport

played an important role in the warfare and nation-building history of the Ga. Akyeampong mentioned the names of some of the world champions who have emerged out of the Ga ethnic group. It is only then that the name of Azumah Nelson appeared in the essay. Through the lenses of the suburb of Bukom, the study shed some light on the role of boxing in the realms of gender, power, and class in the indigenous Ga socio-political setting. Akyeampong did not explore the historical and theoretical rationale behind the introduction of boxing, a cultural construct, from Europe to Ghana. Within the colonial agenda of the British, the study did not explore the political implication of its introduction to Ghana. While Akyeampong's work gives very important secondary information and insight to this thesis, this thesis in an innovative biographical way inserts Azumah Nelson into the history of boxing, and drawing on aspects of world boxing history, amplifies the history of Ghana boxing.

Vieta, who has articulated that sport can enrich culture and life, mould the character of individuals by inculcating a sense of discipline, tolerance, perseverance and industry in them and, engender innovation, excellence and good health in the individual,⁵⁹ dedicated a section of his book to a number of "distinguished" twentieth century sports personalities of Ghana. Within that frame, where he shed some introductory light on the place of sports within indigenous perspective and the development of organised sports like football and boxing under the agency of British colonialism. He also outlined the biographical and professional history of some footballers and boxers. A glaring gap exists, however, in Vieta's biographical outlines. Inexplicably,

⁵⁹ K.T. Vieta, *op cit.* p. 561.

Vieta did not produce any biographical sketch on Azumah Nelson, who, considered as one of the top hundred boxers of the twentieth century world, is indubitably, Ghana's most celebrated boxing legend of the twentieth century. This thesis has rectified that oversight.

Ali Mazrui, whose essays normally project rare thesis and thought provoking views, has an essay on the former soldier-president of Uganda Idi Amin Dada (who was once the heavyweight boxing champion of Uganda for about nine years), and the boxing legend Muhammad Ali, which explores their personalities and careers within the context of warfare and sports.⁶⁰ Mazrui started the essay with some rhetorical questions that at once brought into view the concept of bioeconomics. Did Idi Amin join the army because of a lack of alternative economic opportunities for uneducated Kakwa in colonial Uganda? Or was he helped by the prior attractiveness of "tall African specimens" to those who were recruiting for the King's African Rifles? Why have black people performed better by world standards in athletics than in most other sports and games? Does the explanation lie in the low economic status of blacks? Or is it partly a question of the physical attributes of some black "athletic specimens?" Did the food culture of the Gurkhas and Punjabis help to make them "martial people" suitable for recruitment into the Indian army? Or were there primarily economic differences between them and the less martial communities of India like, say, the Gujerati? These are the apparent questions that appeared at the beginning of that interesting essay. In that essay Mazrui pointed out that certain technologies – technology of production, destruction

⁶⁰ Ali A. Mazrui, *op.cit.*

and communication – helped Amin and Ali to become international figures. The essay, which was framed around bioeconomic questions and notions, and attempted to use the class, religious, sex and racial backgrounds of Amin and Ali to explore and explain the professional life and accomplishments of the two personalities, was innovative. That innovative attempt of the essay to explore and appraise the lives of a soldier cum boxer and a boxer attracted the attention and interest of the researcher and author of this thesis. Bioeconomics appeared to be a very interesting concept to the researcher and author of this thesis. Here the interplay and mixture of biological and economic factors are to be considered as possible enhancers of the successes of sport personalities. These factors may include the staple food of one's ethnicity, ethno-physiological constitution of the individual, the indigenous economic activities of one's ethnicity, and existing economic opportunities opened, normally, to members of a particular ethnic group. Mazrui's rhetorical questions and research endeavour, which accentuated the fact that the life and work of sport personalities could be explored and appraised from different angles, in a heuristic way, revealed to the researcher of this thesis that perhaps the study about the life of fame, in the arena of boxing, and accomplishments of an African sports personality like Azumah Nelson, should be explained within the context of bioeconomics. Nevertheless the researcher conceptually reconsidered bioeconomics and its applicability to the thesis. It came to the notice of the researcher that, for example, the attempt to use bioeconomic factors within the cultural backgrounds of Amin and Ali to explain Amin's strides in sports and soldiering and Ali's progress in sports, reflected in the analysis a watered-down extension of the highly contended hypothesis that

anthropometric and physiological characteristics of races tremendously contribute to their dominance or otherwise in certain sports. Such theories that have been used to explain “Black” (African-American) accomplishments in some sports like boxing, running, and basketball in the U.S.A. include what has been labelled as the Survival of the Fittest Theory and Mandingo Theory.⁶¹

It is interesting to note that a National Broadcasting Company (N.B.C.) special of *circa* April 1989 titled “The Black Athlete: Fact of Fiction,” which Tom Brokaw was the main moderator, asked the fundamental question: Are “Black” athletes better than “White” athletes? Sports experts and researchers were interviewed on the programme which examined the scientific and sports controversy surrounding the belief that for social, cultural and perhaps even genetic reasons, Blacks might be better athletes than Whites especially in sports like basketball, football, baseball, boxing and track. Some of the interviewees offered the evidence that the potential for superiority in certain sports could be detected at birth and in the early development of motor skills. Later it emerges in physical attributes that, as one researcher puts it, enable Black athletes to “explode more efficiently off the ground,” which is very

⁶¹ G.A. Sailes, “An Investigation of Campus Typecasts: The Myth of Black Athletic Superiority and the Dumb Jock Stereotype.” Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Alliance for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance in San Francisco, California, 1990, cited in page 481 of G.A. Sailes, “The Myth of Black Sports Supremacy,” *op.cit.* The Mandingo Theory holds the view that the physical “superiority” of the African American athlete evolved from the days of slavery. The theory posits that slave owners intentionally bred their slaves. This process required the mating of physically large and muscular male and female slaves. The offspring of this method of eugenics were physically superior to the commonly reproduced slave child. The child, it was felt would grow up to be a better source of free and effective labour. The disciples of this theory believe that this selective breeding caused the thighs and gluteal muscles in African Americans to become superior. This accounted for their superior jumping and sprinting abilities over their white counterparts.

useful for jumping and sprinting.⁶² Some theorised that Blacks dominate such sports where there is the need for excessive use of power, speed, agility, jumping and sprinting, because they have fast twitched muscle fibres which gave them advantage in such activities.

Regarding, for example, the issue and question of why there has been an apparent scarcity of Black competitive swimmers and laureates, the common theory, in the U.S.A. was that Blacks, naturally, were “aquatically” limited by, among other supposed design flaws, heavy bones, dense muscles, hair that retained water, skin that repelled water and pores that released carbon dioxide too slowly. “There was a theory that blacks had thicker skulls than whites and that was the problem.”⁶³ Buck Dawson, executive director emeritus of the International Swimming Hall of Fame, was reported to have said that “There was a theory about ankles. It’s not a flexible ankle. . . . Everyone called them ‘sinkers’.”⁶⁴ Al Campanis, formerly associated with the Los Angeles Dodgers, also theorised, in 1987 on the American Broadcasting Company (A.B.C.) classic “Nightline” programme that Blacks have failed to excel in competitive swimming because naturally and physiologically they lack enough fat to improve their buoyancy and so sink easily. Reportedly, “Because they don’t have the buoyancy” was his response to the question “Why are black men or black people not good swimmers?”⁶⁵ This drew much criticism from

⁶² Walter Goodman, “Review/Television; Are Black Athletes Better, and is it Racist to say so?” *New York Times*, (Arts), April 25, 1989, p. 1, <http://www.nytimes.com/1989/04/25/arts/review-television-are-black-athletes-better-and-is-it-racist-to-say-so.html> (Information was retrieved on November 7, 2010).

⁶³ “A New Pool of Talent” *New York Times*, April 29, 1990, p. 2, http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9C0CE1DD163EF93AA15757C0A966958260&sec=&spon=&page_wanted=2 (Information was retrieved on November 7, 2010).

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

the public as well as from successful Black swimmers.⁶⁶ What is interesting to note is that such theories which, attempted and attempt a justification of claims of race cum genetic-linked athletic abilities and reinforce racist folklore and ideology, and racial determinism, have been considered pseudo-scientific and stereotypical, as other scholars have emphasised that Blacks, for example, have either dominated or failed in certain sports in the U.S.A, because of specific social patterns that prevailed in their historic experience in the U.S.A. These included the presence or lack of role models on certain areas of sports, inadequate coaching and facilities, institutionalised racial discrimination which prevented many blacks from entering certain sport areas, therefore, forcing them to enter those that such barriers were not overtly or strongly present and where sports were held in public buildings and subsidised by public funding.⁶⁷ To such scholars, historical and prevailing social patterns must be reviewed when sport participation and accomplishments of personalities are being examined.

Mazrui's approach proved to be a very daring and inspiring one. Bioeconomics was very attractive to the author of this thesis. However, this thesis has not prioritised bioeconomics. It has not for example attempted to investigate whether the beans protein-filled *Akaraje*, which was eaten by his Afro-Brazilian ancestors, and the nutritional properties in his indigenous

⁶⁶ See P. Hoose, *Necessity*, New York: Random House, 1990.

⁶⁷ See J. Coakley, *Sport and Society: Issues and Controversies*, St. Louis, MO: Mosby, 1990, H. Edwards, "The Myth of the Racially Superior Athlete," *Intellectual Digest*, 44, 1972, pp. 32-48, S. Eitzen and G. Sage, (eds.), *Sociology of American Sport*, Iowa: Brown, 1989, G.A. Sailes, "A Socioeconomic explanation of Black sports participation," *Western Journal of Black Studies*, 11, 4, 1987, pp. 164-167, and E. Snyder and E. Spreitzer, (eds.), *Social Aspects of Sports*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hill, 1983.

banku and *komi (kenkey)*,⁶⁸ commonly eaten by the Ga, provided Azumah Nelson with genetically modified muscles and strength, to excel in boxing. Additionally this thesis has not hypothesised and/or substantiated that Azumah Nelson's fighting excellence in boxing, was because he inherited certain advantageous and superior genetic, physiological and anthropometrical qualities from his martial Ga-Mashie ancestors, and rebellious Afro-Brazilian predecessors, some of whom had caused revolts in nineteenth century Brazil. This thesis has avoided a bioeconomic reductionism approach in its analysis of Azumah Nelson's life, career and accomplishments. Rather, it has, in an elastic inclusive and holistic manner, considered converging and even diverging dynamic historical socio-economic factors, which drew Azumah Nelson into boxing. It has also examined and explained specific socialization patterns, even within the realms of such constructions like class, sex, religion and race, which conditioned his fighting spirit and success in that sport.

As the author of this thesis examined the history of Azumah Nelson, the researcher examined how boxing propelled Azumah Nelson from one stratum of the economic class. Being of Ga ethnic extraction, and from a socially underprivileged community and "less fortunate" family background, "why" was Azumah Nelson, specifically, attracted to boxing and ascended to wealth and fame via that sport? The interesting question that followed the above concern was, is it possible that specific groups and individuals are

⁶⁸ Banku is made from fermented corn dough cooked in hot water into a smooth whitish consistent paste. *Kenkey*, known as *komi* by the Ga, is also made from fermented corn dough, which is partially cooked in water, wrapped in corn or plantain leaves, and cooked in hot boiling water into consistent solid balls. The two dishes are usually made from *corn (maize)* flour, as are the Zimbabwean *Sadza*, Zambian *Nshima* and East African *Ugali*. Banku can also be made from a mixture of maize and grated cassava tuber. Unlike *Ugali*, the making of banku or kenkey involves letting the maize (or maize and cassava tuber) ferment before cooking, as is done with cassava tubers when they are made into *Baton de Manioc*. They may be served with soup, stew or pepper sauce with fish or any other condiment.

attracted to specific sports because those sports serve as markers of social class affiliation and tools of social mobility? What is significant to mention is that the researcher found it enlightening to make a conceptual exploration to interrogate and understand, within that frame of history and biography on boxing and Azumah Nelson, the forces that pulled him to boxing. In the quest to find an answer for and understanding to the “why” Azumah Nelson entered boxing, a sport which in the context of Ghana, has been dominated by Ga-Mashie, the researcher has tried to provide, in this thesis, an understanding to what connects one group of people, and their individuals to specific sporting activities and the roles, such sporting activities play in the reproduction of equality or inequality in society.

Bourdieu’s theories on “sport and social class” and “taste” served as important theoretical perspectives, which enabled the researcher to know those elements of sport and to comprehend them as they manifested in the context of an interesting Ga-Mashie-Azumah Nelson-boxing connection and relationship. In his 1991 “Sports and Social Class,” originally published in 1978,⁶⁹ Bourdieu⁷⁰ suggested some key points on the nature of sports. Among them, he contended that (a) “sport, like any other practice, is an object of struggles between the fractions of the dominant class and between the social classes”⁷¹ and that (b) the relationship between a social class and its sports participation depended on the spare time, economic and cultural capital, and the meanings

⁶⁹ A longer version was first published in *Social Science Information*, 17, No. 6, 1978, pp. 819-840.

⁷⁰ See P. Bourdieu, “Sport and Social Class,” in C. Mukerji and M. Schudson, (eds.), *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies*, Berkeley, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1991, pp. 357-373 and, P. Bourdieu “Program for a Sociology of Sport,” in *Sociology of Sport Journal*, 5, 1988, pp. 153-161.

⁷¹ P. Bourdieu, “Sport and Social Class,” *op.cit.* 1991, p. 361.

and functions attributed to the sports practices by the various social classes. The latter, according to Bourdieu, might be concerned with whether, for example, one wanted to produce a strong body with protruding muscles, as in the working class, or a strong, healthy body, “properly” toned, as for the dominant class. Additionally, along with any essential benefits that might go to the body, Bourdieu wished to add an appreciation of the “social value accruing from the pursuit of certain sports by virtue of the distinctive rarity they [members of social classes] (which the author of this thesis believed could also be *ethnies*) derive from their class distribution.”⁷² For example, the golf and polo practiced at elitist clubs, in the estimation of Bourdieu, “enable the accumulation of social capital” and are a “pretext for select encounters . . . a technique of sociability.”⁷³ Therefore, an indispensable part of an understanding of sports participation is the conscious and unconscious orientations of different groups, within which the individual exists, toward engaging in practices which they conceive as distinctive, potentially rewarding (economic, cultural and social) and has the ability to reinforce certain social, cultural, economic, and political positions, within the local community and general community. In *Distinction*,⁷⁴ Bourdieu’s sociology of “taste” attempted to connect specific classes or class fractions (groups and individuals) to a particular orientation to the future, which he called *habitus*. Thus *habitus*, in that context, is a system of dispositions (lasting, acquired schemes of perception and thought which ultimately determine action), which groups and individuals develop in response to the objective conditions they

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 369.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 372.

⁷⁴ P. Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984.

encounter. These outlooks are linked to these groups' relations to their bodies and to the adoption of specific lifestyles. In the context of sports, Bourdieu contended that since individual classes and class fraction had a different instrumental relation to the body, they associated that with their common sport preferences. The working class (which in the case of a colonial environment would be the masses of the minority nationality) preferred to have a taste for contact sports, (that which, as he states elsewhere, "demands a considerable investment of effort, sometimes of pain and suffering (e.g. boxing), and sometimes a gambling with the body itself"),⁷⁵ and the middle classes, especially the upwardly mobile, gravitated to activities that led to an attractive physique – a "body-for-others."⁷⁶ The dominant classes, [for example, colonial administrators and their auxiliary indigenous elites, within a colonial environment] engaged in sport activities that were played in elitist clubs with little, if any, bodily contact between competitors.⁷⁷ From that analysis Bourdieu theorised a general law that:

a sport is most likely to be adopted by a social class [group, people and their individuals] if it does not contradict that social class's relation to the body at its deepest and most unconscious level i.e. the body schema, which is the depository of a whole world view and a whole philosophy of the person and the body.⁷⁸

In Bourdieuan sense, habitus, generally, is central to social reproduction because it is crucial to generating and regulating the practices – life styles – that make up social life.⁷⁹ Individuals learn to want what conditions make possible for them, and not to aspire to what is not available to

⁷⁵ See P. Bourdieu, "Sport and Social Class," *op.cit.*, p. 371.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁷ P. Bourdieu, *Distinction*, pp. 212-217.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 217-218.

⁷⁹ P. Bourdieu, "Sport and Social Class," *op.cit.* p. 367.

them. The conditions in which the individual lives tend to generate sport, art, literature, food, and music dispositions compatible with these conditions.

As key aspects of his sociology of sports, Bourdieu elaborated group relationship to the body, and the connections between the locations of people in social space and their patterns of participation in, and attention to, different sports. So within the context of this thesis, the question of what accounted for or what was the habitus for the proverbial Ga-Mashie “taste” for boxing is a legitimate one. Historically did the location of Ga-Mashie within Accra, the urbanised colonial administrative capital of Gold Coast, where they had a first-hand contact with the colonial administrators who introduced to that space modern day pugilism, have an influence on this “taste” for boxing? Did their indigenous fisticuff martial art which was used to toughen their bodies, make it a Spartan-like fighting machine, settle disputes, instil a warrior and fighting spirit in the young men, influence them to adopt the Europe-originated boxing construction into their sport lifestyle? Why did Azumah Nelson, a Ga, develop a “taste” for the seemingly savage and violent gladiatorial sport of boxing? With insights provided by Bourdieu’s analysis about “habitus” and “taste” and the interpretation that the interplay of *group relationship to the body and group location in social space* are shapers of the ultimate *patterns of participation in and attention to different sports*, this thesis has managed to address these historical issues and sociological concerns.

The notion of habitus, which, links one’s social (ethnic) background to one’s likely (sporting) destination through a set of dispositions towards the future, which manifests the body’s taste, and also the “materialization of class

[social group or ethnics] taste,”⁸⁰ has partly guided this thesis in its conceptual analysis of the Ga-Mashie-Azumah Nelson connection to the distinctive sport of boxing. In other words it has guided this thesis to explore and trace, in an introductory way, the interesting conceptual and historical links between the ethnic background cum social origin of the subject, the pugilistic habitus of such origins, and the ultimate sport destination of the subject.

Although Bourdieu paid attention to social class, a broader conception of social origin, which would include ethnicity, has been appropriated, by this thesis in its examination of the social history of the sport of boxing and its relationship with the Ga-Mashie social group and Azumah Nelson, who is a member of that group.

Thus the Bourdieuan theoretical exposition on “taste,” which can be applied within a historical and/or contextual grounding for social groups and, as in the case of this study, for individuals who belong to ethnic and social groups, has innovatively encouraged this thesis to view Azumah Nelson’s “taste” for boxing through the lenses of the historic pugilistic habitus of Ga-Mashie.

Three books that in the course of the research emerged and showed that they contained information that had some bearing to the life, and professional career of Azumah Nelson, were *Azumah Nelson, The Professor: 12 Rounds of Boxing and Life*, *An African Biographical Dictionary*, and *The Boxing Register: International Boxing Hall of Fame Official Record Book*.

⁸⁰ P. Bourdieu, *Distinction*, p. 190.

In *Azumah Nelson, The Professor: 12 Rounds of Boxing and Life*,⁸¹

Telfer and Azumah Nelson have attempted to use simple metaphors drawn from the childhood days and difficult boxing life of Azumah Nelson as motivational aids to readers particularly students. Likening the inherent dynamics in boxing, such as hardships and survival, and success and failure to dynamics in life and suggesting that although like boxing, the journey of life, including endeavours like schooling, business and sports, is full of difficulties, the authors draw the attention of readers to the spirit of perseverance, hard work, spirituality, hope, confidence, time management, discipline and preparedness, which guided Azumah Nelson's life and made him progress from financial poverty, social obscurity, amateur boxer to world champion, international fame and acclaim, sports legend and national icon. The booklet which is made up of twenty-one pages, with illustrations, was produced to inspire and motivate people to reach their goals. Highlighting the career of Azumah Nelson as a testament that with discipline, perseverance and positive thinking any goal can be achieved the booklet appears to be an instructional manual to life, but certainly not a scholarly work that sheds an insightful light on the boxing career of Azumah Nelson and the social history of boxing in Ghana. Nevertheless, it provided some primary information which gave the author of this thesis an understanding and comprehension of some of the attitudes and beliefs of the boxer, which helped him to achieve a successful career and legendary status. Such first-hand information, which came from the boxer himself, assisted in the formulation of the discussion in the latter part of

⁸¹ Nii Anum Telfer and Azumah Nelson, *Azumah Nelson, The Professor: 12 Rounds of Boxing and Life*, 2009.

chapter four of this thesis, which has explored some of the factors which made Azumah Nelson to have a long reign as a world champion and an impressive record of victories.

The other two books contained short biographical outlines on Azumah Nelson. Containing “713 biographical sketches of historical and contemporary Africans from a wide range of field activities,”⁸² *An African Biographical Dictionary*, easily caught the attention of the author of this thesis. The researcher consulted it. However, it presented a less than one page undersized profile on Azumah Nelson, which was basically composed from information taken from the internet-based *Wikipedia*.⁸³ *The Boxing Register: International Boxing Hall of Fame Official Record Book*,⁸⁴ which is an official record book of the International Boxing Hall of Fame, gives boxing fans as well as newcomers to the sport of boxing something to study and enjoy long after their visit to the Hall of Fame. Touching on aspects of the cultural and social significance of boxing in the West, and deeming boxing, with judges, referees and gloves, as a healthy outgrowth of humankind’s natural instinct to fight, it was also found to be a book which contained snippets of information about the life stories of many boxers. The book only gave a brief run-of-the mill information on the boxing life of Azumah Nelson. The information which it presented lacked scholarly depth and insight. As a book, it was seen by the researcher as a nice reference material that could easily help visitors to the

⁸² Norbert C. Brockman, *An African Biographical Dictionary*, 2nd edition, New York: Grey House Publishing, 2006, p. xiii.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, pp. 371-372.

⁸⁴ James B. Roberts and Alexander G. Skutt, *The Boxing Register: International Boxing Hall of Fame Official Record Book*, 4th edition, (revised), Ithaca, New York, U.S.A: McBooks Press Incorporated, 2006.

International Boxing Hall of Fame to keep their memories, and those who are learning about boxing to be exposed to the excitement of the sport's unparalleled competition. However, for those who intended to have an understanding of the socio-cultural forces that shaped Azumah Nelson's life and career, the behind-the-scene politics that went on before and after his professional fights, the historical and cultural milieu in which boxing as a sport developed in Ghana, through English and indigenous inventiveness, and the political, economic and social ramifications and impact of the sports on the colonial and postcolonial eras in Ghana, would not find the book helpful.

The apparent absence, within the corpus of scholarly literature and the historiography of the popular culture of sports in Ghana and Africa, of a deeper study of the social history of boxing in Ghana and a detailed biographical work on Azumah Nelson makes this thesis an imperative and relevant one.

Methodology

Academic textual construction and the study of aspects of Ghanaian and African history should invite newer interpretations through the employment of a pan-disciplinary approach to historical investigations and writing, and explore new areas of research, themes, and focus. This thesis occupies an unexplored thematic area in Ghanaian historiography. It is a study which has explored the history of boxing and its contribution to Ghana's popular culture. On that path, it has added to the discourse on popular culture and social empowerment through sports. It is a history thesis, mainly in social and cultural history, and has contributed to the discourse on how sports history could be intellectualised as social and cultural history. Moreover, because it

has an analytical iconographical and biographical character, it has added to the intellectual deliberation on how the lives of historical sportspersons and their sporting activities could give insights into socio-cultural interactions, practices, and developments in colonial and postcolonial Ghana.

The thesis has established a cognate and secondary relationship with the discipline of cultural studies, because of its exploration of an aspect of the popular culture of sports.

Grossberg, Nelson, and Treichler have viewed cultural studies as:

an interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary and sometimes counter-disciplinary field that operates in the tension between its tendencies to embrace both a broad, anthropological and more narrowly humanistic conception of culture. . . It is typically interpretative and evaluative in its methodologies, but unlike traditional humanism it rejects the exclusive equation of culture with high culture and argues that all forms of cultural production need to be studied in relation to other cultural practices and to social and historical structures. Cultural studies is “thus committed to the study of the entire range of a society's arts, beliefs, institutions, and communicative practices.”⁸⁵

This thesis of historical enquiry therefore has, without abandoning its place in the discipline of history, moderately drawn insights and ideas from sociological theories and cultural studies, which have given it an interdisciplinary attractiveness.

The methodology and organisation of this thesis have been informed by the historiographical and conceptual concerns outlined above. The research work and the composition of the entire thesis took three years. The breakdown of the three-year period and the related activities in it are as follows:

- (i) First Phase – 9 months were primarily used for background readings of concepts on sports as a popular culture and social

⁸⁵ See “Cultural Studies: An Introduction,” in L. Grossberg, C. Nelson, and P. Treichler, (eds.), *Cultural Studies*, New York and London: Routledge, 1992, p. 4.

advancement, and biographies and literature on other sports personalities, elsewhere, in order to formulate a conceptual and organizational framework for the study.

- (ii) Second Phase – 3 months were used for the fieldwork, which basically involved interviews of resource persons.
- (iii) Third Phase – 3 months were used for the reading of archival materials and other primary documents from different repositories.
- (iv) Fourth Phase – 3 months were used for the organisation of the data collected.
- (v) Fifth Phase – 18 months were used for the write up and completion.

This historical exploration on boxing, and the biography and iconic imagery of Azumah Nelson, within the context of the Ghanaian popular culture of sports, utilized the qualitative method to facilitate a historical interpretation of relevant available information and historical records. Dealing with the story of a living subject, the thesis was qualitative in its interpretation of some of the contemporary issues related to the subject and associated with the culture of boxing and sports in Ghana. This thesis is constructed from a research which was based on documentary and non-documentary sources. The data collected featured primary and secondary data. The secondary were basically used to complement the primary. Involving relevant texts, the secondary information was also used to verify, support and reinforce the body of primary information and knowledge. The author critically checked and probed his sources and cross-checked documentary evidence with oral interviews and vice versa, in order to detect and point out gaps and

contradictions in the written records and oral accounts. The detection of discrepancies and gaps proved useful as they stimulated the researcher to identify new inviting areas and vistas of inquiry about the boxing legend by conceiving new questions to ask and answer.

Jan Vansina's pioneering work on the use of oral tradition as a historical source has informed this thesis.⁸⁶ Therefore the primary sources included interviews. Formal and informal interviews were conducted. Azumah "The Professor" Nelson, and some boxing pundits in Ghana, past and incumbent executive of the Ghana Amateur Boxing Association, (the G.A.B.A.), and the Ghana Boxing Authority, (the G.B.A.), like Samir Captan, boxing coaches, and amateur and occupational boxers were interviewed. The snowballing technique of collecting relevant snippets of oral information also helped the research. Some knowledgeable members of Ga-Mashie, Tabon community, childhood friends and, familial and social associates of Azumah Nelson were also interviewed. Most of the interviewees objected to the recording of testimonies, so the researcher took copious notes. Informal and interestingly spontaneous conversations through unplanned meetings, for example on public transports such as commercial buses and taxis, with sports and boxing enthusiasts with other people – familiar and unfamiliar – who possessed some knowledge about the life and work of the subject also provided information about this boxing hero whose "legend" is in the public domain. In conversations and interviews the researcher solicited views on the sport of boxing in Ghana, the reason why Ga-Mashie has dominated the sport,

⁸⁶ See Jan Vansina, *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*, H.M. Wright (trans.), London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1965, pp. 1-5.

the significance of Azumah Nelson to the sport and nation building, his childhood days, how boxing should be developed, major fights of Azumah Nelson, among others. Conversations and interviews were done either in English, Pidgin English, Twi, or fractured Ga. Some faculty in the department of Ghanaian languages in the University of Cape Coast, also helped the researcher to interpret and translate certain words, phrases and concepts in Ga.

Secondly, the observation of and listening to audio-visual materials, such as V.H.S. tapes, D.V.D., and C.D., and videos on the internet-based YouTube,⁸⁷ which contained audio and video documentary features on Azumah Nelson, boxing commentaries, interviews of Azumah Nelson, including pre and post-fight interviews, and interviews of managers as well as comments from boxing pundits and followers, his boxing opponents, boxing match arrangements, and behind-the-scene preparations of the subject personality, and most of his fights, proved very informative to this thesis. The audio and video media information provided a rich array of views on the sport, its place in Ghana, Azumah Nelson's person and career, and his fighting ways.

This thesis which has investigated boxing, the position of Azumah Nelson in the popular culture of sports, and the link between sports and social advancement, through biographical and historical and contemporary interpretative perspectives, also relied on certain related literature and

⁸⁷ Created in February 2005, YouTube has gained cyber popularity as a video-sharing website where users can upload, share, and view videos. It uses Adobe Flash Video technology to show a wide array of user-generated video content, including movie clips, T.V. clips, including sports, boxing matches, and music videos, as well as amateur content such as video blogging and short original videos. Most of the content on YouTube has been uploaded by individuals, although media corporations including the C.B.S., B.B.C., and other organizations offer some of their material via the site, as part of the YouTube partnership programme. Videos of Azumah Nelson's fights, interviews, and those of many of the opponents he fought are on YouTube. Unregistered users can watch the videos, while registered users are permitted to upload an unlimited number of videos. Videos that are considered to contain potentially offensive content are available only to registered users who are 18 years and older.

documents concerned with the above-mentioned areas. Printed articles and reports in Ghanaian and non-Ghanaian old newspapers, and those that were found as e-documents⁸⁸ on the internet, and magazines, and documents of the colonial administration became useful in the construction of this thesis. Those that touched on sports and recreation, particularly boxing, in Gold Coast and Ghana, and those that gave information about Azumah Nelson's in and out of the ring life were read and the relevant information that were found in them were analysed and used in the construction of the narrative in the thesis. Some of the newspapers were obtainable from the offices of Public Records and Archives Administration Department (P.R.A.A.D.) in Accra and Cape Coast in Ghana. Colonial official papers such as letters, and documents and correspondences of the different sanctioning bodies of sports and boxing in the country, from the colonial period to the postcolonial era, which rested as archival materials, in the offices of the P.R.A.A.D., which were found to contain relevant information were reviewed by the author of this thesis and used as building blocks for the narrative in the thesis.

Significantly, the P.R.A.A.D. in Accra provided majority of the key archival documents for the thesis. It is worth mentioning, however, that finding the relevant files and documents in that storehouse in Accra started as a major and difficult task for the researcher. The researcher operated in a repository where files and documents often went through the unending processes of re-cataloguing, re-numbering and re-filing, thus moving documents from one file and folder to the other. It therefore became vital for the researcher to identify, locate, and make a particular document the key

⁸⁸ Electronic Documents.

archival radar and road map to use to access the relevant files and documents, such as letters and minutes of official meetings, on sports and boxing in Ghana.

Fortunately the researcher found a long essay with catalogue number PW (Project Work) 8 that was lodged in the repository of P.R.A.A.D. in Accra and which, at the time the researcher visited the archives, contained an up-to-date list of relevant files which contained documents related to sports and boxing in the country. Prepared in 1999 by Antoinette Yaa Ansah and Gede Augustine Julius, in partial fulfilment of the requirement for the award of a diploma certificate in Archival Studies from the University of Ghana, it bore the title “A Descriptive List of Records of the Ministry of Youth and Sports 1949-1980 in the National Archives of Ghana.”⁸⁹ That academic project work, which had methodically created a listing form in its pages that had systematically identified the relevant files on sports in the country from 1949-1980, placed them under the record group RG9 – Ministry of Youth and Sports, and given them the class number RG9/1, also provided covering dates for the documents which were contained in each file and a brief description of the records contained therein. The project work and its endowment served as the radar and road map which helped the researcher to locate, in the repository P.R.A.A.D in Accra, some of the necessary archival documents which he used for this thesis.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ Antoinette Yaa Ansah and Gede Augustine Julius, “A Descriptive List of Records of the Ministry of Youth and Sports 1949-1980 in the National Archives of Ghana,” Diploma dissertation in Archival Studies, Department of Library and Archive Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, 1999.

⁹⁰ See appendix for copies of the National Archives Listing Form from *Ibid.*

Furthermore, other relevant archival documents in the possession of the G.A.B.A., and the University of Ghana's Balme Library, for example the Furley Collection, were also accessed. The snippets of information which such archival sources carried and which were found to be germane to the theme of the thesis were culled and used to construct aspects of this doctoral essay.

To this wide range of sources have been added relevant information which were derived from secondary sources of relevant published and unpublished works, including books, articles and chapters in books, undergraduate long essays, Master's theses, and doctoral theses, which were obtained from academic libraries in the University of Cambridge, and other accessible public and university libraries in Ghana and England. Others were obtained in print and/or e-documents from the library of the University of South Florida (U.S.F.) where the researcher spent five months, as a 2010 Global Academic Partnership Scholar, and wrote the first draft of this thesis.

The various internet-based search engines such as Google scholar, and JSTOR,⁹¹ were also used to access relevant websites that presented scholarly online journals and articles, and informative journalistic articles. Necessary bodies of information which were identified in such documents have been analytically mortised into the interpretative and narrative fabric of the thesis.

Organisation of the Thesis

In terms of organisation the analytical narrative that follows in the thesis unfolds over eight thematically ordered chapters. The first chapter is the Introduction. The second chapter carries the title, "Sports, Society and the Rise

⁹¹JSTOR is the acronym for Journal Storage, which is a United States-based online system for archiving academic journals, in cross-disciplinary fields such as anthropology, economics, mathematics, and the arts and sciences. It was founded *circa* 1995. It provides full-text searches of digitized back issues of several hundred, old and new, well-known journals.

of Modern Boxing in the Global Setting: An Introductory Historical Appraisal.” Chapter Three has the caption, “The Ga, *Asafo Atwele* and the Rooting of Modern Boxing in Ghana.” “Origins? *Mi Tabonnyobi. Mi Ga-Mashinyobi. I am the Son of my People*” is the title of the fourth chapter. The title of Chapter Five is “The Making of the Azumah Legend.” Chapter Six is entitled “*Rex of the Super-featherweights: The Azumah Legend Continues.*” The seventh chapter of the thesis is titled “Is it just about the pain (an ethos of Bruising)?” The eighth chapter is the Conclusion.

Although chronology is addressed, especially in the biographical aspect of the study, the thematic approach has generally conditioned the entire chapterisation process of the thesis. The reason for the essentially thematic narrative structure is because of the lack of an existing chronological foundation on which to build a social and cultural history of boxing in Ghana, which intellectualises the biography of Azumah Nelson and reviews the historical antecedents to and transformations of boxing from the classical world of Sumeria, Egypt, Greece, and Rome, to eighteenth century England, and its manifestation in colonial Gold Coast and indigenous Ga-Mashie.

Within the narrative of this thesis, each chapter picks up a particular theme that contributes to the making of a unified story line and the provision of an understanding to the conceptual and historical meaning and roles of sports and boxing as international cultural commodities. Such a story line also gives an understanding to the development of the sport of organised boxing in Ghana, boxing’s overt and inner social meaning and values within the colonial and postcolonial socio-cultural milieux of Ghana. Furthermore, the story line provides a comprehension of Azumah Nelson’s life, the social significance of

his boxing career and legend, and the cultural and economic ramifications of his out-of-the-ring life as a social person and activist, and a national hero.

CHAPTER TWO

SPORTS, SOCIETY AND THE RISE OF MODERN¹ BOXING IN THE GLOBAL SETTING: AN INTRODUCTORY HISTORICAL APPRAISAL

Introduction

The nature and function of play,² games³ and sport(s)⁴ in society, through time, have attracted the interest of physical educators, social scientists

¹ In the context of this study “modern” is construed as the period from the Age of Enlightenment in Europe. It refers to the period as well as the Europe-spawned ideas, cultural motifs, ideologies, and philosophies that followed that period and which, on the wings of European imperialism and colonialism, were sent from Europe to other parts of the world where European nation-states, particularly the United Kingdom, had captured territories. There is little consensus on when to date the beginning of the Age of Enlightenment and some chronologers may simply use the beginning of the eighteenth century or the middle of the seventeenth century as a default date. If taken back to the middle of the seventeenth century, the Age of Enlightenment would trace its origins to Rene Descartes' *Discourse on the Method*, published in 1637. Others may place the genesis of the Age of Enlightenment at the beginning in Britain's Glorious Revolution of 1688 or with the publication of Isaac Newton's *Principia Mathematica*, which first appeared in 1687. As to its end, some chronologers use the French Revolution of 1789 or the beginning of the Napoleonic Wars (1804–15) as a convenient point in time with which to date the end of the Enlightenment. For some it has not ended and has continued even into the twenty-first century. For the purposes of this study the beginning of the Age of Enlightenment, that is the modern era, starts from the middle of the seventeenth century. Modern boxing then refers to the sport of boxing which, having started and flourished as bareknuckle pugilism in post Civil War England, developed into English-style boxing and, through the agency of colonialism, spread to the colonial territories of the United Kingdom and consequently, drawing on some non-English ideas, became a globalised commodity. Thus, having manifested in the colonial territory of Gold Coast (Ghana) during the twentieth century, the present construct or sport of boxing in Ghana should, in the opinion of this study, be regarded as “modern.”

² By play this study adopts Huizinga's definition to mean, a voluntary action or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is “different” from “ordinary” life. (See J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1949, p. 28). Huizinga, also, adds that “Summing up the formal characteristics of play we might call it a free activity standing quite consciously outside “ordinary” life as being “not serious” but at the same time absorbing the player intensely and utterly. It is an activity connected with no material interest, and no profit can be gained by it. It proceeds within its own proper boundaries of time and space according to fixed rules and in an ordinary manner. It [can] promote(s) the formation of social groupings, which tend to surround themselves with secrecy and to stress their difference from the common world by disguise or other means. (See J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens – A Study of the Play Element in Culture*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1955, p.13).

³ This study considers game as a sub-class of play as have done Huizinga in *Homo Ludens* of 1949 and 1955, and Caillois (See R. Caillois, *Man, Play and Games* (translated by Meyer Barash), New York: Free Press, 1961). Game is defined as any form of playful competition, whose outcome is determined by physical skill, strategy or chance employed singly or in

and (social and cultural) historians alike. The culture of sports encapsulates the first two – play(ful) actions and games. Its socio-cultural role in time – pre-modern, modern and post-modern (contemporary) – for different localities and people have interested sociologists and historians. As a concept, cultural element, and tangible social institution, sports as an institution is,

an aspect of social life in which distinctive value-orientations and interest, centring upon large and important social concerns...generate or are accompanied by distinctive modes of social interaction. Its use emphasises ‘important’ social phenomena; relationships of ‘strategic’ ‘structural significance’.⁵

The study of its nature, relevance, and position in Western and non-Western societies, draws different comments and competing scholarly interpretations and definitions. While some commentaries present sports as a socio-cultural motif endowed with retrogressive and uni-directional powers, i.e. a hallucinogen and tool of oppression, which diverts the attention of the oppressed from “serious” activities and real issues in society, sports can, also be perceived in a different light. Sports can be regarded as an indispensable part of human and social life, having tremendous powers, which, harnessed and used, could positively or negatively shape society.

One person, who, from experience, registered the view that sports, depending on the user and controller, could be an oppressive tool to control people, is Frederick Douglass. After becoming free from pro-slavery south of

combination. (This is based largely on the work of Caillois i.e. *Man, Play and Games*, and J.M. Roberts, et. al., “Games in Culture,” *American Anthropologist*, 61, 1951, pp. 597-605.

⁴Sports as physical activities, in this context, are specialized types of game. Therefore, a sport, as one of the many “sports” organised, institutionalised or otherwise, engaged in by individuals, as activities of self-test or by competing groups or teams trying to outdo each other, is perceived as an actual special type of game occurrence or event.

⁵ Julius Gould and William L. Kolb, (eds.), *A Dictionary of the Social Sciences*, New York: Free Press, 1964, p. 338.

the U.S.A., he lamented that sports, controlled by slaveholders, became and served as a decoy, which was used to lure the minds and energies of the enslaved. In that context, sports enhanced oppression and prevented the enslaved who participated in them from pursuing more “useful activities,” and fully appreciating their horrible plight. According to him, holidays were spent in various ways by the enslaved and sports, as organised constructions, were consciously employed by the enslaving nationality to occupy the other on such days. Making the enslaved to play ball, wrestle, run, foot race, accompanied by merriments like fiddling, dancing and drinking of whiskey, with bets made by enslavers on which slave could drink more, was agreeable to the enslavers, because such arrangements induced the enslaved to forget about their deplorable conditions and not to think about changing that situation. That was the perception of a former “slave.” Of course, to Douglass, a product of the oppressed nationality, sports in that environment and how they were employed would be an undesired social construction.

Within the notion of hegemony, sports on the other hand served an important function to the slaveholders. From their perspective, therefore, it was desirable since sports had the power and functionality for achieving some desired result(s). Douglass, in that context, believed that sports and merriment, sanctioned by the hegemonic class, were, like force and whipping, among the most effective ways of “breaking” the Negro and “keeping down the spirit of insurrection.”⁶ The employment of sports labelled with the name of liberty, in that context, was a dose of vicious dissipation used to cheat, since they served

⁶ Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, Houston A. Baher, Jr., (ed.), New York: Penguin Books, [1845], 1982, p. 115.

as fraudulent conductors, or safety valves to carry off the rebellious spirit of enslaved humanity.⁷ The abandonment of sports, to Douglass, was a sure way to revive the self and to quicken the spirit of insurrection to freedom and real liberty. Although, we might disagree with Douglass's conclusion that the effect of sports gravitated in one direction, he, while operating from a particular American slavery environment, nonetheless was theoretically correct in recognising and pointing out that sports was far more than just games people play.

The use of sports as “opium of the masses” and weapon of control by hegemonic classes and majority nationalities against vassals and minorities is, for illustrative purposes, also reflected and evidenced in the history of classical Republican and Imperial Rome. Within certain periods of national political pressure and upheavals and economic difficulty, organised sports was employed, particularly at the metropolitan level, to shape public feeling. They were also utilised by aspiring politicians to endear themselves to the sports-loving masses. Additionally, spectacles of sports were employed by the politically powerful to divert popular attention from crises affecting the government structure. For example spectacles of games (sports) were cleverly used to shape popular feeling during the late Republic, which was an era marked by political upheavals and pressure, of which a changing social attitude of the discontented masses to the government structure was a factor. Commonly sponsored by elite representatives of the communities, they were staged in the circus and arena and became increasingly lavish, popular and politically charged shows, which the sponsors attempted to use to reinforce the

⁷ *Ibid.*

social order which included their own status.⁸ Aspiring politicians and political candidates also sponsored impressive violent and bloody sports spectacles, which were popular, as a way of bribing the masses to support them to gain political mileage.⁹ Understanding the political advantages of sports spectacles imperial leaders, like Julius Caesar¹⁰ and Nero,¹¹ attempted to use sports spectacles, which they sponsored, to enhance and popularise their political images. Nero even took part in some for self gratification.¹² Following The Great Fire of Rome in A.D. 64, which rumour among the populace implicated Nero as the arsonist, he made a scapegoat of the Christians in Rome to divert public attention from the national crisis. Nero accused the Christians of arson and made sporting spectacles of their execution to satisfy the masses.¹³

Of further interest is the fact that, in the context of Western colonialism, the institution of sports became a tool of the colonisers to support and consolidate colonial and imperial cultural control over the colonised societies. This situation, which was endemic in the context of the British Empire, shall subsequently be discussed in this study.

⁸ Marcel Le Glay, et al, *A History of Rome*, Hong Kong: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005, pp. 170-171.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

¹¹ Richard Holland, *Nero: The Man Behind the Myth*, England: Sutton Publishers, 2001, pp. 116-118.

¹² Pretending to have an aversion for blood sports, Nero partook in foot races, singing and poetry contests, winning all the events for which he entered. He decided to tour Greece in search of such fine activities. He set out for Greece to attend and compete in the Olympic Games A.D. 67. Despite falling out of his chariot, the judges rigged the contest and declared him winner of that race and for all the other activities he took part. He took part in the Isthmian, Nemean, Pythian and Panathean Games, which as an exception not the rule and tradition, were held in the same year for Nero. See "Emperor Nero – Olympic Champion," *The B.B.C. Homepage*, January 2001. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/dna/h2g2/A493> 689 (Information was retrieved on October 24, 2010).

¹³ Jürgen Malitz, *Nero*, Allison Brown (trans.), Cornwall: Blackwell Publishing, 2005, pp. 68-69.

Beside Douglass, Veblen, also cynical in *Theory of the Leisure Class*, perceived sports as a reversion to “barbarian” culture. Whether the leisure class (bourgeoisie) or working class engaged in them, they were “marks of an arrested spiritual [intellectual] development.”¹⁴ Regarding organised college sports, and sports in general, he observed that:

These manifestations of the predatory temperament are all to be classed under the head of exploit. They are partly simple and unreflected expressions of an attitude of emulative ferocity, partly activities deliberately entered upon with the view to gaining repute for prowess. *Sports of all kinds* are of the general character, including prize-fights (boxing) bull-fights, athletics, shooting, angling, yachting, and [other] games of skills, even where the element of destructive physical efficiency is not an obtrusive feature. Sports shade off from the basis of hostile combat, through skill to cunning and chicanery, without it being possible to draw a line at any point. The ground of an addiction to sports is an archaic spiritual constitution – the possession of the predatory emulative propensity in relatively high potency. A strong proclivity to adventuresome exploit and to the infliction of damage is especially pronounced in those employments, which are in colloquial usage specifically called sportsmanship.¹⁵

Veblen’s observation is myopic, because the human pursuance of the culture of sports has been largely done for recreational and positively functional purposes. Its powers are tremendous, and its uses enormous. A confluence of these characteristics, in different time periods and societies, have in many instances yielded very functional and creative outputs in the building and progression of societies towards harmony and peaceful coexistence.

Interestingly, Veblen, who theorises that the construction and institution of sports are antithetical to good human natureliness and social

¹⁴ Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, New York: The Modern Library, 1934, p. 253.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

civility, and unrewarding, is not the only one on such a line of thought. The personal definition of sports by Irvin Cobb, a twentieth century humorist, that it is, “Hard work for which you do not get paid”¹⁶ is also pessimistic and inappropriate. This is because, trans-culturally, sports, in a positive way, have been, regardless of the varying degree, a fund-churning and economically rewarding industry, which supports socio-cultural and economic development and self-improving agenda of countries, societies and individuals. Many wealthy people in the twenty-first century world are sportspersons in the competitive and traditional mainstream sports or extreme sports,¹⁷ or connected to the sports industry as product manufacturers, advisors, physical training experts, coaches, owners of sporting clubs and promoters.

¹⁶ H.T. Paxton, (ed.), *Sport U.S.A.: The Best from the Saturday Evening Post*, N.Y.: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1961, p. 74.

¹⁷ Extreme sports is a term given by Western media to some predominantly Western sporting activities – the so-called “action” or “adventure” sports, which are perceived to involve a high level of inherent danger. The exact origin of the term is unclear, but it gained popularity in the 1990s. When a sportsperson is at a certain risk while performing that activity, he/she is said to be playing an extreme sport. Some common characteristics of such sports are that they are rarely sanctioned by schools and tend to be more solitary than “traditional” sports. While they are not exclusively for the youth, they tend to contain a younger-than-average target group.

Extreme sports can be performed on land, in the sky, and in water. They often feature speed, height or physical exertion and a lot of thrilling and exciting stunts. Participants often compete not only against other athletes, but also against environmental obstacles and challenges which are frequently weather and terrain related such as wind, snow, water and mountains.

Extreme sports which are performed on the land include indoor climbing, adventure racing, aggressive inline skating, caving, extreme motocross, extreme skiing, freestyle skiing, land and ice yachting, mountain biking, mountain boarding, outdoor climbing, sandboarding, skateboarding, snowboarding, snowmobiling, speed biking, speed skiing, and scootering. The sky sports include bungee jumping, gliding, ski jumping, sky diving, sky surfing, and sky flying. The water sports include barefoot water skiing, cliff diving, free-diving, jet skiing, open water swimming, powerboat racing, round the world yacht racing, scuba diving, snorkeling, speed sailing, surfing, wakeboarding, whitewater kayaking, windsurfing.

Newcomer participants tend to work on their craft without the guidance of a coach. Whilst traditional sporting judgment criteria may be adopted when assessing performance (distance, time, score, etc.), extreme sports performers are often evaluated on more subjective and aesthetic criteria. Extreme sports may have gained popularity in the late twentieth century as a reaction to the increased safety of modern life. Lacking a feeling of danger in their everyday activities, people may have felt compelled to seek out danger or risk. Another reason for increased participation in extreme sports is enhanced sports technology. For example, the invention of sticky rubber-soled climbing shoes and artificial climbing walls broadened the appeal of rock climbing. And advances in ski design allowed more skiers to attempt extreme feats previously thought impossible.

Veblen and Cobb, among other contemporary theorists, made such postulations because of a circumstantial urgency of the twentieth century. That urgency was the concern of social thinkers and academics to understand the sociology, psychology and history of the culture and social construction of sports, its effect on character formation, social mobility, good health standards, political ideologies, social hegemony, social harmony, religious thought and rites, and, subjected to how it is harnessed and utilised, how it generally shapes society. This period produced some pioneering sociological, psychological and historical works that explored the functions, effects and different dimensions of sports in contemporary and historical societies. These included "The Psychology of Football" (1903) by Patrick,¹⁸ and W.G. Sumner's "Popular sports, exhibitions and drama" in the seventeenth chapter of *Folkways*.¹⁹ In 1910, Steinitzer's critique of sport, "Sport and Kultur", became a precursor to a series of debates published in *Ruch* in 1911.²⁰ In 1912, Howard also produced "Social Psychology of the Spectator."²¹ By the middle of the 1930s, this trend had gathered momentum as more works, which promoted sports as a subject of very serious theoretical, empirical and historical studies, and scientific research, appeared. This Western venture eventually yielded explorations on non-Western sporting cultures such as Stumpf and Cozen's "Some Aspects of the Role of Games, Sports and

¹⁸ G.T.W. Patrick, "The Psychology of Football," *American Journal of Psychology*, 14, 1903, pp. 104-117.

¹⁹ W.G. Sumner, *Folkways: The Study of the Sociological Importance of Usages, Manners, Customs, Mores and Morals*, Boston: Ginn and Company, The Athanaeum Press, [1906] 1907, pp. 560-604.

²⁰ A. Wohl, "Conception and Range of Sport Sociology," *International Review of Sport Sociology*, 1, 1966, pp. 5-17.

²¹ G.E. Howard, "Social Psychology of the Spectator," *The American Journal of Sociology*, 18, 1912, pp. 33-50.

Recreational Activities in the Culture of Modern Primitive People.”²² Contemporaneously, J. Huizinga, a Dutch historian, produced *Homo Ludens*, which showed the role of play [sports] within nearly every aspect of culture, from war to religion.²³ In *Man, Play, and Games*, R. Caillois, the French sociologist, moved further and classified games into four major types and endeavoured to show the function of each in society.²⁴ McIntosh of England, articulating directly to sports from an excellent historical perspective, drawing, in part, on the works of both Huizinga and Caillois, also discussed different dimensions of sports in contemporary society.²⁵ There have been other comprehensive works of that early enterprise. They include Nathan’s *Sport and Society*²⁶ and Magnane’s *Sociologie du Sport*.²⁷

Scrutinizing sports and its ever-increasing importance to social progress, Kane and Murray, in 1966, made an important remark for sports to be considered as a social phenomenon worthy of serious academic inquiry. They observed that:

There is no doubt that as sport becomes more and more an important social and economic element of mass culture, there is a growing need to apply the disciplined regimen of social science [and other academic disciplines] in examining the implications of the various forces, [people i.e. actors and spectators, organisations, ideologies, cultures, politics, international diplomacy, etc.] which have helped to shape its development, structure and organisation.²⁸

²² F. Stumpf and F.W. Cozens, “Some Aspects of the Role of Games, Sports, and Recreational Activities in the Culture of Modern Primitive People. I. The New Zealand Maoris,” *Research Quarterly*, 18, 1947, pp. 198-218.

²³ J. Huizinga, *op.cit.*, 1955.

²⁴ R. Caillois, *op.cit.*, 1961.

²⁵ P. C. McIntosh, *Sport in Society*, London: C.A. Watts, 1963.

²⁶ A. Nathan, *Sport and Society*, London: Bowes and Bowes, 1958.

²⁷ G. Magnane, *Sociologie du Sport*, Paris: Gallimard, 1964.

²⁸ J.E. Kane and C. Murray, “Suggestions for the Sociological Study of Sport,” in *Readings in Physical Education*, London: Physical Education Association, 1966, p. 111.

This concern, obviously, was borne by other scholars. Consequently, the progressive trend in the sociological, psychological, cultural and physical educational and historical study of sports, which galvanised academic interest since the 1970s has inspired several works written beyond the frontiers of journalism from workers of many diverse fields in academia in the West, Asia and Africa. Sociologists and psychologists, as well as those in physical education and recreation, have dominated that endeavour. Historians, however, have not featured greatly, particularly in examining areas like the interrelationship between sports and society, and the sportsperson and the employment of sports to affect social, economic and political changes for themselves and society. Apparently, this neglect and apathy is clear in African historiography, particularly in the historiography of post West Africa, where much focus has been on political and economic history, with social and cultural history, which encapsulate sports, recreation and leisure, barely given attention.

This situation where the study of sports from the angle of cultural and physical anthropology and history was neglected manifested also for sometime in the West too. Using the American experience as an instructive model to reflect that Western situation and explain that neglect of sports as an important item in cultural history, Stumpf and Cozens²⁹ posited that:

the lack of acknowledgement of sports as an important item in cultural history stemmed from the fact that sports was perhaps considered as not having any contributory function in many of the fields conventionally credited with making important contributions to history.

²⁹ F. Stumpf and F.W. Cozens, *Sports in American Life*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953.

Logically, such perceptions would discourage many historians and academics in general, in pursuance of so-called applied research-oriented topics, to avoid topics bordering on the place of sports within history, society, and culture. However, that situation gradually changed, and particularly from the 1970s there has been a proliferation of sociological and psychological works and studies of history on the place of sports in society. Although it appears that these two areas of studies took precedence over clear-cut historical interrogation of that phenomenon, the relevance of history in studies related to human society and culture are glaring in such prevalent studies. Such writings largely evidence the indispensability of history, as they, touching on sports and, naturally, the human society in which the phenomenon of sports resides, are normally unable to avoid historical analysis and narrations.

Much information regarding such writings, particularly the “sociology” of sports could, be found in such “histories” as those written by Veblen, Huizinga, Dulles, Krout, Holliman, among others, which span the 1930s to the 1970s and into the twenty-first century. Why do we, or should we, refer to such writings, which we identified as “sociology” of sports, as “histories”. This is not just a way of making a legitimate case for the indispensability of history in works that study human society. Calling them “histories” is logical since history, in a sense, is sociology in the past tense, a record of social progress.

From the 1960s Western sociologists and historians, in concert, progressively started to pay some scholarly and research attention to studying the role of sports in history. This navigated such “histories” into examining the

development of certain sports in the social historical progression of Western and non-Western societies. Furthermore, attention went to the significance of the Olympic Games, impact of sports, as a cultural motif (element of culture) and social institution, on global and local politics, economics, and diplomacy. Additionally, it gradually afforded greater scholarly attention to the writing of biographies of sports personalities whose lives and activities, within the realms of sports, effected significant changes in the politics and economics of their societies.

Remarkably, the plethora of such Western scholarship about the sociology and psychology of sports, and history of sports, largely privileged and paid attention to Western case studies. Minor attention was given to non-Western cases, with Africa receiving insignificant attention. Propounding theories on the nature, uses, functions and the place and role of the human and institutional agency in sports, and examining the history of sports and biographies of sports personalities, those works did not profoundly address Africa and Ghana for that matter. Such works that explore diverse and convergent theories on sports, and deal with conceptual issues such as sports and politics, sports and power, sports and gender, and biography abound. Additionally, there exist in a large measure those that deal with sports and racism, sports and ideology – capitalism, apartheid and socialism. They include those of Lynn and Gray Poole,³⁰ R. Thompson,³¹ R. Cashman and M. McKernan,³² T. Mason,³³ J. Hargreaves,³⁴ Shirley Glubok and Alfred

³⁰ Lynn Poole and Gray Poole, *History of Ancient Olympic Games*, London: Vision Press, 1963.

³¹ Richard Thompson, *Race and Sport*, London: Oxford University Press, 1964.

³² R. Cashman and M. McKernan (eds.), *Sport in History, The Making of Modern Sporting History*, St Lucia, Brisbane: University of Queensland Press, 1979.

Tamarin,³⁵ V. Paraschak,³⁶ David Remnick,³⁷ G. Jarvie,³⁸ J. Maguire,³⁹ R.D. Mandell,⁴⁰ J. Parry and N. Parry,⁴¹ and L. Shipley.⁴² Others evolve from B. Bradley,⁴³ R. Lipsyte,⁴⁴ M. Smelser⁴⁵ Robert F. Wheeler,⁴⁶ B. Majumdar,⁴⁷ B. Stoddart,⁴⁸ R.E. Washington and David Karen,⁴⁹ Art Evans,⁵⁰ D.B.,⁵¹ Stephen G. Jones,⁵² Jennifer Hargreaves,⁵³ G. A. Sailes,⁵⁴ E.T Pauker,⁵⁵ N.B.

³³ T. Mason, (ed.) *Sport in Britain - A Social History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

³⁴ J. Hargreaves, *Sport, Power and Culture: A Social and Historical Analysis of Popular Sports in Britain*, Cambridge: The Polity Press, 1986.

³⁵ Shirley Glubok and Alfred Tamarin, *Olympic Games in Ancient Greece*, New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1976.

³⁶ V. Paraschak, "Sport, festivals and race relations in the Northwest Territories of Canada," in G. Jarvie (ed.), *Sport Racism and Ethnicity*, The Falmer Press, 1991.

³⁷ David Remnick, *King of the World. Muhammad Ali and the Rise of an American Hero*, New York: Random House, 1998.

³⁸ G. Jarvie, "Sport, popular struggle and South African culture", in G. Jarvie, (ed.), *Sport Racism and Ethnicity*, London: The Falmer Press, 1991, pp. 175-189.

³⁹ J. Maguire, "Sport, racism and British society: A sociological study of England's elite, male, Afro-Caribbean soccer and rugby union players," in G. Jarvie (ed.), *Sport Racism and Ethnicity*, London: The Falmer Press, 1991, pp. 94-123.

⁴⁰ R.D. Mandell, *Sport - A Cultural History*, Columbia University Press, 1984.

⁴¹ J. Parry and N. Parry, "Sport and the black experience," in G. Jarvie (ed.), *Sport Racism and Ethnicity*, London: The Falmer Press, 1991, pp.150-174.

⁴² L. Shipley, "Boxing," in T. Mason (ed.), *Sport in Britain - A Social History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, pp. 78-115.

⁴³ Bill Bradley, *Life on The Run*, New York: Quadrangle, 1976.

⁴⁴ R. Lipsyte, *Sports World: An American Dreamland*, New York: Quadrangle, 1975.

⁴⁵ Marshall Smelser, *The Life that Ruth Built: A Biography*, New York: Quadrangle, 1976.

⁴⁶ Robert F. Wheeler, "Teaching Sport as History, History through Sport," *The History Teacher*, Vol. 11, No. 3, May 1978, pp. 311-322.

⁴⁷ Boria Majumdar, "The Vernacular in Sports History," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 37, No. 29 Jul. 20-26, 2002, pp. 3069-3075

⁴⁸ Brian Stoddart, "Sport, Cultural Imperialism, and Colonial Response in the British Empire," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 30, No. 4, Oct. 1988, pp. 649-673.

⁴⁹ Robert E. Washington and David Karen, "Sport and Society," *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 27, 2001, pp. 187-212.

⁵⁰ Art Evans, "Joe Louis as a Key Functionary: White Reactions Toward a Black Champion," *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 1, Sept. 1985, pp. 95-111.

⁵¹ D. B., "The Blacks and the Whites in Sport," *Africa Today*, Vol. 17, No. 6, Racism in Sport, Nov. - Dec. 1970, pp. 2-5.

⁵² Stephen G. Jones, "State Intervention in Sport and Leisure in Britain between the Wars," *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 22, No. 1, Jan. 1987, pp. 163-182.

⁵³ Jennifer Hargreaves, "Heroines of Sport: The Politics of Difference and Identity," *Gender and Society*, Vol. 16, No. 2, Apr. 2002, pp. 273-274.

⁵⁴ Gary A. Sailes, "The Myth of Black Sports Supremacy," *Journal of Black Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 4, Jun. 1991, pp. 480-487.

⁵⁵ Ewa T. Pauker, "Ganefo I: Sports and Politics in Djakarta," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 5, No. 4, Apr. 1965, pp. 171-185.

Crowther,⁵⁶ H. Edwards,⁵⁷ J. Olsen,⁵⁸ Cheryl Roberts,⁵⁹ R. Holt,⁶⁰ Tony Mason,⁶¹ and Michael B. Poliakoff.⁶² The few prevailing ones that have discussed sports in Africa in the sociological and historical contexts include those of W.J. Baker and J. A. Mangan,⁶³ Ali A. Mazrui,⁶⁴ Anthony Deku,⁶⁵ E. Akyeampong,⁶⁶ E. Akyeampong and Charles Ambler,⁶⁷ K.T. Vieta,⁶⁸ and E. A. Wagner.⁶⁹

Specifically, Akyeampong and Vieta explore aspects and issues related to sports history in Ghana. Deku's work outlines some important stages of organisational development of competitive sports in Ghana, where disciplines like football, athletics, boxing, *et cetera*, were selected as tools to enhance national social development, particularly after independence. Whilst Akyeampong explores the foundation of the English-styled boxing in colonial

⁵⁶ Nigel B. Crowther, "Studies in Greek Athletics, Part I." *Classical World*, Vol. 78, No. 5, (May-June 1985), pp. 497-558, and Nigel B. Crowther "Studies in Greek Athletics, Part II." *Classical World*, Vol. 79, No. 2, (Nov.-Dec. 1985), pp. 73-136.

⁵⁷ Harry Edwards, *Revolt of the Black Athlete*, New York: The Free Press, 1969.

⁵⁸ Jack Olsen, *The Black Athlete: A Shameful Story*, New York: Time-Life Books, 1968.

⁵⁹ Cheryl Roberts, "Black Women, Recreation and Organised Sport," *Agenda*, No. 17, Recreation and Leisure, 1993, pp. 8-17.

⁶⁰ Richard Holt, *Sport and the British: A Modern History*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, / New York: Oxford University Press, 1989.

⁶¹ T. Mason (ed.), *Sport in Britain: A Social History*, Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

⁶² Michael B. Poliakoff, *Combat Sports in the Ancient World: Competition, Violence and Culture* (Sports and History Series), New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1989.

⁶³ W. J. Baker and J.A. Mangan (eds.), *Sport in Africa: Essays in Social History*, New York and London: Africana Publishing Company, Holmes and Meier, 1987.

⁶⁴ Ali A. Mazrui, "Boxer Muhammad Ali and Soldier Idi Amin as International Political Symbols: The Bioeconomics of Sport and War," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 19, No. 2, Apr. 1977, pp. 189-215.

⁶⁵ Deku Anthony, *Sports Development and Organisation in Ghana*, Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1969.

⁶⁶ Emmanuel Akyeampong, "Bukom and the Social History of Boxing in Accra: Warfare and Citizenship in Pre-colonial Ga Society," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1, Special Issue: Leisure in African History. 2002, pp. 39-60.

⁶⁷ Emmanuel Akyeampong and Charles Ambler, "Leisure in African History: An Introduction," *International Journal of African Historical Studies*, Vol. 35. No. 1, 2002, pp. 1-16.

⁶⁸ K.T. Vieta, *The Flagbearers of Ghana: Profiles of One Hundred distinguished Ghanaian*, Accra: EMC Publications, 1990.

⁶⁹ E.A. Wagner (ed.), *Sports in Asia and Africa: A Comparative Handbook*, New York: Greenwood Press, 1989.

Accra and explains how an indigenous fisticuff sport culture provided a base for it, Vieta articulates that sports enrich culture and life. He posits that sports help to mould the character of the individual, by inculcating a sense of discipline, tolerance, the spirit of perseverance and industry, and engender innovation, excellence and good health and finesse in the individual.⁷⁰ These postulations feature in the sports personality section of his book, which gives biographical profiles of a number of distinguished twentieth century Ghanaians. Within that section, where a national icon like Azumah Nelson is conspicuously excluded, Vieta in a plain way shed a little light on the place of sports within the indigenous settings, and in an elementary and brief manner sketches the beginning of colonialism-backed sports like England-derived football and boxing in Great Britain's colony of Gold Coast.

Transculturally and globally sports provide important social, political and economic issues that should elicit greater research attention from academics. Apparently, sports have elicited some academic attention. However, the scholarly exploration of sports, particularly by historians within the corridors of African academia, is a burgeoning phenomenon and persuasion which is worthy of encouragement. This call to African historians in particular and Africanists in general to engage with the culture of sports would obviously elicit some questions from so-called conventional and normative historians, particularly in post-colonial Africa, engaged in political and economic history. These would include; what businesses have the discipline of history and the historian to do with sports? Why should the study of the place, relevance and effect of sports in society be of interest and

⁷⁰ K.T. Vieta, *op. cit.*, p. 561.

significance to the historian? Why should sports – the institution, organisation, disciplines, and human agency and actors such as sports personalities, promoters and spectators – in society be of relevance to the (African) historian, and not the sociologist in-the-main or psychologist in-the-main who can deal with issues like sociology or psychology of sports? Should the behaviour of sports crowds and the motivation of the individual and groups involve the behavioural sciences? Should the study of the customs, traditions, value systems, and economic aspect of sports not point to the social sciences? Should not the consideration of physiology, biomechanics and motor learning be considered by the physical sciences? Affirmatively, there is no doubt that behavioural and physical scientists like sociologists, psychologists and physical education specialists can study sports. However, the phenomenon of sports is not so small that it is only these specialists who can study it. The fact is that sports should not be conceived as an inelastic rigid social construct that cannot be a subject of scholarly scrutiny for the arts, sciences and humanities. It is, therefore, not a tiny phenomenon that cannot attract the attention of historians. Sports possess dimensions and issues, which could be studied and addressed from different research angles. These include aspects like sports and enrichment of life and understanding of culture, effects of sports on society over time and how sports has been used over time to bring about change and ensure continuity in the politics and economics of the individual and society. Does the study of these aspects of sports not fall adequately within the research and scholarly jurisdiction of the purview of the humanities of which history is primary?

In the study of human nature and affairs, much value can come from the historical study of sport in society, which is part of the quest for meaning, and value in life. According to Nathan, sport has roots in the humanities through providing life enrichment and fulfilment opportunities. It is an important interest of people throughout the world.⁷¹ When the total picture of sports in society is analysed, the field of study must logically be the humanities and by extension the social sciences. Sports, collectively, serve as an element of culture, and culture without history is empty. So regarding the interrogation of how sports, as a human orchestrated institution, impacts on the past and present of the individual and societal progression, this study is of the strong view that it can adequately be conducted and viewed from the angle of history.

In addition, there is more to “history” than kings and queens, viziers, presidents, prime ministers, or “great” religions, “great” inventions and discoveries, “famous” battles, and “great” depressions. There is more to the history of sports than hero and heroine idolizing and collecting of autographs and pictures. The concept of history of sports is a demanding and fundamental invitation to examine the role of sports in humankind’s past, how it shapes the present and how that relationship contributes to the ideological, political, cultural and economic progression of the individual and society. Within specific localities, like Ghana, the field of sports history can be used as both a tool and an object in examining the recent past. Contrary to elitist preconception of traditional history, sports can be one way, among many, for gaining a fuller understanding of our collective socio-political and cultural

⁷¹ See A. Nathan, *op.cit.* 1958.

past and present. In a pluralistic society, like Ghana, it is particularly important that historical studies be concerned with the activities of the many as well as the “few” and that people, particularly students, should have some exposure to such history. Yet the reality is that with the gradual erosion or removal of general education requirement, fewer students at the secondary and the tertiary levels take even an occasional History class. Society is emphasising “practical” knowledge and “applied” research-oriented subjects and students in tertiary institutions possess a negative attitude towards the subject and discipline of history, which they consider as having connections to dead dates and past events without any direct bearing on the present circumstances.

How to maintain students’ and public interest in the subject, and convince them that it is endowed with “practical” knowledge becomes a crucial task for all well-meaning and progressive academics and historians. One possible answer is a serious historical consideration of the cultural institution of sports, as a tool that can engender personal and societal advancement. What constitutes history is no more nor less than the sum total of human experience, and the construction of sports has, in the past and present increasingly occupied an important part of this experience in society, making Eugen Weber to observe in an article on sports in France that: “far from standing apart, sports were integrated and integrating activities, part of the contemporary scene, reflecting social and ideological preoccupations and very likely affecting them in turn.”⁷²

⁷² Eugen Weber, "Gymnastics and Sports in Fin-de-Siecle France: Opium of the Classes?" *American Historical Review*, 76, 1976, p. 72.

If sports can be a mirror reflecting society and a conditioner or socializing agent affecting society, then indubitably, there is no reason why sport, including the human agents in it, cannot provide a legitimate basis for historical study, i.e., the critical examination of continuity and change over time and how these, animated by the activities and ideas of individuals, affect the present.

The social history of sports and the sports order must emerge from the uneasy status of “popular cultural studies” and “sociological and recreational studies” to assume, within Ghanaian historiography, a rank as a major area of research in the history of social institutions, the transformation of social classes and ideologies, and the socio-cultural formation of identity and culture. Indeed, the study of sports, in the context of history, offers an exciting avenue for exploring some of the more fundamental realities of the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial Ghana. The historical study of sports, as individual disciplines and related institutions and politics or as biographies of sport personalities, in the context of Ghanaian history, can be of help in identifying and exploring researchable areas and shedding light on issues such as the place of sport in the cultural hierarchy in Ghana’s history. Additionally, it can help identify the factors that have influenced the status of sports in the society and how governmental support has affected its status. Furthermore, such exploration of sports, which like all physical activity has six-semi independent dimensions namely social experience, health and fitness, pursuit of vertigo, aesthetic experience, catharsis, and ascetic experience,⁷³ can examine its role

⁷³ G.S. Kenyon, “The Contribution of Physical Activity to Social Development,” *Symposium on Integrated Development*, Lafayette, Indiana: 1964, pp. 48-54.

in the development of the individual and society in the pre-colonial, colonial and postcolonial history of the nation state of Ghana. Additionally, it can interrogate whether sports are endowed with certain inherent values which naturally contribute to social unification, identity, recognition, control and/or support of the masses, national security, promotion of the general welfare, and wholesome catharsis. Again such an enterprise can interrogate the values of sports as an instrument of social good and find out if there is a relationship between sports – as physical activities, career, commercial industry, cultural element, ideological tool – and the development of individual and group value systems, and negotiation of personal, group, ethnic, national and international identities. Furthermore, such an enterprise can investigate if there are connections between sports and the improvement of race relations, suppression of asocial behaviour, provision of educational and economic opportunity, social mobility and self expression for the less privileged in society, outlet for recreation, recognition, and national and international understanding and good will.

The itemised areas above, among others, that problematise the culture and concept of sports should attract the interest and be an obvious concern of all engaged Ghanaian historians that are interested in the social and cultural history of Ghana. The understanding that a historical study of sports can examine the relationship between sports and social development is what animates and motivates the thrust of this study to interrogate, within the context of Ghana's popular culture history, the social history of boxing among the Ga-Mashie in Ghana, and Azumah Nelson's boxing career and its relationship to the shaping of popular culture and socio-economic growth.

This study, therefore, does not look at boxing as a mere form of leisure, bereft of the refinements of civilised entertainment and amusement, but, acknowledging the fact that there are competing perceptions related to whether the sport is primitive or not, provides and offers a fundamental reconceptualisation and rethinking of boxing as a bloody sport that should perhaps be banned.⁷⁴ This study views and presents the sport as a significant framework for shaping personal, group, and national identities.

If boxing and the life and career of a sporting personality present an area of academic enquiry, in fact, academic historical research attention, then sports, whether in the context of past and present periods of all societies, is of tremendous social importance. Sports therefore are not mere games that people play.

As acquaintance with the literature on sports history and sociology grows, the impression is strengthened that this is an area of cultural significance, which calls for extensive academic study. Contrary to any pessimistic view that sports does not have the same status in culture as art,

⁷⁴ See for example Jack Anderson, *The Legality of Boxing: Punch Drunk Love?* Oxon: Birbeck Law Press, / N.Y: U.S.A, Routledge-Cavendish, 2007. Jack Anderson assesses the legal response to “prizefighting” and undertakes an analysis of the status of “modern boxing” in both criminal and legal theory and practice. He posits that the legality of boxing is an historical anomaly which is rooted in the sport’s forced evolution from prizefighting to modern boxing which accommodates the use of gloves. Revealing that at the end of the nineteenth century the fistic sport was granted an “exemption” from ordinary law of violence because it was deemed a well and self regulated sport undertaken by mature consenting adults whose motives were essentially sportive, Anderson attempts to expose that “exemption” to contemporary legal and social norms. The work reviews some historical, moral, ethical, philosophical, medical, racial and regulatory issues associated with boxing. It concludes that, unless boxing sees some adaptation and reforms, which, enumerated in Chapter 7 of that book, includes bill of rights for boxers, ban on underage boxing, ban on blows to the head, financial and contractual transparency, education and personal development for boxers, fight passports for boxers and informed consent about dangers, a ban is the only reasonable response by law and society to professional boxing, as it currently operates.

music and literature,⁷⁵ and opposed to the assertion of some writers, like Brill that: “Primitive man, [whatever that means] likewise was too busy to feel any need of games. It was only when civilisation brought periods of peace and security to certain nations that games [sports] was invented . . . ,”⁷⁶ Cozens and Stumpf believe that:

Sports and physical recreation activities belong with the arts of humanity. Such activities have formed a basic part of all culture, including racial groups and all historical ages, because they [sports] are as fundamental a form of human expression as music, poetry, and painting.⁷⁷

They claim that: “. . . sports and games provide a touchstone for understanding how people live, work, and think, and may also serve as a barometer of a nation’s progress in civilisation.”⁷⁸

Sports, manifesting as physical exercises involving playful activities and games of social active leisure pursuits, and organised sports of playful but competitive physical or mental activity based on rules and norms, with object of achieving results, is a social institution. Using, for illustrative purposes, Boyles observation on the place and prevalence of sports in American society that, sports permeate any number of level of contemporary society, sports touch upon and deeply influence such disparate elements as status, race relations, business life, automotive design, clothing styles, the concept of the hero, language, and ethical values and, that for better or worse, sports give form and substance to much in American life,⁷⁹ this study contends that the

⁷⁵ The argument about whether sports are of artistic and aesthetic values or not has been made by Peter J. Arnold. See Peter J. Arnold, “Sport, the Aesthetic and Art: Further Thoughts,” *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 2, May, 1990, pp. 160-179.

⁷⁶ A. A. Brill, “The Why of the Fan,” *North American Review*, 1929, pp. 427-434.

⁷⁷ F.W. Cozens and F.S. Stumpf, *Sports in American Life*, p.1

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁷⁹ Robert H. Boyle, *Sport-Mirror of American Life*, Boston: Little, Brown, 1963, pp. 3, 4.

magnitude of sports in society as a whole, through time, justifies its consideration as a social institution. With an industry and mass popular movement, which can be referred to as the “sports order,” comprising the social organisations and human entities which organise, facilitate, and regulate human action in sport situations, it has enormous political, cultural, economic and social powers to influence people’s lives and societies in different ways. Sports have operationalised these endowments through time. However, the implication, nature and uses of sports can and have been perceived in different ways by people. These perceptions are informed by what sports has, within time, been used for by groups and individuals within specific cultural and social spaces and, generally on the global politico-economic and cultural scene.

Regardless of these variegated perceptions, there are commonalities and confluence of opinions in them. The opinions possess the notion that sports affect the lives of people in different ways. Apparently, students of the sociological and historical implications of sports are aware of sports’ considerable economic import, inherent political strength, increasing national and international political significance, strong influence upon clothing fashion and style of dress, and power to engage and control the lives of those committed to it.

In spite of the positions of Vernal and Douglass, let us examine other ways that sports affect society and individuals. Since time immemorial, sports, serving different purposes, have been an essential part of different societies all over the world. Institutionalised to perform social functions, sports have been connected to human physical developmental education. Sports have formed

part of the overall culture of society, and have represented and represent measures taken to make people healthy and improve their physical abilities. When observed from a humanistic perspective, it possesses a broad spectrum of benefits. It is a means to achieve good health standards and enjoyment, build strong character and confidence, particularly for the youth, since it has the potential to prepare and put them in a better position to meet the challenges in a competitive world.

Historically, and in contemporary times, sports have had a relationship with social organisation in preliterate, literate, modern⁸⁰ and contemporary ethnic cultures. It has had connections with politics and government including nationalism, social classes, economics, religion, education, military establishment, medicine, gender, arts, and science. For example, its relationship with religion down the ages has shown fluctuation concerning acceptance and non-acceptance of it in the sphere of religion. In some societies, sports were essentially perceived and pursued as ritual practices in religious and devotional pursuits. In others, it was considered mundane to relate to religious institutions and practices. For example in the immediate pre Restoration era of England, it was deemed antithetical to Christian principles and piety, and this for example can be found in the Puritanical ideal of no play in society and the unacceptability of that “profane” construction especially in Christian religious enterprises.

Presently, it has generally become very permissible in many societies and this reflects even in the educational training systems of countries where it

⁸⁰ By modern, we mean, or we trace its beginning to, the period of the Age of Enlightenment in Europe. For a fuller explanation of this term see foot note number one of this chapter.

is an integral part of the curriculum. In addition, the medical profession through ages has clearly accepted sports, in physical education and recreation for their values in preventive medicine related to physical and mental health. Indubitably, sports and recreation feature in therapeutic and rehabilitative service in cultures through time. Consequently, sports medicine which is a developing medical speciality, presently found in different societies, has increasingly become very concerned with the welfare of both the professional and amateur athlete.

Sports as Theoretical and Practical Tools of Politics and the Moulding of Ideology in History and Culture

Sports have related to politics in every given culture and have had a long relationship with military establishments and national security. The historical narratives of Sparta reveal sports as an important tool in the building of strong warriors. The development and pursuance of many combat sports in different cultures, for example sword fights, (fencing), wrestling and boxing in different societies,⁸¹ and Karate in Okinawa, Japan, Kung fu in China, Tae Kwan Do in Korea, were fundamentally directed at creating strong fighters to protect the security of those societies. In World War II, sports formed part of the training experience in preparing personnel for combat and service duty and used to maintain morale and fitness in different areas in the theatres of combat and in military medical rehabilitation programmes. Presently, like in the past, fitness through sports is considered as a primary factor in the maintenance of National Security in many countries.

⁸¹ The interested reader on the functional use of combat sport for security reason in some ancient societies can see Michael B. Poliakoff, *op.cit.*

Sports, as physical recreation, have come to constitute a major leisure time interest of many people – the leisure elites and masses – in different parts of the world. In an ideal world, sports are about sportsmanship and constitute a very healthy pastime in any society. However, considering how its power can be galvanised for popular support for national interest, and how it can whip up emotions and nationalistic feelings to create a sense of we-feelings among people, a question worth asking is whether sports can influence or has influenced the local progressive politics of modern polities and international multi-national political diplomacy. Therefore, are they – sports and politics – separate or intrinsically linked? The period from the end of World War I through the period, which saw the emergence of fascist powers in Europe to the World War II, witnessed fierce political struggles among major international powers who exhibited these struggles through sports. This political competition did not end with World War II. The end of that War ushered in a period, which showed the tremendous influence of sports in politics and vice versa, particularly on the international diplomatic scene, when many Olympic athletes, of “traditional” Western political powers and emergent global ones, were indoctrinated into the conceptions of national prestige and transformed into “soldiers” of sports. For propaganda and reasons related to political control, it became normal for sports personalities of certain powers, within the framework of national policy of making them perform excellently at international competitions to protect national prestige, to go through military training disguised as sports. Baron de Coubertin’s idea of reviving the Olympics to give modern sports a gift of new life became debased by the hypocrisy and veiled political intentions of his successors, many of who

were leaders of these international powers, who, without admitting it, seized the platform of the Olympics and manifested it into a field of international political race. Military training disguised as sports was basic in the Eastern bloc. However, it is a form of propaganda, which goes back to German experiments, which Adolf Hitler even encouraged during his regime. Sports was utilised by confrontational anti-government political elements during the Weimer regime to weaken the respect of the youth for the government and democratic dispensation imposed on Germany by the Versailles Treaty. In 1918, the illegal paramilitary *Schwarze Reichswehr*, which in a wider sense but unofficially came to contain auxiliary *friekorps* wings like the *sturmabteilung*, was founded to evade the military restrictions imposed on Germany. Evading the prohibition through measures such as hiding stores of weapons and munitions and trying to maintain production capacity by camouflaging it as civilian, it founded a “special” Olympia Sports Club, which formed a façade for its military exercises. It promoted the sport of small-bore rifle shooting and hand grenade throwing in universities to attract the youth from bourgeois sports. The would-be Nazi officer, General von Reechenau, who perceived sports as “war with friendly arms,” considered such martial sports as substitute for national service. For Nazi elements such sports of war, which was preparing the youth for an imminent struggle with the creators of the “diktat,” was cardinal because of their belief that “war was the most noblest of all sports.” Such so-called non-bourgeoisie sports were used to seduce the youth, which Joseph Goebbels, in the weekly *Das Reich*, believed would prepare them for “Der Tag.”⁸² Gustav Stresemann, who became

⁸² “Der Tag” means “The Day.” It can be construed as the Nazi propaganda reference for the

chancellor in August 1923, had declared that the Weimer Republic would not bring up an aristocracy of biceps. Such a statement drove many of the adventurous youth, who were attracted to the non-bourgeoisie sports, to leaders who were ready to make use of them in creating an aristocracy of biceps. Consequently, Hitler and the Nazi Regime would accept most young German sports leaders of the Weimer Republic because they had already joined that rank.

Hitler did not actively partake in sports. However, he, like Mussolini, another Fascist, used sports for political propaganda and control. Hitler wanted to use sports to improve German physical fitness for military purposes, motherhood, and boost national prestige in international sports competitions. Mussolini who was showily athletic, could bare his chest on an alpine ski slope and pose as a model for young fascists ostensibly in an attempt to present a sporting image of himself to encourage the young fascists to do well at international engagements for Italy and also win their support and sharpen his political popularity.⁸³

As a Nazi policy, participation in sports and “play” was a duty towards the State so that the youth would unite to create an army of strong young men and women. The Third Reich in pursuance of nationalist agenda made propaganda with the Olympic Games in Berlin in 1936. Hitler stood in the

Nazi-planned doomsday for the non-Aryan world and the conquest of all non-Nazi German elements and spaces in and outside Germany

⁸³ Some early accounts of the theory and practice of the fascist regimes sports programme appears in Felice Fabrizio, *Sport e fascismo*, Rimini-Firenze: Guaraldi, 1976, and Victoria De Grazia, *The Culture of Consent*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981. Participation of young women in sports, despite opposition from the Roman Catholic Church, was encouraged by the fascists. Fascist Italy's international sports relations are discussed in Angela Teja, “Italian Sport and International Relations under Fascism,” in Pierre Arnaud and James Riordan (eds.), *Sport and International Politics, The Impact of Fascism and Communism on Sport*, London: Spon Press, Taylor and Francis Group, 1998, pp. 147-167.

Olympic arena and made huge political capital for the Nazi Regime. Leni Riefenstahl's⁸⁴ film documentary *Olympia* reveals how Hitler and Goebbels used the spectacle for Nazi political propaganda and fallacy of Aryan superiority. It was on that platform that Hitler, as a way of symbolically reiterating his idea of Aryan superiority, for example refused to congratulate Jesse Owens for his quadruple winning because he was "subhuman."⁸⁵

Communist regimes used sport in a political manner to exactly the same ends as the Fascist. In communist Eastern Europe, it was not the 'oasis of freedom'. It was an incubator of 'New Socialist Man'. It was used to grow and sustain communist ideas. Therefore, huge resources were used to support sport in the communist world culminating in the Moscow Olympics, which many countries decided to boycott in 1980, due to the invasion of Afghanistan.

Sports have also become and been used, as a political tool, by "minorities" and sympathisers to challenge positions and power of hegemonic groups. In recent years of apartheid in South Africa, sports and politics were conjoined in the global quest to destroy that regime. Sportspersons who dared to compete in South Africa consequently were prohibited from competing

⁸⁴ Leni Riefenstahl, alias Helene Berta Amelia, was a famous filmmaker in Germany. Hitler, as chancellor of Germany, appointed her to be the Film Expert for the Nazi Party and commissioned her to make a number of propaganda films for the Nazi regime.

⁸⁵ Hajo Bernett has produced various works that examine the role of sports in Germany under Nazism. Bernett has exposed Nazi political instrumentalisation of sports and condemned the utter acceptance of such implementation on the part of "bourgeois" sports administrators who previously had upheld the notion that "Politics should not interfere with sports." Additionally, he rejected neo-Marxist argument that sports are inherently repressive and assumed that modern sports represented a positive phenomenon. However, he has repeatedly bashed their "misuse" by political systems. The interested reader can see works like Hajo Bernett (ed.), *Nationalsozialistische Leibeserziehung*, Schorndorf: Hofmann, 1966, *Sportpolitik im Dritten Reich*, Schorndorf: Hofmann, 1971, *Untersuchungen zur Zeitgeschichte des Sports*, Schorndorf, 1973, *Der jüdische Sport im Nationalsozialistischen Deutschland, 1933-1938*, Schorndorf: Hofmann, 1978, *Der Weg des Sports in die Nationalsozialistische Diktatur*, Schorndorf: Hofmann, 1983, *Sportunterricht in der Nationalsozialistischen Schule*, Sankt Augustin: H. Richarz, 1985. In continuity, Hans-Joachim Teichler also examines sports during the Nazi era in *Internationale Sportpolitik im Dritten Reich*, Schorndorf: Karl Hofmann, 1991.

anywhere else. Consequently, prior to the demise of *apartheid*, a whole generation of South African sportspersons were confined to South Africa and prohibited from competing elsewhere.⁸⁶ Indubitably, sports and politics are miscible categories. The overt political implications of sports and the many political controversies that have occurred in history, and will continue to occur, within and around the domain of sports, suggest that sports has been hijacked by politics and that the miscibility of the two is highly prevalent. Clearly, sports and the human agencies that animate it have influenced and shaped the political progression and history of the world. It continues to do so and in that regard we can contend that sports, with its order, is a maker and mover of history.

Socialism (East) vrs Capitalism (West): The Position of the Sports Order and Institution in an Ideologically Bi-polar World in the Twentieth Century

The miscibility of sports and politics was also evident in the Cold War era international diplomacy. The post-World War II ideology-spawned Cold War made sports, which can be an integral part of state policy, an important weapon and stage for contenders in that war. The main contenders were the U.S.A.-led Western bloc, representing capitalism and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.)-led Eastern communism-socialism bloc. Evidently, in relation to foreign policy, where winnings in sports represented measures of ideological vitality and national prestige, accomplishments in sports served as an unobtrusive form of ideological propaganda for the blocs.

⁸⁶ Ben Freeth, "Justice for Agriculture," *Open Letter Forum*, No. 20, (Sport and politics and injustice), January 26, 2003.

Consequently ‘international competitive sports in a bi-polar world became an arena for ideologies, mirroring the same tensions that were seen throughout the world on the purely political plane.’⁸⁷ In that bi-polar world, where a nuclear impasse and an intensified “battle for the minds of people” existed, sports became, particularly from 1950, an area of enormous significance. A report by UNESCO, during the 1950s, commented on the increasing ‘politicisation’ of international sports. Referencing the politicizing of international sports since the 1939-1945 war, the report mentioned how increasingly athletic and games supremacy had, in some cases, “become the *sine qua non* of general national superiority.”⁸⁸ The report further revealed “modern Olympic games are now regarded by many as merely a testing ground for great political [and ideological] units”⁸⁹ This assertion had validity. In 1963, Indonesia was banned from the Olympic community by the International Olympic Committee, (I.O.C.) for not issuing visas, due to political reasons, to athletes of Nationalist China and Israel to attend the IVth Asian Games in Djakarta. Indonesia saw it as Western capitalist big brother conspiracy. In retaliation President Sukharno, on February 13, 1963, declared to the supra-party national organisation, the National Front Committee that:

As President of the Republic of Indonesia, Supreme Commander of the Republic of Indonesia, as great leader of the Indonesian revolution, and as supreme leader of the National Front, I now order Indonesia: Quit the I.O.C. . . . Brothers, besides my order to quit the I.O.C. I also order: Organize as fast as possible GANEFO, the Games of the New Emerging Forces – Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the socialist

⁸⁷ See J.W. Loy and G.S. Kenyon (eds.), *Sport, Culture and Society*, London: Macmillan, 1969, p. 206.

⁸⁸ *The Place of Sport in Education*, Paris: UNESCO, 1956, p. 55. A PDF version can be obtained from <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0006/000645/064562Eo.pdf>. (Information was retrieved on October 16, 2010).

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

countries . . . Pak Bandrio⁹⁰ has clearly said that sports cannot be separated from politics. Therefore, let us now work for a sports association on the basis of politics. We do not want to put on any masks; let us create a sports association on the basis of the new emerging forces.⁹¹

Sukharno, with the support of U.S.S.R., demonstrated the polarisation of sports for ideological warfare when he said that:

the international Olympic Games had proved to be an imperialistic tool. They are said to have sports without politics in the Olympic Games, to have them only among nations who are not communistic, who are not against imperialism, colonialism and the I.O.C., has excluded Indonesia from the International Olympic Committee, because we have not behaved pleasantly to their concept. Now after that experience we Indonesians thought, let us better speak frankly . . . When they excluded Communist China, is that not politics? When they are not friendly to the U.A.R., is that not politics? When they are not friendly to North Korea, is that not politics? When they exclude North Vietnam, is that not politics? I propose to be frank. Now let's frankly say, sports have something to do with politics, and let us now establish the Games of the New Emerging Forces, the GANEFO . . . against the Old Established Order.⁹²

Because sports by its nature appears superficially apolitical and readily understandable; can excite nationalist instincts and encourage group identification; take place across racial, class, religious and national lines; and through modern means of communication, sporting spectacles can be transmitted throughout the world, it, in national and world affairs, became a propaganda weapon for statesmen in East and West. This represented another modern method of psychological warfare. For the East, the deepening and widening influence of socialist sports on the condition and trends in the world

⁹⁰ This familiar term was in reference of Subandrio, the Foreign Minister in the Indonesian Cabinet.

⁹¹ George Modelski (ed.), *The New Emerging Forces, Documents on the Ideology of Indonesian Foreign Policy*, Department of International Relations, Canberra: Australian National University, 1963, pp. 88, 89.

⁹² *GANEFO Bulletin*, No.1, July 1963, pp. 3-4.

sports movement was considered as one of the best and most comprehensible means of explaining to the masses, within the Soviet domain and the world, the advantages, which the socialist system had over capitalism.⁹³ Within the Soviet Union, and countries that favoured state-socialist systems, the sports movement was fully integrated into the social and political system and thus became an instrument of governmental policies.

The Soviet bloc's perception of sports was highly conditioned by Marx and Lenin's philosophy on physical culture. Marx did not subscribe to the dualist metaphysical thought, which separated mind from body. These to Marx were related. Marx posited that human (mind) consciousness (thoughts, ideas, mental outlook) did not determine human existence; rather it was the social existence (material world) and self (body) that determined the human consciousness.⁹⁴ If the material world determined the mental forms, ideas and images, then anything that happened to and shaped the former affected the latter. This Marxist thought contained implication for recreation and sports. Since the human psychosomatic organism forms and transforms under exterior circumstances, (which it in turn affects and shapes) including social and personal environment, subjection to physical education (sports), develops that part of the body (mind) and the body as a whole (personality) which in turn is the greatest asset to society, directing its building, nature and formation. In the context of Marxist thought there is, evidently, a link between social and individual development and between the physical and mental development of

⁹³ Y.A. Talayev, "Sport – oblast' mirnovo sorevnovaniya," *Teoriya i praktika fizicheskoi kul'tury*, 1973, No. 1, p. 8 as noted in James Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977, p. 350.

⁹⁴ K. Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*, Chicago: Charles H. Kerr Publishing, 1904, pp. 11-12.

the individual. Societies are likely to, and must, like the Soviet society, aim to shape this development, by supervising physical culture, including sports, to regulate it to affect the physical and mental personalities of the people and shape their economic, social and political environment.

In the context of modern liberal capitalist societies, and those that it controlled, and culturally attempted to shape, such as colonies, the ideology on the contrary was that of so-called “independent” decision making and “free” contracting between “equal “ social atoms (person). In such a context, it would appear to be a concern of the individual, a feature of life unconnected with classes and social values, and economics and society’s mode of production. Yet its power as “opium of the masses,” which can shape the outlook of the masses and direct them, and achieve specific goals in the interest of the establishment, is known and used by establishments in so-called “liberal” capitalist societies.

Within the Marxist framework, sports form part of the social superstructure. Not separate from politics and economics, it is influenced by prevailing relations of production. Since bad sports can adversely affect body and mind, and consequently society’s politics, environment, and production, sports, which have influence on society and production, must be encouraged but supervised by the state to ensure that they promote healthy bodies, minds, economics, politics and socialist development agenda.

Like labour, sports are practical and influence human development in the broadest sense including society’s economic relations. Labour makes humans to associate with nature, organise, and direct the material reaction between themselves and nature, - appropriating nature’s creation in a structure

modified to his own wants. By acting (labouring) on the external world and changing it, humans simultaneously change their nature.⁹⁵ A study of early bourgeoisie society, revealed to Marx that production could be inhibited and was inhibited by, among other things, the denial, to workers, time for recreation, which would help to revive their energy for production and make it more efficient. Workers, therefore, needed free time - not for pleasure alone but ultimately for recuperation so that they would apply their energised selves more vigorously to productive work after reasonable work and recreation – games and other leisure pursuits (sports). Since such recreative activities could produce resourceful individuals who are healthy in body and mind, Marx believed that the educational system of the future should provide a balanced all-round education in which physical education would be an integral part. The structure would include the training of the mind and body, i.e., mental and bodily education obtainable from, for example, schools of gymnastics and military exercise, and technological training.⁹⁶ Logically, Marx was in support of an educational system that combined mental and physical education with manual labour, not only as one of the methods of adding to the good organisation of production but as the only technique of producing fully

⁹⁵ K. Marx, *Capital*, Vol. 1. Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1961, p. 177.

⁹⁶ See K. Marx, "Instructions for the Delegates for the Provisional General Council. The Different Questions," *International Courier*, Nos. 6/7, February 20, and Nos. 8/10, March 13, 1867, especially the section on Juvenile and Children's Labour (both sexes). Electronic text available on <http://www.marxist.org/history/international/iwma/documentts/1866/instructions.htm#04> (Information was accessed on September 29, 2010). The "Instructions" were first appeared in *Der Vorbote* Nos. 10 and 11, October and November 1866. According to Micheline Ishay, Karl Marx wrote these instructions for the General Council's own delegates to the Geneva Congress of the International Working Men's Association, (an international communist organisation) which was held in Geneva in September 1866. The "Instructions" were read out at the Congress as the General Council's report and published in the *International Courier* the General Council's official organ on February 20 and March 13, 1867. See Micheline Ishay, *The Human Right Reader*, New York: Routledge, 1997, p. 210.

developed human beings.⁹⁷ Therefore, recreation under communism was not simply games but work-like activities with play (sports), to be selected and pursued for their inherent pleasures and practical results, which include the positive shaping of the personality. Incidentally Leon Trotsky also philosophised that:

the character of a child is revealed and formed in its play. The character of an adult is clearly manifested in his play and amusements [sports]. But in forming the character of a whole class . . . like the proletariat [soviet society], amusements and play [including sports] ought to occupy a prominent position.⁹⁸

Furthermore Trotsky added that:

The longing for amusement, [including sport activities] distraction, sight seeing and laughter is the most legitimate desire of human nature. We are able, and indeed obliged, to give the satisfaction of this desire a higher artistic quality, at the same time making amusement a weapon of collective education (instruction) [for personal and social formation and improvement and production within the working class (soviet society)].⁹⁹

Vladimir Ilych Lenin also believed that work and physical recreation were interdependent and that the playful use of energy, if directed well, could contribute to self-realisation and development of the personality and production in society. He loved sports and physical fitness. As a child, he indulged in shooting, skating, walking, climbing mountains and cycling.¹⁰⁰ He came to value fitness as a stimulant to mental alertness and “did gymnastics

⁹⁷ K. Marx, *Capital*, *op.cit.*, pp. 483-484.

⁹⁸ See Leon Trotsky, “Vodka, the Church and the Cinema,” *Pravda*, July 12, 1923. Transcribed and HTML (HyperText Markup Language) online by Sally Ryan, May 2, 2007, http://www.marxists.org/archive/trotsky/women/life/23_07_12.htm (Information was accessed on September 29, 2010).

⁹⁹ Leon Trotsky, *Problems of Everyday Life*, New York: Monad Press, 1973, p. 32. See also Leon Trotsky, “Vodka, the Church and the Cinema,” *Pravda*, July 12, 1923, online by Sally Ryan, *op.cit.*

¹⁰⁰ R.B. Lockhart, *Giants Cast Long Shadows*, London: Putnam, 1960, p. 134.

with great pleasure and value everyday.”¹⁰¹ He exercised and played chess.¹⁰² In his writings on the subject of sports and physical culture, he favoured mental and physical education as the germ of the education of the future and the all-round development of the individual.¹⁰³ Having emphasised that “the youth should . . . make use of wrestling, work, studies, sport, merrymaking, singing and dreaming,”¹⁰⁴ Lenin also accentuated the value of activities like cavalry training, skiing, cycling and water sports and [at the height of the Civil War] the need to use pre-military training for labour as well as the aims of war.¹⁰⁵ Perceived as a tool for emancipating women in socialist/communist societies, drawing them into public activity, to relatively quickly achieve a measure of equality with men and be seen to do so, Lenin, it is reported, asserted that:

It is our urgent duty task to draw working women into sport. . . . If we can achieve that and get them to make full use of the sun, water and air for fortifying themselves we shall bring an entire revolution to Russian way of life.¹⁰⁶

Lenin believed that within socialism and complete communism, everyone would have the chance to choose a physical activity to pursue and attain complete self-realisation, meet their needs as members of the society, and ensure complete welfare and free all-round development of all members

¹⁰¹ James Riordan, *Sport in Soviet Society*, *op.cit.*, p. 61.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 62

¹⁰⁴ Reported in A. Bozynensky, *Vst rechka komsomol'tsev s V.I. Leninom*, Gospolitizdat, 1956, p. 18, in James Riordan, *op.cit.*, p. 63.

¹⁰⁵ Noted in N.I. Podvoisky, *Rabotnitsa i fizicheskaya kul'tura*, Moscow: Molodaya Gvardiya, 1938, p. 114, in James Riordan, *ibid.*, p. 65.

¹⁰⁶ N.I. Podvoisky, *ibid.* p. 3, in James Riordan, *ibid.*, p. 64.

of society.¹⁰⁷ Sports were to be made accessible to the people for higher labour productivity.¹⁰⁸

The Marxist and Leninist views on physical culture, mental and physical education, and the interdependence of the mental and physical aspects of being, provided the framework in which physical and mental recreation, regulated by society, was perceived by the U.S.S.R., and states that, using the concept of scientific socialism, aspire to sovietism and communism. Hence, state supervision of the activities, movement and institution of sports in such areas.

Before the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917, sports in Russia formed an important element in social and political order and issues. Russia was a founding member of the Olympic Movement and Russians competed in the Fourth Olympics held in London in 1908.¹⁰⁹ Sports became a domestic political tool for the czarist regime. Russia's defeat in the Russo-Japanese War in 1904-1905, inspired the strong use of sports as a means of combating socio-political evils that emerged from the events of 1905, to ensure public order, control, and security of the state. Participation of the population at large in some form of fitness campaign, it was envisaged, would improve social morale, enhance cohesiveness, and, like "opium of the masses," divert workers and students from revolutionary activities and safeguard young people from the influence of the street and hooliganism.¹¹⁰ The Minister of Education,

¹⁰⁷ V.I. Lenin, *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*, Vol. 6, p. 85-86, in James Riordan, *ibid.*, p. 63.

¹⁰⁸ N.I. Podvoisky, *op.cit.*, p. 121, quoted James Riordan, *ibid.*, p. 66.

¹⁰⁹ See Olympic Sports, "1908 London Summer Games" on Olympics at Sports Reference .com, online, <http://www.sports-reference.com/olympics/summer/1908/> (Information was obtained on April 11, 2012).

¹¹⁰ James Riordan, *ibid.*, p. 33.

Kasso, in 1906, thought that sports should be a means of combating the moral irresolution of students.¹¹¹

In post-Czar Russia sports came under directives of the Soviet government. Sports as an integral part of physical culture – comprising organised physical exercise, playful activities or games, all forms of socially appraised active leisure pursuits and organised playful competitive sport, of physical or mental activity based on rules and norms, were mandated to be pursued, in principle, with the object of achieving a result. This was to be done according to national governmental directives. The construct of sports was deemed as a societal institution with a socialising function which was connected to the human physical development and education. The institution of sports was seen as a relevant part of the overall culture of society, representing all measures taken to make people healthy and to improve their physical abilities. Being part of physical culture, par with mental culture, its ultimate goal and function to discharge

was to prepare the [people] younger generation [in particular] for a long and happy life, highly productive labour for the benefit of society and for defence of the socialist homeland.¹¹²

Additionally,

Physical culture and sports were to contribute to (the) formation of a harmonious personality, socialisation and integration, to political, moral, mental and aesthetic education, to health, development of people's physical capabilities, to accumulation and transmission of knowledge and experience in motor activity, the rational utilisation of free time. Moreover, they were to help in the forging of international cultural contacts, to greater international representation [i.e. more

¹¹¹ Reported in *Tsilist*, No. 7, p. 17, in James Riordan, *ibid.*, p. 33.

¹¹² V.V. Belorusova (ed.), *Pedagogika, Uchebnoye posobie diya institutov fizicheskoi kul'tury (Pedagogic study aid for physical culture institutes)*, Moscow, 1972, pp. 182-183 in James Riordan, *ibid.*, p. 4

Soviet representatives on international sports bodies], to fight for peace and friendship among peoples, etc.¹¹³

As an ideological tool of the Soviet bloc, the State had the task of ensuring top performance of Soviet athletes abroad as a means of globally showcasing its achievements in developing communism and in promoting physical culture and sport and to gain a prominent position internationally in major sports. The State's control was to ensure the systematic use of sports ambassadors, when they were on international competitions, to propagate the aims and tasks of the U.S.S.R., explain the attitudes of Soviet sports organisations to outsiders and vigorously combat anti-communism slander and misinformation concerning Soviet sports and politics.

Sports reach far and have the ability to unite wider sections of populations than probably any other social activity. Sports can transcend and dissolve boundaries of nationality, sex, age, social position, rural and urban location and political attitudes. For example, through boxing, the racially polarised U.S.A., for sometime, forgot the issue of race, when Joe Louis, an African-American re-encountered Max Schmeling on June 22, 1938, and supported Joe Louis against the German in a world heavyweight championship. Many Americans interpreted Louis' one round knockout victory as a deconstruction of the "image" of the Aryan, self-declared "Nazi-superhuman", and Nazism. Louis won the praise of many white Americans. It satisfied many African-Americans because, at least, one of them was celebrated as a hero, even by glaring racists. That was the unifying power of sports at work and an example of the power which sports personalities possess

¹¹³ See N.I. Ponomaryov, "Sport i obshchestvo," *Teoriya i praktika fizicheskoi kul'tury*, No. 6, 1973, p. 12, in James Riordan, *ibid.*, p. 6.

and can use to alter the nature of social relations and politics. Coming from a poor family of sharecroppers, belonging to a minority nationality in a racially polarised society, Louis, through sports became a “key figure” in the history of race relations in the U.S.A. in 1938. Through that medium, he achieved something of popular support, which hypothetically speaking, the Grand Master of the Ku Klux Klan, and other racist “white” Americans then, who would not stare in the direction of African-American intellectual elites and scholars like W.E.B. Dubois, could not disregard and be oblivious.

In all pre-modern and modern, Western and non-Western, societies, and ideological blocs of the twentieth century, sports, have been of utility due to sports’ inherent qualities of being easily understood and enjoyed, developing mass enthusiasm, being political and apolitical, permitting self-expression and economically rewarding participants.

Within the Western bloc where it was mostly organised by non-government bodies, it appeared and tended to be virtually free of state control. However, within the Cold War era, the state regulated the activities of its sporting ambassadors. It was this milieu which churned some Hollywood movies which served as propaganda tools for the U.S.A. and its Western allies against the communist East and its proclivity for socialism.

The U.S.A. and its Western bloc presented in its propaganda movies different symbols, like martial, educational and cultural, to articulate and depict Western “superiority.” Such acts and paradigms of Western propaganda also employed the symbology of ideological competition through sports to discredit the East. Often, such acts depicted The Star-Spangled Banner-

inspired¹¹⁴ athletes defeating Soviet athletes in different disciplines. A classical example is the series *Rocky*, which, with the American icon Sylvester Stallone as the pervading hero, first came out in 1976. Stallone is also the protagonist called John Rambo, a former Green Beret, in other Western propaganda movies like *First Blood II* and *First Blood III*, released in 1985 and 1988 respectively. In the second volume, he, in the service of his country, is portrayed destroying Russian troops, their Vietnamese communist allies, and installations in Vietnam. The third volume depicts Rambo, the military superhero, destroying Soviet communist troops and military installations of the Red Army in Afghanistan. He emerges as a defender of anti-communism and helper of the Afghan *Mujahideen*¹¹⁵ in their triumph over a Red Army occupation in Afghanistan. In *Rocky IV*, which was released in 1985, the boxer Rocky Balboa (Stallone), representing the U.S.A., and clearly wearing its colours in the ring, vanquished a U.S.S.R.-"super fighter," Ivan Drago (Dolph Lundgren), a symbolic epitome of communism, in a bout staged in Moscow, the centre of Soviet Communist power. Conditioned with symbolism, the movie shows Rocky, a spectre of American capitalism training in a Siberian hamlet, doing exercises like chopping wood, lifting rocks and running in the snow, while Drago, indulges himself with ultra technological facilities, running on treadmills, utilising weightlifting machines, and receiving injections. During the fight, Rocky takes a lot of beating, but, representing the resoluteness of the U.S.A. and capitalism, refuses to fall.

¹¹⁴ "The Star-Spangled Banner" is the national anthem of the U.S.A. A 35-year-old lawyer and amateur poet, Francis Scott Key, wrote a poem titled "Defence of Fort McHenry." It was this poem, which was written in 1814, that provided the lyrics for the anthem.

¹¹⁵ The word is the plural of the Arabic word *Mujahid*. Mujahid is a Muslim fighter, a jihadist, and it literally means "struggler," "justice-fighter" or "freedom-fighter." It evolves from the same Arabic trilateral root as *jihad*, which can be construed as "struggle."

Eventually he wins over the foreign crowd, symbolically representing the world, with his display of courage and determination, and knocks Drago out with seconds left in the final round. Such a defeat symbolically represented an envisaged global triumph of capitalism over communism. Although a production like *Rocky IV* and others were dramatic virtual realities, they, for political reasons and ideological propaganda, were distributed to different parts of the world, to portray capitalism's superiority over communism and subliminally affect the psyche of people, and help to sway them to capitalism.

Sports in the West were not free of politics and foreign policy aims. However, in the Soviet Union, sporting activities occupied a more central position and their functions and interrelationship with the security services, economy and culture, were more manifest than in the former.

Sports as Important Functional and Aesthetic Elements of Society: The Context of Indigenous Ethnic Cultures.

The culture element and *corpus* of sports is one of the "common denominators" of human cultures.¹¹⁶ The social construction of sports, as a consciously organised institutionalised cultural pattern, which is different from the spontaneous activities and random interest of the young child at play like running about, jumping, building huts and throwing objects, in historical and contemporary times, manifests its cultural dimension of functionality in social organisation. Sporting activities, whether competitive, non-competitive, individual, team, recreational, or developmental have served different purposes in historical societies. Some societies have used them in their

¹¹⁶ Ralph Linton, *The Science of Man in the World Crises*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1945.

religious functions. Others have used sports to legally settle land disputes, select marital mates, demonstrate prestige and power, and insure a successful agricultural harvest.¹¹⁷ For example wrestling, perhaps the most ancient of sports, among other roles, was a judicial mechanism for settling disputes over boundaries of rice fields and land among the Ifugao in the Philippines and Pukapuka villages of the Cook Islands.¹¹⁸ It formed part of the rite of passage to usher boys into adulthood as strong young men among the Pukapuka.¹¹⁹

Girls, of the Dukawa of Nigeria, also selected their husbands at special wrestling bouts, organised for young bachelors. During the bout, a girl would sprinkle white flour on the head of her chosen one, and marriage negotiations would begin between the families of the girl and bachelor.¹²⁰ The elaborate actions, show of force, determination and passionate energy in sporting activities, which at times induce ecstasy, featured as devotional rituals of religion for some societies, like the ancient Greeks and pre-colonial Samoan culture. Homer, in *circa* eighth century *Iliad*, described games that were sporting events, serving the Greeks, as important religious ceremonies for funerals.¹²¹ It must have also functioned as a psychological tool for catharsis, for the living to purge excessive emotions connected with the life crisis of

¹¹⁷ It is reported that an Emperor instituted wrestling as part of the ceremonies of the Japanese agricultural festival of the Five Grains during the eighth century. Since the year proved to be a fruitful one, the custom was continued. See S. Culin, *Korean Games with Notes on Corresponding Games of China and Japan*, Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia, 1895.

¹¹⁸ See R. F. Barton, "Ifugao Law," *University of California Publications in American Archaeology and Ethnology* 15, 1, 1919, 1-186, R.F. Barton, *Ifugao Law*, Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1969, and E. Beaglehole and P. Beaglehole, *Ethnology of Pukapuka*, (Bernice P. Bishop Museum. Bulletin, No. 150), Honolulu: Hawaii, Kraus Reprint Co. 1938.

¹¹⁹ E. Beaglehole and P. Beaglehole, *ibid*.

¹²⁰ O. Temple, *Notes on the Tribes, Provinces, Emirates and States of the Provinces of Nigeria*. London: Cass, 1922. This is cited in R. Briffault, *The Mothers*, New York: Macmillan Company, 1927, p. 97.

¹²¹ Shirley Glubok and Alfred Tamarin, *op.cit.*, pp. 9-10.

death. The Pan Athenian games celebrated the birth of the goddess, Athena. Pan-Hellenic sporting events, held every four years at Olympia, apart from creating Hellenic social and political solidarity, were observed to honour Zeus, the chief deity of the Greeks. Other sporting festivals of religious significance included the Pythian Games of Delphi, celebrated to honour Apollo, and those of Nemea and Isthmia, which celebrated Zeus and Poseidon, god of the sea.¹²²

Pre-colonial Samoan culture anthropomorphised its deities and the deities were perceived to have human feelings, perform human actions, and derive enjoyment from human diversions such as sports. The deities, therefore, were present with them during worship, enjoying with them during devotional feasting, dancing, singing and other social emulations [such as sport].¹²³ There were annual rites for propitiating some deities, which featured sporting spectacles, where participants engaged in competitive, but bloody club fights. The blood from that gladiatorial performance of the Pacific was an offering, which was thought to cause the deities, “. . . to be all pleased with their [worshippers] devotedness, and answer prayer for health, good crops and success in battle.”¹²⁴ Warfare held an important place in different ethnic societies, and within such communities, men in particular talked of glory and honour to be gained on the field of battle. Many of the games and sports of different pre-modern aboriginal societies, and even modern societies, involved the same skills applicable in war, namely, those concerned with hand-to-hand combat, like wrestling and boxing, and those concerned with weapons, like

¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 11-12.

¹²³ E.S. Craighill Handy, *Polynesian Religion*, (Bernice P. Bishop Museum Bulletin, 34), 1927, p. 88.

¹²⁴ George Turner, *Samoa a Hundred Years Ago and Long Before*, London: Macmillan and Co., 1884, p. 57.

archery, handling of spears, knives, swords, clubs, slings, and later guns. These arts were pursued as sports for recreation and for sharpening the skills of the partakers in the use of such weapons and arts, for their easy application in actual warfare. So in ethnic societies where men, and in some cases women, were warriors, a principle for training was participation in contests involving martial arts, most of which featured commonly at social gatherings. In battles, strength and endurance were factors to success. They were also important in victory in sports like boxing, wrestling, Karate, Kung fu and club fighting. Among the Samoans, like the Spartan, such games, involving great physical exercise, good wrestlers and club fighters, were always praised,¹²⁵ and formed part of the social training of children. Sports formed part of celebrations, which took place after the birth of a child, when the child could sit up, crawl, stand up and walk. Although these observances in Samoan culture (and others) may have been social and religious, the fighting element existed to have an impact on the child celebrant and the young males at such ceremonies. It had the effect of empowering the child and other young males around, through rapport of stimulating their growth, and endowing their spirit with those qualities of strength and discipline that were exhibited by the adults. It conditioned their psyche and character and inspired them to emulate those qualities of the adults. It was to enable them to take the place of the adults when grown, as distinguished leaders in social and political life and more importantly among the community's fighters. This is also true of the cultural history of some ethnic groups in Ghana.

¹²⁵ George Brown, *Melanesians and Polynesians*, London: Macmillan and Co., 1910.

Within the context of ethnic cultures in Ghana, Vieta reports that indigenous *ethnies* devised many sporting activities for their young [especially males], which, involving great physical exercise and martial art-oriented combat sports, promoted a courageous spirit, fitness and endurance in the young ones. Among the Ewe, up to about the age of ten, boys were made to engage in mock-battles, tug-of-war, running and other activities; which involved physical exertion. Most of the popular activities were of challenge and confrontation. Children would roll up their clothes in the form of whips in readiness for fighting and taunt each other with songs of challenge and confrontation. This whole sporting construction primarily existed as a test of bravery, and the singing was for testing general knowledge and alertness. The Gurunsi and Sissala were noted for their wrestling contests. Among the Ga, it was also normal for inter-community fisticuffs contest to be organised on special occasions under the moonlight between children over five years, paired on one-on-one basis to entertain their communities. Additionally, children and the youth were taught to settle disputes or differences with their fists and no one was expected to separate the combatants till the fisticuffs were over with one clearly defeated, after which the combatants were made to shake hands and, in the spirit of camaraderie and sports, let go of their anger. All these were institutionalised as means of making the focus group of young pre-pubescent, pubescent and adolescent males accustomed to combat, lose fear and through that become adult warriors and protect their people in any event of aggression with their enemies.¹²⁶ It also was to instruct the focus group about socialisation, their sporting heritage and to promote and deepen the

¹²⁶ K.T. Vieta, *op.cit.*, p. 561.

attributes essential in warfare among them, all of which were vital to the character formation of the individual and unity and security of their society.

Within ethnic societies, obtaining a livelihood could also be a co-operative enterprise, with the participants giving labour and receiving the fruits of labour. Activities involved in obtaining some economic necessities of life were recreational and sport-like in nature. For example fishing, bird netting and trapping and game hunting could be sports as well as economic-oriented food procuring activities. This could be done at the personal, group [peer] and inter-community levels. Additionally, as reported by Turner and Stair, food could be obtained because of victory in sports, where a defeated party usually [in the frame of non-fiscal economies] would give the winning side some kind of food.¹²⁷

Apparently, the economic dimension (a means of obtaining livelihood within the context of fiscal economies), is dominant today. Presently, organised sports, manifesting various disciplines, have become an economic venture and industry. Globally and nationally, organised sports yield financial capital and rewards for institutions and humans in the sports order.

Sports have had an educational dimension in the indigenous context of ethnic societies. Through its functional dimensions, like character formation, the youth especially learn their social roles. By sporting with and receiving instruction from adults, which admonishes them to be fearless and strive to excel in forms of activities valued as socially and culturally constructive by

¹²⁷ See George Turner, *op.cit.* See also John B. Stair, *Old Samoa or Flotsam and Jetsam from the Pacific Ocean*, London: Religious Tract Society, 1897.

community, their psychological and plastic material and their biological heritage, were hardened along their ethnic identity and cultural lines.

Examination of sports, involving game activities of *physical skill*, *strategy*, and *chance*, and its “order” in pre-modern, modern and post-modern societies, and on the cosmopolitan socio-political and economic levels, reveals an interrelationship of social organisation, religion, warfare, economic pursuits and education with recreational life and sports for amateurs and professionals. In all these spaces, sports is a facilitator of social intercourse of enjoyable nature through which group solidarity is promoted and, furthermore, an approved outlet for feelings of rivalry is provided. It has been a means of economic livelihood, a tool of hegemony, ritualistic and devotional vehicles, an outlet for excessive emotions connected with the life crises of birth, marriage and death and, more importantly, concerning social status, a tool of social mobility and prestige.

If there is an interrelationship between sports and social status, then what are some of the consequences of this interconnectedness? It has the consequences of creating social classes of people, belonging to the sports order, and for socialisation and establishment of norms and values related to such social classes. Normally, such social classes become levers for upward social mobility for members. Sociologically, sports have compensatory functions, which are primarily characterised by their operation for security and advancement of social life. Presently in many countries, a relatively large number of upwardly mobile young persons are found among sporting youth, with their sports and clubs providing important support in their mobility effort. Consequently, in societies that presently are divided more into classes based

upon personal achievement, sports (particularly in its active form) is acquiring an increasing importance. The system of norms and values maintained by sporting persons, particularly the youth, has a positive influence in the attitude found in modern society which when it comes to respect for one's neighbours, emphasises the principle of achievement. Although within sports the principle of achievement is necessary for respect, the cardinal norms and values of self-respect, respect for opponents, comradeship, and partnership, fundamentally support respect not based on achievements to be given to one's neighbours.

The exhibition of the power of sports as a tool of social mobility, which moves people from one social and economic stratum to the other is globally very much prevalent. Excellence in different sporting disciplines has enabled many people, in locales over the world, who were of lower socio-economic standing and deprived background, to become popular icons, wealthy business persons, and entrepreneurs. Such elements have gained social fame and made financial gains from sports by winning prize monies, advertising sports products, featuring in movies, or by becoming top sports officials, politicians, coaches, or sports ambassadors for their countries and international sports organisations. They include Muhammad "Louisville Lip",¹²⁸ Ali, and Joe Louis of the U.S.A., Pelé a.k.a. Edison Arantes do

¹²⁸ Muhammad Ali was characteristically articulate and eloquent and he often "amused" sports journalists and taunted his boxing opponents with his razor sharp wit and eloquent bragging about his boxing prowess. "The Louisville Lip" was one of the popular nicknames of Ali, which was given as an affectionate tribute to his verbal powers.

Nascimento K.B.E.¹²⁹ of Brazil, Diego Armando Maradona of Argentina, George Oppong Weah of Liberia, and Abedi Pele of Ghana.

Contextualising Boxing as a Political Metaphor and Negotiator of Race Relations in Colonial and Postcolonial U.S.A.

The sociological functionality of sports makes it clear that participation in sports by people, particularly during youth, in direct contrast to cynical accusations, can definitely make positive contributions to addressing different structural problems in mass society.

As noted, sports have also been used by individuals of deprived groups, suppressed nationalities to challenge the acquired positions of superordinate nationalities in politically or racially polarised localities and colonial environments, where the duality of inferior and superior exists. In that context, sports becomes a tool to rework and affect race and political relations in socially and racially imbalanced societies like the slave societies in the U.S.A. and colonial societies in different parts of the world. This tool, however, can be used by both parties either to affirm the position of the superordinate group or to dismantle the myth of racial and political inferiority of the minority nationality. For example, boxing has been one discipline which has commonly been used by minorities to challenge superordinate nationalities. In the U.S.A., for example, boxing was and became popular during the colonial period within the history of the U.S.A. for many African-Americans. Although slave owners had used African elements to partake in

¹²⁹ K.B.E. means Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire. Pelé received an honorary K.B.E. in 1997.

that sport as entertainers, it became a tool to challenge the perpetrators of slavery and colonialism which suppressed African elements in the U.S.A.

From the colonial through the postcolonial period to the twentieth century, boxing, for many of its *aficionados*, became a concealed determinant of racial superiority. Requiring a lot of physical strength, mental stability, tact and skills, it was seen as a marker of human and racial genetic excellence. Therefore, “black” and “white” male boxing champions, particularly at the heavyweight level, which is the ultimate level in modern boxing, represented excellence for their race and class. On the other hand, defeated champions, particularly if they were defeated by a contender from the other side of the race and class dichotomy, symbolised the opposite for their race and class. Within popular African-American and Euro-American psychology, boxing became the determinant of racial and class excellence and mediocrity. Therefore, the general pseudo-scientific rule was that a strong white male boxing champion was an epitomic reflection of the strength and superiority of his race and class. That was same for the African-American boxer. On this situation of the interrelatedness of boxing, race and power in the U.S.A, Eldridge Cleaver, succinctly, remarked that: “The boxing ring is the ultimate focus of masculinity in [patriarchal] America, the two-fisted testing ground of manhood, and the heavyweight champion, as a symbol, is the real Mr. America.”¹³⁰ Moreover, “. . . boxing, and the heavyweight championship in particular, serves as the ultimate test of masculinity, based on the perfection of the body and its use.”¹³¹

¹³⁰ Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*, New York: Dell Publishing Company Inc., 1968, p. 84.

¹³¹ *Ibid.* p. 86.

Inspired and evolving largely from the tradition of English-style bare-knuckle prizefighting, boxing in the U.S.A. is a product of slavery. Southern planters in particular amused themselves by pitching two bare-fisted strong slaves in iron collars to fight as sport and gambling, which is an apparent evidence of exploitation by a hegemonic group over a subordinated group. No wonder Douglass detested such establishment-controlled sporting spectacles. Muhammad Ali, who made fortune and international fame from boxing, inspired by the history of boxing in the U.S.A., also reflectively expressed disgust about the scene of two “blacks” fighting. He remarked in 1970 that: “They [Euro-American slave owners and post slavery Euro-American boxing managers and promoters of African-American boxers] stand around and say, ‘Good fight, boy; you are good boy; good goin’.”¹³² Moreover Ali added that:

They do not look at fighters to have brains. They do not look at fighters to be businessmen, or human, or intelligent. Fighters are just brutes that come to entertain rich white people. Beat up on each other and break each other’s noses, and bleed, and show off like two little monkeys for the crowd, killing each other for the crowd. And half the crowd is white. We are just like two slaves in that ring. The masters get two of us big old black slaves and let us fight it out while they bet: ‘My slave can whup your slave.’ That is what I see when I see two black people fighting.¹³³

The Virginia-born slave Tom Molineaux (Molyneux) is the first recognized (U.S.) American, and African-American heavyweight boxing (bare-knuckle prizefight) champion. Virginians largely developed a taste for bare-knuckle prizefighting from those whose interest in it had been motivated through their visits to England, where it was popular. After many victories, Molineaux migrated to New York as a freeman and continued to triumph over

¹³² David Remnick, *op.cit.*, p. 221.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

local and foreign contenders on the Hudson River wharfs. He moved to contest in England, where the sport was largely operating with Broughton's rules¹³⁴ which was initiated *circa* 1743.

In 1810, he fought on Copthall Common, the English Tom Cribb, who was the acclaimed bare-knuckle prizefighting champion of the British Empire. Crowd interference and attacks on Molineaux and delaying tactics played by Cribb, made Molineaux tired, and he subsequently suffered defeat.¹³⁵

Following the Emancipation Declaration, a new American champion, John Lawrence Sullivan, alias Boston Strong Boy, emerged. Being a "White" (Caucasian) American, he drew the colour line and refused to fight black challengers. His successor, Jim Jefferies, followed that example and planned to retire when there were no white men left to fight. He retired without fighting any black contender.

When Jack Johnson, a black fighter, took the title from a white fighter, Tommy Burns, Jefferies, inspired by racist notions, was lured to come and fight, and admittedly disclosed that he was going into the fight for the sole purpose of proving that a white man was better than a "Negro." Most white Americans solidly supported him. On the day of the fight in Reno, Nevada, July 14, 1910, chants like "Kill the Nigger!" and "All Coons look alike to me" resonated from the crowd. However, Johnson triumphed and he wrote in his autobiography that hardly a blow had been struck when he knew that he was Jeff's master. The victory engineered race riots in parts of Illinois, Missouri, New York, and Ohio, and many "blacks" were killed for celebrating Johnson.

¹³⁴ The rules would be subsequently discussed in this chapter.

¹³⁵ Rex Lardner, *The Legendary Champions*, New York: American Heritage Press 1972, p. 26.

Incidentally, different people, especially religious and right wing groups started calling for the sport, which was operating under the Queensbury rules,¹³⁶ to be proscribed because of the race implication in boxing and the social disturbances it could bring.

Johnson, who was empowered by boxing, and became wealthy and internationally famous, sought to defy race-related persecution by leading an opulent life with his fleet of cars, playing the bass viol and reading widely. He taunted the race-bias establishment by having affairs with young white women and prostitutes and marrying a white woman, Etta Duryea, who shot herself one year after marriage. Projecting himself as a symbol of revived black masculinity he, as a popular icon for the African American side of the race divide, mocked the establishment by displaying to reporters, a penile grandeur, which represented a spectre of masculinity, by wrapping his penis in gauze to project its hugeness in tight shorts.

Persecuted by the Mann Act, which was institutionalised against commercial prostitution and the transport of women across state borders for immoral intent, he took refuge in Canada and Europe for sometime and returned to serve time. His retirement came after losing his title in Havana to Jess Willard in 1915, and ended his career as promoter of his own legacy and a raconteur in a dime museum.

“White” American champions would avoid black contenders for a long time until Joe Louis would beat Jim Braddock in 1937 and retain the title until his retirement in 1948. He suffered racial attacks and stereotyping for his

¹³⁶ A discussion of the background and evolution of the Queensbury boxing rules, which moved English-style prizefighting pugilism to modern English-styled boxing with gloves, would be made subsequently in this chapter.

victory. However, his trainers, promoters and managers, like Jack “Chappie” Blackburn, John Roxborough and Julian Black, conditioned him to be a fighter and public figure that would steer clear of the radicalism, toughness and arrogance of Johnson, to avoid inflaming the sensitivities of white America. He was forbidden to go to nightclub alone, take pictures alongside a white woman, and revel over a fallen opponent. He was also to keep an expressionless countenance in front of the camera and reporters.

As the civil rights movement generated strands of militant politics, many blacks would feel that Americans were paying too much attention to sports heroes and too little to the suffering of millions of ordinary people. However, the excitement of sports, and boxing in particular, and their place as regulators and influences in politics and race relations, would remain a twentieth century constant in the U.S.A.

Boxing in the U.S.A. was a racial metaphor, which intensified in the 1960s. Muhammad Ali would reinvent in himself the arrogance, loud mouthing and defiance of Johnson, when he clinched the heavyweight championship at the age of twenty-two. In Cleaver’s judgement Ali “became the first “free” black champion to ever confront [the politics of]¹³⁷ “white” America.” Feeling empowered, as the representation of black super masculinity, he became a political figure and international icon when he used the sporting platform of boxing to articulate his misgivings at the race-bias political, economic and cultural establishment of the U.S.A. Sports and boxing for that matter would propel him to become an influential figure in

¹³⁷ Eldridge Cleaver, *op.cit.*, p. 92.

international diplomacy and, bearing the sobriquet “The Greatest,” become a globally renowned popular culture icon and boxing legend.

Apart from wrestling, perhaps older than all combat sports, since even in its crudest form, it can be found among all animal species, the artistic expression and scientific construction of boxing, where two human opponents use their fists to punch each other to score points, symbolising finesse, art, science, domination, submission and conquest, has existed in different human cultures for a long time. Its roots are deeply ingrained and anchored in the history of human civilisation and in the course of the centuries boxing has demonstrated to be a fundamental form of competition, and a significant medium for all kinds of creative expression. Consequently, it has been written about in the past and continues to draw attention as an interesting human activity worthy of human investigation. No wonder this most basic form of competition has attracted the attention of scribes of ancient Egypt and Sumeria, and famous chroniclers, philosophers, and essayists such as Homer, Plato, William Hazlitt¹³⁸ and Ernest Hemingway.¹³⁹

¹³⁸ He was an English writer, grammarian and philosopher. He lived from *circa* 1778 to *circa* September 18, 1830. He is remembered for his humanistic essays and literary criticism. Arguably, he is one of the great critics and essayists of the English language. He also wrote about pugilism. (See Jack Anderson, Pugilistic Prosecutions: Prize Fighting and the Courts in Nineteenth Century Britain,” p. 39. online posting <http://www.la84foundation.org/SportsLibrary/SportsHistorian/2001/sh212e.pdf> (Information was retrieved on November 10, 2010).

¹³⁹ Ernest Hemingway is arguably the most influential novelist in twentieth century American literature. He liked boxing. Hemingway had an aptitude for physical challenge that engaged him through high school, where he both played football and boxed. Because of permanent eye damage contracted from numerous boxing matches, Hemingway was repeatedly rejected from service in World War I. Boxing provided more material for Hemingway's stories, as well as a habit of likening his literary feats to boxing victories. (See “Biography of Ernest Hemingway,” *Gradesaver.com*, n.d. <http://www.gradesaver.com/author/ernest-hemingway/> (Information was retrieved on November 11, 2010).

Exploring Boxing as a Local and International Socio-Cultural Commodity from Classical Ancient Civilisations to the British Empire in the Twentieth Century

Fighting with the fist, which is a natural phenomenon among human beings, has a sporting dimension. Evidence of fist-fighting contests, depicting scenes of boxers and spectators, appears on ancient Sumerian relief carvings of the third millennium B.C., Egyptian relief from the second millennium B.C. and Minoan reliefs. The *circa* 7,000 years-old Mesopotamian stone tablet, which was discovered by the Assyriologist,¹⁴⁰ E.A. Speiser in 1927 in Baghdad, Iraq, depicts two men getting ready for a bare-fist prizefight.¹⁴¹ According to Jaimie Lee-Barron, who is the Director of the Institute of Martial Arts and Sciences, U.K., and Dean of the Faculty of Martial Arts, Knightsbridge University, ancient Indian texts such as the *Vedas*, *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* also mention fist fighting, implying that it existed in the ancient Indus Valley civilisation.¹⁴²

Before the Greeks ushered in the Olympics in 776 B.C.,¹⁴³ Egypt had indulged in organised sports, with competitive dimensions, mostly institutionalised around political, social and religious activities. It had the sport of boxing with rules. Boxing with rules therefore, has a history thousands of

¹⁴⁰ A scholar of Assyriology which is the archaeological, historical, and linguistic studies of ancient Mesopotamia (ancient Iraq) and the related cultures that used cuneiform writing.

¹⁴¹ Jaimie Lee-Barron, "The Martial Science of Boxing and Its Contribution to Military Close Combat," *ezonearticles.com*, online posting, n.d. <http://ezonearticles.com/?The-Martial-Science-Of-Boxing-And-Its-Contribution-To-Military-Close-Combat&id=2598126> (Information was obtained on January 17, 2011). This paper was also presented at the First Conference of the Institute for Martial Arts and Sciences, July 18, 2009, Wigan, U.K.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³ A.D. Tonny and Steffen Wenig, *Sports in Ancient Egypt*, Leipzig, (German Democratic Republic Edition), 1969, pp. 9, 76, 79.

years old in Egypt¹⁴⁴ whose civilisation predates the Graeco-Roman one, which is the foundation of European (Western) civilisation. Iconographic statues of Prama Mountains of Sardinia (*circa* 2000-1000 B.C.), and *Boxing Boys Fresco* (*circa* 1550 B.C.),¹⁴⁵ from Thera of Minoan Crete,¹⁴⁶ confirm the early employment of some kind of gloves.

The ancient Greeks provide us early historical records of boxing as a formal sport. The *Iliad* contains a primary detailed account of a boxing fight (Book XXIII).¹⁴⁷ Though it is possible that the Homeric epics reflect later culture, the *Iliad*, reports that Mycenaean warriors competitively boxed, with codified rules, in tourneys to honour the fallen.

Modern international boxing evolved from Europe, particularly in England, to other parts of the world. However, because other indigenous pugilistic constructions with different rules, like *Asafo Atwele* of the Ga in Ghana, *French Boxing*, *Thai Boxing*, and *Burmese Boxing*, exist, some countries, for purposes of distinction, refer to the modern international boxing practice, alongside their own, as “English-(style) Boxing.”

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22

¹⁴⁵ The Boxing Boys Fresco is one of many well-preserved frescoes from the island of Thera (Santorini). Thera was destroyed by a violent volcanic eruption, probably in the sixteenth century B.C.E., preserving much of the art there. The Greek archaeologist Spiros Marinatos, at the Akrotire site on Thera, discovered that rare relic.

¹⁴⁶ Minoan Crete is the first culture in the Aegean to provide us with ample iconographic evidence of sporting activity held in the Bronze Age. Evidence is mainly iconographic, since textual evidence from the earlier periods still remains undeciphered. Minoan sports are portrayed in stone vases, frescoes and sealstones. The famous fresco from Thera (*circa* 1550 B.C.), depicting two young boys boxing, proves that training was a main concern from an early age. Each of the boys is wearing a girdle and a boxing glove on their right hand only. (Information obtained from the article titled “Minoan Crete” on <http://sunsite.icm.edu.pl/olympics/prehistory.minoan.html>. Information obtained on February 1, 2009).

¹⁴⁷ See Homer, *Iliad*, Book XXIII (23), verse 651 to 696. See also Homer, *Iliad*, A.T. Murray, (trans.), Classical E-Text, Book 23, <http://www.theoi.com/Text/HomerIliad23.html> (Information retrieved on November 11, 2010). The interested reader can also see Virgil's *Aeneid*, Book V (5), verse 362 to 484.

Presently, the English-inspired international boxing construction, as a global cultural commodity, has become a cynosure and gained cultural currency in many countries and forms an integral part of modern Olympics, which, revived by the wealthy Parisian, Pierre de Coubertin, was inaugurated in 1896 in Athens, Greece. The Olympics, before its revival, had been comatose for centuries.

Boxing, as part of Greek sports, first appeared as a contest in the Olympia in the 23rd Olympiad (688 B.C.) and contest for boys appeared in the 41st. Throughout the classical period, taken to span the early fifth century B.C. to the death of Alexander the Great, in 323 B.C., it was a major event in all the chief athletic meetings,¹⁴⁸ and it was known as *Pygme* or *Pygmachia*.

Generally, the Greek construction resembled the sport as it was practiced in Europe and America in the early nineteenth century more than the twentieth century ring-enclosed boxing. There were no measure rings or boxing arena. Contenders took positions on hard dirt in the centre of a local entertainment venue. Encircled by spectators, the space afforded the boxers room to battle. At the command of judges, fighters sparred and battled until one contestant admitted defeat by holding up his index finger or by pointing his finger to his opponent or was knocked out. There were no set of rounds, and no weight divisions. Boxers could strike the head, neck, shoulders and stomach and in some cases, could strike floored opponents. Holding was illegal and blows could be parried with the flat of the hand. With the advent of the Olympics, participants trained on *korykos* (punching bags). Fighters wore

¹⁴⁸ K.T. Frost, "Greek Boxing," *The Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Vol. 26, 1906, p. 214.

himantes (leather straps) over their hands, wrists, and sometimes breast, to protect them from injury. For the hands, the soft leather thongs, about eight to ten feet long, with a loop at the ends, to be attached to the thumbs, were swaddled around the four fingers, stretched across the flat of the hand and bandaged around the wrist and up the forearm. These appendages served as gloves. In later periods, pieces of wood were attached to thongs, and spikes, consequently, would be set into the wood blocks. Eventually, during the decadent Roman times, when bloody and violent sports like the gladiatorial spectacles, attracted huge popular patronage to the amphitheatres to scream and yell with the release of the brutal element, which is part of human nature, boxers fought with *caestus*, which were heavy thongs bound around spiked pieces of metal.

In golden age Greece, professional and amateur male boxers, who participated in Olympic contests and as a pastime, received social recognition and rewards like crowns of olive, laurel, pine, or wild celery. It became a trade and a profession as many athletes began to seek richer prizes than floral wreaths. As sport professionalism increased, boxing became a way for talented young men of low station to amass wealth and make their way upward in the ancient Greek world. As professionalism invited money and social prestige to the professionals, it invoked corruption, cheating and attempts to bribe in sports at the professional and amateur levels. It is reported that the 96th Olympiad of 396 B.C. witnessed cheating and corruption in the stade race. Eight years later bribery was uncovered in the boxing matches. Eupolus of Thessaly bribed his opponents, including Phormio of Halicarnassus, who had won the Olympic championship four years earlier, to let him win. The Elea

sponsors fined the culprits and used the proceeds to make statues of Zeus called “zanes”, which bore the inscription, “Not with money, but with speed of foot and strength of body must prizes be won at Olympia”. They were erected at the entrance of the stadium as warning to competitors.¹⁴⁹

The Greek sports tradition was to be imbibed by Romans, and that tradition influentially set the pace for nineteenth century Western competitive sporting and athletic civilisation.

When Greece became a Roman vassal province, in 146 B.C., the Olympics thrived for some time under the Romans and boxing was a major sport in the spectacles of the Olympics, which, under the Greeks, featured events like foot races, broad jumping, horse and chariot races, wrestling, *pankration*,¹⁵⁰ discus and javelin throwing.¹⁵¹ Boxing was important in Graeco-Roman civilisation, the cultural fountainhead of Western civilisation, and the ancients were wildly enthusiastic about the sport as are contemporary aficionados.

The Olympics and boxing started to lose patronage, when Emperor Theodosius I, considering them pagan and unchristian, showed little support for them. In A.D. 393, the Christian emperor Theodosius proscribed the Olympics. By the time of Theodosius II, when the Temple of Zeus in the Altis was burnt in A.D. 426, the Olympics had ended. In A.D. 500, boxing was

¹⁴⁹ Shirley Glubok and Alfred Tamarin, *op.cit.* p 92.

¹⁵⁰ *Pankration* literally meaning “all-powers” comes from the Greek roots *Pan* which means all, and *kratos* which means power or strength. It was another combat sport, which could be bloodily brutal. It was simply a blend of the extreme elements of wrestling and boxing. Huge contestants, larded with blubber (animal fat) and bulk fought each other by kicking, biting, strangling, twisting arms and jumping on downed adversaries. The only illegal move was gouging of the eyes. The engagement continued until one contestant was knocked out, or squirmed in pain on the ground, unable to rise to continue the fight.

¹⁵¹ For more information or a directory to reference sources on studies and notes on Greek sport and athletic culture, see Nigel B. Crowther, “Studies in Greek Athletics,” Part II, *The Classical World*, Vol. 79, No. 2, Studies in Greek Athletics. Part II, Nov.-Dec., 1985.

banned altogether by an imperial edict of the Eastern Roman Empire, because its Christian political authority considered it an insult to God since it disfigured the face of man, which reflected the visage of God. The order had little influence outside the major cities of that imperial orbit. Western Europe by this period was no longer within that zone. Therefore, competitive boxing, which the Greek sporting culture and Olympiad had nurtured, remained popular throughout the Middle Ages and beyond in Western Europe, particularly in its major cities.

The sporting culture and athletic tradition of Greece and Rome inspired most of the nineteenth century sporting cultures of Europe and boxing, manifested as an integral part of European culture, particularly British culture, can be traced to the Graeco-Roman sporting culture. Through British imperialism, particularly during the nineteenth century, that ancient model which the English modified, spread to other parts of the world, where British cultural imperialism, with its baggage of sports, reached.

Modern boxing in Ghana, which started in the twentieth century, and has become popular and produced international champions like Azumah Nelson, whose life and career would subsequently be interrogated, is a product of British cultural imperialism. Sports had a place in the imperialistic projects of the British. In their effort to stamp their cultural lifestyles and ideas in territories that they sought to subject under their imperial structure, for global domination, they employed sports.

Apart from unconcealed bureaucratic and military coercion, (the British armies that occupied or were present in most of the colonies were numerically insignificant that they, in those localities, served as symbolic

deterrent than direct repressors),¹⁵² sports served as another means through which Britain was able to hold to its vast imperial preserve for so long. The English language was also an informal tool for this venture. It was a means for the exchange of moral codes and social attitudes. Achieving command of the "correct" English language, accent, vocabulary and syntax, became the aspiration of many colonial peoples in both the Caucasoid and non-Caucasoid sections of the Empire. Thus the works of Alan Mulgan in New Zealand, Nirad Chaudhuri in India, and C. L. R. James in Trinidad might have differed in form and content, but they shared an awareness of and a respect for the force of literature [language] as a sentimental bond between imperial power and control of colonial territorial spaces.¹⁵³ Military presence, which was just a small part of the remnants to ensure British cultural imperialism, could not have been the only and main tool for that venture. Through certain structured conduits within sports, such as organisation and ceremony, pattern of participation and exclusion, competition against the imperial power and colonial territories, and strong centralisation of authority in England,

¹⁵² The insignificant numerical value of the British armies stationed in colonies is evidenced by the fact that in many of the colonies where local martial insurrections emerged the armies of occupation could not in most cases quell them alone. Consequently, it is clear that, for example, from the 1860s to the 1960s, from the first war of independence in India until the Mau Mau rebellion in Kenya, the imperial military and militia forces marshalled in aid of the civil power in such diverse circumstances. Such circumstances include the New Zealand wars of the 1860s, the 1876 constitutional riots in Barbados, the South African wars at the turn of the nineteenth century, the Caribbean labour disturbances of the 1930s, and the Malayan emergency of the 1950s.

¹⁵³ The works of Alan Mulgan in New Zealand, Nirad Chaudhuri in India, C. L. R. James in Trinidad, Edward Kamau Braithwaite in Jamaica and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o in Kenya share and show an awareness of and a respect for the force of literature and language as a significant bond between imperial power and colonial outpost. The interested reader can see: Alan Mulgan, *Home: A New Zealander's Adventure*, London: Longmans, 1927; Nirad Chaudhuri, *The Autobiography of an Unknown Indian* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968; C. L. R. James, *Beyond a Boundary*, London: Hutchinson, 1963. The reader can also refer Edward Braithwaite, "The African Presence in Caribbean Literature," *Daedalus*, 103, Spring, 1974; Edward Braithwaite, *History of the Voice: Development of Nation Language in Anglophone Caribbean Poetry*, London: New Beacon, 1984; and Ngugi Wa Thiong'o, *Decolonising the Mind: The Politics of Language in African Literature*, London: Curry, 1986.

especially in London, British cultural power involving a set of ideas, beliefs, rules and conventions, concerning social behaviour, was promoted as appropriate forms of behaviour and ordering in the Empire. These gained currency from the bulk of the client population, or at least by those important sections of that population upon whom the British relied for the mediation of their ruling practices, objectives, and ideology. Sports facilitated the cultural transfer of dominant British beliefs as to social behaviour, standards, relations, and conformity, to her colonial territories,¹⁵⁴ and many of the introduced sporting constructions, their attendant cultural beliefs, and behaviour have persisted beyond the end of the formal Empire, and have had consequences for the postcolonial order.

The Gramscian diversion from the Marxist emphasis of the economic base to the cultural superstructure, found in its analysis of hegemony (in Italy), which spurred a number of generational social writings,¹⁵⁵ can give an insight into sports [a cultural manipulator] as an important part of cultural power [hegemony] even in the context of British imperialism. The Italian Marxist

¹⁵⁴ On the question of the role of sports in the cultural imperialist enterprise of the British, which is a subject that has not received very much attention in the writings on British imperialism, the interested reader can see Ronald Hyam, *Britain's Imperial Century, 1815-1914: A Study of Empire and Expansion* New York: Harper and Row, 1976, and J. A. Mangan, *The Games Ethic and Imperialism*, London: Viking, 1986.

¹⁵⁵ See, for example, Antonio Gramsci, *The Modern Prince and Other Writings*, New York: International, 1975, Joseph V. Femia, *Gramsci's Political Thought: Hegemony, Consciousness, and the Revolutionary Process*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981, John Hoffman, *The Gramscian Challenge: Coercion and Consent in Marxist Political Theory*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1984, and T. J. Jackson Lears, "The Concept of Cultural Hegemony: Problems and Possibilities," *American Historical Review*, 90, 3, June, 1985. For some applications to sport, see for example S. Parry, "Sport and Hegemony," *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport*, 10, 1984; Pierre Bourdieu, "Sport and Social Class," *Social Science Information*, 17, 6, 1978, Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1984; Stuart Hall and Tony Jefferson, (eds.), *Resistance through Rituals*, London: Hutchinson, 1976.

Antonio Gramsci¹⁵⁶ elaborating the idea of hegemony emphasised how values, supportive of dominant interests in society, get passed on as “shared values” to the masses and thereby, once accepted by the multitudes, come to reinforce their domination by that elite. The manipulated subjects, within such a controlled environment, come to accept conditions and things the way they see them – as benign, useful, legitimate, and “right.” Such a perception thereby promotes hegemony and control for the manipulators, because through such manipulation the strains and tensions, associated with the unequal allocation of values in society, are somehow muted. In Gramscian thought humans are “...conformist to some conformity.” This supports the continuation of the *status quo*, and, by definition, those who benefit from the current state of affairs maintain their sway with this sort of mindset. Those who are powerful and wealthy will stay that way, in part, because the people accept this situation.

How does such a situation prevail? The basic principle is that those in power who control the economic and political structures also manipulate and control the transmission of messages, the views of reality, to the masses. For example in a capitalist society, the wealthy elite would continuously tell the poor masses that (a) through hard work they, collectively, can improve their status and get rich, and so the recipients do not rebel and jeopardize their chances of joining the elite. Furthermore, (b) if the elite get wealthier, then this will trickle down and benefit the masses that are not in the ranks of the well-to-do. Told this over and over, and presented with false values, which the

¹⁵⁶ For information on the man the interested reader can see Alistair Davidson, *Antonio Gramsci: The Man, His Ideas*, Sydney: Australian Left Review Publications, 1968.

masses are falsely made to believe that they share with the elites, the mass of people come to accept their status in society and allow the powerful to stay powerful and the wealthy to stay wealthy in a hegemonic position.

In Gramscian thought, hegemony is the result of a bloc of interests united behind a common set of values and norms, which, upon being transmitted to the mass of people through the multitudinous institutions of society, which could include shared values in sports, reinforce the power of that bloc.

From the Gramscian argument that effective control of the cultural superstructure, even in the face of severe deprivation in the base, strengthens the belief of the masses in values “shared” with the ruling groups, thereby allowing the ruling class to maintain hegemony, Bourdieu and his colleagues argue that cultural institutions, such as art galleries, museums, and sports play a central part in maintaining and promoting established class relations. This is because the so-called socially shared beliefs, and those institutions, while largely the preserve of a cultural elite (which they can manipulate), are also considered valuable by the masses, even though individuals from the latter might not attend or participate in them. These concepts therefore make it clear that sports, which appear as egalitarian and apolitical, can be manipulated by a ruling class, for example in a colonial environment, to maintain hegemony and cultural control over the subjected class (masses), since the feeling of shared beliefs tends to suppress the spirit of antagonism and insurrection from the masses against the privileged. In the light of these thoughts, it is clear that sports can serve as a powerful but largely informal social institution that can

create shared beliefs and attitudes between “rulers” and “the ruled” while at the same time enhancing the social distance between them.

Within the British imperial setting, particularly with the growth of the “new” British Empire in the second half of the nineteenth century which coincided with what constituted a “games revolution” in Britain, sports became a strong determinant of social relations, beginning with the British environment itself, from which the games code was exported to other parts of the Empire. This was the period when the first Football Association Cup final was played (1853), county cricket championship inaugurated (1873), modern tennis patented (1870s), and first Wimbledon titles staged (1873). Most partakers of these sports in Britain, after completing their secondary and university education, were sent to colonial territories. Having been imbued with the social power and importance of games, which include the value of teamwork, obeying constituted authority, courage in the face of adversity, loyalty to fellow players, and respect for the rules, these servants of the Empire now, in the colonial territories, as masters of power, military officers, Christian ministers and teachers, became perpetrators of those values. In addition, they concomitantly initiated and promoted British sports in the territories. They contributed in making it widespread in the Empire particularly by the turn of the nineteenth century in Africa, Asia, the Pacific and Caribbean. It was out of this system that for example horseracing clubs became very much established in India, Hong Kong, Australia, New Zealand, and Trinidad, and African colonies. Cricket also rooted in Australia, South

Africa, India, New Zealand, and the British West Indies.¹⁵⁷ Golf and tennis spread and became popular, rifle shooting (with its defence connotations) became especially popular, and the annual Queen's Prize shoot at Bisley became one great imperial spectacle.¹⁵⁸ Football rules took off slowly and produced patterns that varied.¹⁵⁹ Aristocratic games, like croquet and indoor constructions such as billiards, board and card games, were also promoted. By the end of the nineteenth century, a significant amount of literature and text accompanied such constructions. Most of them simultaneously disseminated information on how to play the sports and espoused ideas on how to dress, behave, and conform to imperial models of social performance.¹⁶⁰ These sports and literature facilitated British cultural imperialist scheme and engendered its hold on the colonial territories as race meetings of high and low status, major cricket matches, annual sporting championships, particularly those “controlled” competitions against the imperial power, became occasions for the reaffirmation of belief in the imperial ideology. In addition, they stimulated the continuance of colonial social ordering through the illusion of shared beliefs and such means as establishing, confirming, and ratifying marriage contracts within appropriate circles.¹⁶¹

¹⁵⁷ A helpful directory can be E. W. Swanton, (ed.), *Barclay's World of Cricket*, London: Collins, 1980.

¹⁵⁸ Captain Robert Johnstone, *A Brief Historical Survey of the British West Indies at Bisley, 1902-1950*, Port of Spain: Government Printing Office, 1951.

¹⁵⁹ Nicholas Mason, *Football!* London: Temple Smith, 1974 is an interesting study, which outlines the story. For a major example, R. H. Chester and N. A. C. McMillan, *Centenary: 100 Years of All Black Rugby*, Auckland: Moa, 1984.

¹⁶⁰ For example, *The Badminton Library of Sports and Pastimes*, which was a sporting and publishing project conceived and founded by Henry Somerset, 8th Duke of Beaufort (1824–1899), covered most sports from archery to yachting. The Badminton Library was originally produced in about twenty-eight volumes between 1885 and 1896. Later Rowing and Punting, Boating, Athletics, and Football were added in 1898 and 1899.

¹⁶¹ For example, C. T. Buckland, *Sketches of Social Life in India*, London: Allen, 1884; Major W. Troup, *Sporting Memories: My Life as Gloucestershire County Cricketer, Rugby and Hockey Player, and Member of the Indian Police Service*, London: Hutchinson, 1924.

By promoting British-controlled sports and games code and their system of values in colonial schools and social clubs, mainly by churches and colonial administrators, generations of students, Christians and ordinary members of the communities were influenced by these agents of cultural power and shared values of British imperialism. This thereby made many colonial elements to imbibe these “healthy” sports, which were connected to the civilising properties related to aspects of the British cultural collage, which was being built in the colonial territories.

Some particular sports, directed at certain targeted groups, were closely monitored by the colonial power structure, so that desirable and undesirable social characteristics could be engendered, generally, among the subject population. For example, Reverend Greville John Chester, during the 1860s, argued the need for poor West Indian black youths to learn cricket to train them for life.¹⁶² In the 1930s, missionaries introduced cricket in the Trobriand Islands to break down ethnic warfare. The sanctioning of English-style boxing among the Ga in Accra was a means to stop the “violence” in an indigenous bare-knuckle fisticuff sport.¹⁶³ Whereas the Ga adopted the new style without altering it, the Trobrianders zealously took cricket, but rejected the English-style as being too slow. They incorporated ethnic practices into their version of cricket. Cricket in the Trobriands, then, moved rapidly from missionary control and imperial model to a complete reshaping by the indigenous population.

¹⁶² See Greville John Chester, *Transatlantic Sketches in the West Indies, South America, Canada and the United States*, London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1869.

¹⁶³ See Emmanuel Akyeampong, “Bukom and the Social History of Boxing in Accra: Warfare and Citizenship in Pre-colonial Ga Society,” *op.cit.*

Tennis was different in social purpose and directed towards a different social clientele. Deemed a “social” sport, it was meant to bring people of like mind and social rank together in a leisure setting rather than to motivate competition, emphasise struggle for excellence or development of skills. Consequently, tennis “parties” were normally held at private homes, with participants extracted from upper social echelons, and as noted by one visitor to Melbourne late in the nineteenth century, they were characterized as vicious “scandal” (gossip) sessions, which provided access to information circulating in the colony.¹⁶⁴

Within colonial environments, where sports helped in providing opportunity for controlled conscious social ordering and mere recreation, such powers of sports did not always come from its formal institutionalisation by colonial masters to be studied by colonial subjects. Instead, through their introduction within an existing society, they became a *corpus* of practices with a set of beliefs. Over time, they became part of the cultural set up of that society, as the colonial subjects acquired them subconsciously. Such a reaction of assimilation [or even rejection] could also be explained to be a product of what can be referred to, using the Annales school of historiography, as “mentalités” or the state of mind of the people at the time. Thus the *histoire des mentalités*¹⁶⁵ Annales postulation that individuals or groups in the past reacted differently to their world due to their mentalites, which their culture produced, can provide an understanding of why some colonial people easily accepted certain sports, which colonial administrators introduced to them.

¹⁶⁴ Harold Finch-Hatton, *Advance Australia! An Account of Eight Years Work, Wandering, and Amusement in Queensland, New South Wales, and Victoria*, London: Allen, 1885, p. 363.

¹⁶⁵ This can be explained as “history of attitudes” or “history of world-views.”

Introduction of the equestrian sport of polo and its acceptance in India can serve as an illustration. The British arrived in India with a set of cultural beliefs and attitudes, which they considered as proper standards of civilisation. They were ready to accommodate subordinate groups that appeared anxious to share those qualities. Polo, with its aristocratic and chivalry values, for example, largely, attracted the Indian *raja* (the princely rulers) and aristocrats who naturally gravitated to it because, within the scope and estimation of their existing aristocratic “mentalites”, they viewed it as a way of maintaining at least some of their own equestrian cultural continuities. At the same time, in their calculation, it served, for them, as a way of positioning themselves advantageously within the new political order by demonstrating to the imperial power that they shared some of its ideals and values. Hence, at the formalisation of British rule in 1858, the rajas and aristocrats who became the main clientele encouraged to take up polo, retained some semiautonomous control over their territories but were, at the same time, subject to British attempts to “improve” their administrations. The development of polo in India is an excellent indication of the process of British cultural imperialism.

This subconscious element of British cultural imperialism, capable of getting people to involuntarily assimilate foreign values, outside the bounds of formal policy making, rendered the institution of sports as a powerful factor in the maintenance of and reaction to British control throughout the Empire.

The process of social and cultural formation and ranking through sports, as an informal social agency, was also pronounced in cricket, a discipline through which many colonial societies measured their

“advancement” against the standard of British achievement.¹⁶⁶ In Australia and New Zealand, although player participation began to broaden in social scale by the advent of World War I, control of the game remained with local elites who subscribed fully to British philosophies of sport.¹⁶⁷

Cricket was a major vehicle for transferring the “appropriate” British moral code from the imperial messengers to local populations. Colonial “administrator-sportsmen” governors were major in emphasising cricket as a ceremonial exhibition of British behaviour, standards, and moral codes both public and private. For example, the late-nineteenth century governor of Bombay and a pioneer of English cricket, Lord George Canning Harris, 4th Baron Harris, believed that by assimilating the playing and behavioural codes of cricket, some selected groups of Indians would be ready for some political responsibility.¹⁶⁸ Sir Stanley Jackson, an English player and captain around the turn of the century, who became governor of Bengal in the 1930s, also took a keen interest in cricket as moral guide. In the West Indies such similar interest was pursued by officials like Sir Augustus W.L. Hemming, who governed British Guiana and Jamaica between *circa* 1896/7 and 1904, and Sir James Shaw Hay, who governed Barbados at the turn of the nineteenth century, after spending sometime in West Africa,¹⁶⁹ where from *circa* 1886 to 1892 he acted as administrator of the Gambia, governor in Sierra Leone and Consul General

¹⁶⁶ For the Indian case see, Richard Cashman, *Patrons, Players, and the Crowd: The Phenomenon of Indian Cricket*, Bombay: Orient Longman, 1980; for Australia, see W. F. Mandle, “Cricket and Australian Nationalism in the Nineteenth Century,” *Journal of the Royal Australian Historical Society*, 59:4, December 1973, pp. 225-246.

¹⁶⁷ For case study examples on Australia, see Brian Stoddart, “Sport and Society 1890-1940: A Foray,” *Sport in Society*, 9: 5, 2006, pp. 719-748, and Wray Vamplew and Brian Stoddart, (eds.), *Sport In Australia: A Social History*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995.

¹⁶⁸ See Lord George Harris, *A Few Short Runs*, London: Murray, 1921.

¹⁶⁹ See Lord Hawke, *Recollections and Reminiscences*, London: Williams and Norgate, 1924, p. 165, and Sir Ralph Williams, *How I Became a Governor*, London: Murray, 1913, p. 229.

for Liberia.¹⁷⁰ Some administrators, like Lords Sheffield and Plunkett in Australia and New Zealand, personally donated trophies for state and provincial competitions.

Generally, by the end of the nineteenth century, then, cricket, polo and other English-controlled sports with their social purposes were rooted and accepted throughout the Empire. While British-authored manuals which invented techniques and styles, and sports results from Britain, which was generally considered by the colonial subjects as the citadel of sports in the Empire, were awaited in the colonies, the administration of the established sports in the colonies was operationalised within a hierarchy commanded from London. For example, the Marylebone Cricket Club (M.C.C.) was the ultimate statutes maker and judge of behavioural standards in that discipline. Disputes over rules were referred to similar groups, which existed for sports like boxing, football, tennis, hockey, netball, golf, racing, and athletics. Collectively, these hierarchies served as a vital aspect of imperial rule because, culturally, they emphasised the colonial notion of supremacy of British universal influence.¹⁷¹

At the height of empire, then, sports as a cultural bond had considerable force, conveying through its many forms a moral and behavioural code that bonded the imperial power with many, if not most, of the influential colonial quarters. Perhaps the most symbolic expression of this cultural unity of colonies in empire, with Britain as hegemon and “enlightener”, manifested

¹⁷⁰ H.R. Addison, C.H. Oakes, W. J. Lawson, D. B. Wheelton Sladen, *Who's Who 1900: An Annual Biographical Dictionary*, Vol. 52, London, Soho Square: Adam and Charles Black, 1900, p. 502.

¹⁷¹ For example, the Imperial Cricket Council was only transformed into the International Cricket Council during the era of political transference of the 1960s.

as the Commonwealth Games. This idea of an imperial sports festival, to feature competitors from British Commonwealth countries, emerged in the early 1890s. Proposed by the Australian John Astley Cooper, it also reveals the powerful and empire-wide sense of “shared” cultural values.¹⁷² In 1911, the first festival took place, and the first British Empire Games, which were staged in Hamilton in Canada, followed it in August 1930. The emphasis was firmly upon imperial unity and identity, and significantly, it evolved at a time when the seeds for the break up of empire had well, and truly, been planted, as it had been exhibited significantly in 1911 and 1930 by the mass agitation for increased political autonomy in India.

In 1938, the games were held in Sydney, to mark the 150th anniversary of the founding of Australia as a British imperial “asset,” an asset, which ostracised English convicts largely helped to secure for Britain. Interestingly, at the initial stage in the development of the games system, an elaborate set of rituals emerged to commemorate the centrality of monarchy, homage of athletes as citizens towards that monarchy, unity of empire, and the endurance of cultural ties regardless of political change. Moreover, as a symbolic reminder of the imperial hierarchy and of the connections between sport and general life, within an imperial structure where degrees of power and

¹⁷²See G. Redmond (ed.), *The 1984 Olympic Scientific Congress Proceedings: Volume 7, Sport and Politics*, Champaign, Illinois: Human Kinetics, 1986. Michael Dawson “Acting global, thinking local: ‘Liquid imperialism’ and the multiple meanings of the 1954 British Empire and Commonwealth Games,” *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 23: 1, 2006, pp. 3-27, and Katharine Moore, “The Concept of British Empire Games: An Analysis of Its Origin and Evolution from 1891 to 1930,” Ph.D. thesis, University of Queensland, 1987. Katharine Moore “‘The Warmth of Comradship’: The First British Empire Games and Imperial Solidarity.” *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 6, no. 2, 1989, pp. 242–251. Harold Perkin, “Teaching the Nations How to Play: Sport and Society in the British Empire and Commonwealth.” *International Journal of the History of Sport*, 6, no. 2, 1989, pp. 145-155.

privileges mostly favoured so-called “white societies”, it was only in 1966 that it was held in a “less-developed”, non-white majority centre. That was in Kingston, Jamaica, just after the country celebrated its political independence. From that situation and observation, it is apparent that sports, in the colonial and immediate postcolonial commonwealth context, was yet another tool which was to be used to programme non-white colonial peoples to aspire to the social standards and ideals of “enlighteners” from (and local supporters of) the “developed” – “white” (English) society. However, within the success of such a socially distorted imperial ideology, which paralleled general life and sports, resided the beginnings of some major complications for the empire in the early days of its postcolonial commonwealth. These difficulties were products of existing contradictions within the imperial construction of sports. Sports was displayed as an influential agency to “improve” colonial peoples socially and politically, yet the controllers attempted to maintain the fiction that sport was a discrete, apolitical institution. It was projected as a vehicle of transcultural unity but within it were marks of potential racial and cultural conflict. Not the least of these was the fact that from World War I onwards, the increasing international politicisation of sport caught Britain in a situation where alterations to its fundamental ideology of sport became substantial. Nevertheless, even before those changes occurred in the 1920s and 1930s, challenges to the model had arisen in the colonies. An emerged problem for the imperial power was that, having encouraged the measurement of social progress by comparing colonial against British achievements in sports, a victory for the former on any occasion, would naturally be conceived by the victors as symbolic of general parity. Hence, colonial nationalities like

Australians, South Africans and New Zealanders, drew inspiration from improved performances and victories against England in cricket and rugby matches, respectively, and began to think themselves as equal to the English.

India gained her independence in 1947, and the decolonisation process accelerated. Most colonies, facing opposition from agents of the ailing imperial administrative structure, strove to control the official and institutional facets of political power, and principles of cultural power, especially sports, and harness it for nation-building purposes.¹⁷³ However, English grip on the cultural package of sports was not an easy one to loosen. By the early 1950s in Ghana, for example the bulk of political power had theoretically shifted to the indigenes, in a prelude to independence. Kwame Nkrumah, proving to be a talented architect of his people's future, took interest in sports and activities of the Gold Coast Amateur Sports Council of 1952 and became the patron to many sports organisations because he perceived success in sports as a means for his people to gain international recognition and self-respect. Yet the colonial administrators still controlled some of the organisations that existed. The West Indies in the early 1950s witnessed men like Norman Washington Manley, Sir Grantley Adams, Forbes Burnham, and Eric Williams striving to bring sports, particularly cricket, under black control, because they saw in cricket and West Indian success at it (and by extension other sports) a chance for self-respect.¹⁷⁴ Yet, a representation of white cultural domination continued in sports, because it was only in the 1960s that black captains led the West Indies on regular basis. In 1960, Frank Worrell was chosen as

¹⁷³ See, for example, Dean E. McHenry, Jr., "The Use of Sports in Policy Implementation: The Case of Tanzania," *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 18:2, 1980.

¹⁷⁴ For the general story, see Gordon K. Lewis, *The Growth of the Modern West Indies*, New York: Modern, 1968.

captain. It was perhaps not because he was just black, but because he, after living and playing in England for a long time and having a tertiary education in Manchester, was deemed to have been “enlightened” in the best English games tradition and equipped with the calibre of a successful white captain. The selection of Garfield Sobers, who succeeded Worrell, gave the West Indies a genuine black local captain.¹⁷⁵

Sports facilitated English cultural domination of peoples and cultures within its imperial power structure and helped England to secure its vast colonial territorial reserves. In addition, within the context of postcolonial commonwealth relations, it continued to accentuate and strengthen an established historical and contemporary cultural relationship between a former colonial hegemon and former vassals, who, nevertheless, consider themselves as “development partners” in a vanished empire, which exists in a diplomatic shadow of itself.

Sports should be treated as a pervasive and enduring theme in the history of British imperialism and colonial relationships. As a tool for preparation for colonial cultural life based on British ideas and models, its workings were largely unsupported by force, and its nature intangible thereby making it almost impossible to define. Nevertheless, its role in keeping colonies under British cultural hegemony was powerful. Its capacity to masquerade as an apolitical agency enhanced its ability to influence, because it appeared as one area of the social arena where otherwise differing peoples, colonisers and colonised, could meet under the illusion of shared ideal and

¹⁷⁵ W. K. Marshall, "Gary Sobers and the Brisbane Revolution," *New World Quarterly*, 2:1, 1965, p. 87.

equality. Yet the medium of sports, whose power has exerted a subconscious influence on both colonial and postcolonial conditions, projected British cultural hegemony and ideals, during the colonial period, and still promote strands of them in the postcolonial period.

Perhaps, aside the prevalence of English-introduced disciplines in former colonies, an enduring legacy of colonial sports remains the Commonwealth Games. It reflects a subconscious postcolonial allegiance of participants to the culture of a defunct imperial hegemon and a perceived unity among divergent nations that, but for sharing a brief heritage with a moribund Empire, have little in common.

Sports form an enduring feature in the history of British imperialism and colonial relationships. Through the agency of British imperialism, colonies like Gold Coast, now Ghana, received imported sporting disciplines, of which, aside football, boxing is popular. Similar to what they did in Gold Coast, British imperialism and colonial administration introduced modern or international boxing into its colonies. Presently independent, these former colonies still accommodate boxing as part of their popular culture.

But how did the ancient sport of boxing become popular in British society to the extent that, from the eighteenth century through the twentieth century, the machine of British imperialism was able to export it to British colonies? We have already touched on how in A.D. 500 an imperial edict was unleashed by the Christian-oriented Eastern Roman Empire to proscribe altogether the Greaco-Roman culture-spawned boxing, because the government perceived the fight aspect of the sport as 'an insult to the dignity of human beings and God.' However, that imperial edict of A.D. 500 had little

influence on the tradition of boxing outside the major cities of the Eastern Empire. The sport remained popular in Western Europe throughout the Middle Ages and beyond. Records of Classical boxing activity disappeared after the fall of the Roman Empire. However, fist-fighting sports thrived in different cities and provinces of Italy between the twelfth and seventeenth centuries. For example, ancient Rus maintained an indigenous tradition of Fistfight. Shedding his thought on this tenacity of the tradition of boxing, Jaimie Lee-Barron, observed that “boxing continued to evolve as both a sport and a method of self defence through out Europe, but particularly in Italy and especially in the British Isles.”¹⁷⁶

Traceable to the Classical tradition, like a new phoenix emerging from its own ashes to regain freshness of youth, it, around the early eighteenth century, strongly evolved as a popular sport called bare-knuckle pugilism or prizefighting. The *London Protestant Mercury*, in 1681, documented an early account of a bare-knuckle fight in England. It appears that the first English bare-knuckle champion was James Figg, the father of actual professional prizefighting. His date is 1719 and he appears to have reigned for eleven years. He, purportedly, created the popular boxing phrases of “The manly art of self-defense” and “Third man in the ring.” He was largely, responsible for the popularity of the sport because he opened a school on Tottenham Court Road, London to teach the sport in a scientific way. The school which he established 1719 was known as the English School of Arms and Art of Self-Defense Academy. Additionally, he travelled around England and gave

¹⁷⁶ Jaimie Lee-Barron, *op.cit.*, p. 4.

sparring exhibitions to attract people to the sport. From the eighteenth century, the English increasingly strengthened it as part of their sporting culture and from the nineteenth century popularised it in regions where they exercised political imperial authority.

The sport of bare-knuckle fisticuff started to flourish particularly after the English Civil Wars ended *circa* 1651. However, this flourishing did not continue because of the era of Puritanism. The Puritan views of the majority of Parliament and its supporters began to be imposed on the rest of the country. The Puritans advocated an austere lifestyle and restricted what they saw as the excesses of the previous regime. Apart from suppressing Christmas and Easter, which were deemed to have pagan antecedents, pastimes and recreational activities such as the theatre, gambling, and a number of sports including bare-knuckle fighting were also banned, because the Puritans considered them to be “unchristian and violent.” However, sports and the popularity of bare-knuckle fighting escalated particularly after the regime of the Puritans.

The Restoration and advent of Charles II in 1660 led to the revival of many suppressed sports and recreational activities, which became popular. This encouraged activities like popular drinking, betting, gambling, horseracing and bare-knuckle fistfight. Civil War-shaken English society went through political and economic hardships, which projected into the eighteenth century. The society was contended by reconstruction, social polarisation and over population in slum-infested urban centres, where economic hardships were rife. These yielded apart from alcohol abuse, anti-social activities such as pick pocketing, undertaken, particularly, by underprivileged urban dwellers, to

make a living. Life on the street became very tough and called for survival on the streets. The ability to defend one's person with the fist was a necessity for survival and protection of self-pride. Fighting with the fist became prevalent on the urban streets. It is then comprehensible for minds to understand why bare-knuckle fighting became an important aspect of sports of that age and an outlet for gambling where participant and spectator could make quick money. Consequently, horseracing and bare-knuckle fights became crowd pullers because of their potentials to afford opportunities and spaces for the public to engage in gambling, betting, violence, drinking, pimping and prostitution. Unruliness and debauchery came to characterise leisure activity from the end of the seventeenth century. It renewed appetite for violence. The industrial revolution starting, according to T.S. Ashton, after 1760,¹⁷⁷ was about and promised money. Money could be made as long as people were prepared to do a day's work or engage in any activity, which could bring money. This capitalist revolution engineered the revival of another great vice of the age, gambling. The money seeking English entrepreneur and ordinary man sought ways to exploit opportunities in such an environment to make money and maximise profit. It was out of this that the sporting spectacles of horse-racing and bare-knuckle prizefight became even more popular within English popular sport and recreational culture during the last quarter of the eighteenth century. As crowd pullers, which engendered drinking through buying and selling, prostitution, quick prize money for the competitors, betting and gambling, they became avenues for making commercial gains.

¹⁷⁷ See T.S. Ashton, *The Industrial Revolution, 1760-1830*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997 edition, [an early edition came in 1968.]

Bare-knuckle prizefighting in its day thrived in an atmosphere of roistering aggression, which was a feature of eighteenth century urban social life and occasion for sports. Early fighting had no written rules, weight divisions or round limits, and no referee. In general, it was very chaotic.

John “Jack” Broughton, who became recognised as a heavyweight champion, codified and introduced the first “boxing rules,” (the Broughton Rules) on August 11, 1743.¹⁷⁸ Reigning from 1740 to 1750, he, in 1743, established an amphitheatre for public displays of the art, largely under his rules, behind Oxford Road, near Tottenham Court Road. William Augustus, the 3rd Duke of Cumberland, an admirer of bloody sports, who became known as “Butcher of Cumberland” because of his merciless slaughtering of Jacobite Scots at the Battle of Culloden in 1745, sponsored the rules. Daniel “the Jew” Mendoza alias “The Light of Israel” whose fame in boxing started flourishing from 1791, and from 1794-1795 reigned as English bare-knuckle champion,¹⁷⁹ continued the teaching and popularising of boxing tradition. He opened the Lyceum in the Strand, where he promoted the rules and enjoyed the patronage of aristocratic admirers and pupils. Under the rules of Broughton, fights occurred in a 24 feet (7.3 m)-square ring surrounded by ropes. Broughton invented and encouraged the use of horse hair gloves (mufflers)¹⁸⁰ a form of padded gloves, which were used in training and exhibitions. The London-based Pugilistic Society (1814-1861), developed the London Prize Ring Rules

¹⁷⁸ Nat Fleischer and Sam Andre, *A Pictorial History of Boxing*, New York: Citadel Press, 1959, p. 12.

¹⁷⁹ John Rennie, *London History: 100 Faces of the East End*, United Kingdom: Lulu.com, 2006, p. 120.

¹⁸⁰ See “Sport, ancient and modern: Boxing,” in William Page (ed.), *A History of the County of Middlesex, Volume 2: General; Ashford, East Bedfont with Hatton, Feltham, Hampton with Hampton Wick, Hanworth, Laleham, Littleton* (1911), pp. 292-295. *British History Online*, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/report.aspx?compid=22197>. (Information retrieved on November 8, 2010).

(L.P.R.R.) in 1838, to replace Broughton's Rules, which among other directions had disallowed hitting below the belt, hitting a downed opponent and wrestling below the waist. It also set fights in rounds, with a 30-second rest period in between, and rounds were to be over with a knockdown. Fights ended after a rest period if a fighter could not "toe the mark" or "come up to scratch" ("the mark" was a square of a yard chalked in the middle of a stage which boxers had to approach at the start of each new round).¹⁸¹ The L.P.R.R. were revised by the Pugilistic Association's Revised Rules in 1853, and then superseded by the New Rules of the Pugilistic Benevolent Society in 1866, the latter commonly known as the "Rules of the London Prize Ring." Inspired by Broughton, they became the benchmark for fighting until the last bare-knuckle championships bout sometime around 1889. After 1889, the use of gloves, a practice which is still prevailing, would become the order of the day.¹⁸²

From another perspective, it appears pugilism became popular, even with aristocrats, because it had a tranquilizing effect on eighteenth century English society. Before the rise of boxing as an artful form of self-defense¹⁸³, the main recourse to the settlement of an affair of honour was the pistol or the sword. If, as Sir Walter Besant cogently observed, the threat of duelling "demanded and cultivated carefulness of speech, courtesy of manner, and imposed some checks on conduct"; it also encouraged the bullies and

¹⁸¹ John Rennie, *op. cit.*, p. 119.

¹⁸² *Ibid.* p. 120.

¹⁸³ Normally boxing historians identifies a difference between pugilism and boxing. Pugilism is regarded as being cruder and less scientific than boxing. From Broughton's time onward the term boxing, rather than pugilism, best describes the sport.

adventurers to force their way into high society by sheer terrorism.¹⁸⁴ By offering another less deadly field of honour, pugilism helped the duel to die out.¹⁸⁵ Clearly, the therapeutic and functional effect that pugilism had on the society is perfectly communicated in a piece, written by the renowned boxing chronicler of the eighteenth century, Pierce Egan. He wrote:

Where, *then*, is the relative, however high in pride and pomp, on viewing the father, husband, or brother, killed in a duel - but what would rather than they should have had recourse of the manly defense of BOXING, than the deadly weapons of sword and ball; from which a bloody nose, or black eye, might have been the only consequence to themselves, and their families, and neither in their feelings or their circumstances been injured; reconciliation with their antagonist - faults mutually acknowledged - and, perhaps became inseparable friends ever afterwards.¹⁸⁶

As bare-knuckle prizefighting became a major spectacle in Britain at the end of the eighteenth century and the start of the nineteenth century, huge sums of money were gathered on the outcome of fights, particularly in England, where it drew massive crowds. Consequently, “fixing” emerged in the sport, and fights could be thrown and referees bought, but it appeared that the chance of a successful bet and the attraction of the violent spectacle outweighed the risk of being conned, and so the crowds kept coming. It, however, lost some popularity as it fell into popular disrepute, particularly, during the second half of the nineteenth century because of “change” in the moral climate of England. Certainly, Victorian sensitivities [or at least those

¹⁸⁴ Sir Walter Besant, *London in the Eighteenth Century* (3rd edition), London: A. and C. Black, Ltd., 1902, pp. 358-359.

¹⁸⁵ George Maccauley Trevelyan, *British History in the Nineteenth Century, 1782-1901*, London: Longmans, Green and Co., Ltd., 1922, p. 170.

¹⁸⁶ Pierce Egan, *Boxiana; or Sketches of Ancient and Modern Pugilism; From the Days of the Renowned Broughton and Slack, To the Heroes of the Present Milling Era*, Vol. 1, London, George Virtue, 1830, (Elibron Classic Series (Replica) Adamant Media Corporation, 2006), p. 13.

openly expressed] would have been injured by the crime and brutality with which prizefights were associated. The high profile fixing, spectator riots, the high rate of death, disability and brain damage all contributed to the formal death of prizefighting in the 1860s, thereby transforming the about two hundred years of violent sport of pugilism to modern boxing. For sometime through the late nineteenth century, pugilism or prizefighting primarily existed as a sport of dubious legitimacy. Outlawed in England and even much of the U.S.A., where it had been introduced, pugilistic prizefights were often held at gambling venues and broken up by police. However, it continued with the English, because the average individual's passion for a fight did not diminish. That passion and public affection engendered the creation of modern boxing. This creation, which replaced the primordial bare-knuckle prizefighting, was generally played according to the *Marquess of Queensberry Boxing rules*, which involved the use of bloated gloves of size and timing.¹⁸⁷

The English case of *R v. Coney* (1882) 8 QBD 534, found that a bare-knuckle fight was an assault occasioning actual bodily harm, despite the consent of the participants.¹⁸⁸ Consequently, prize fighting became "unlawful because of its tendency to cause a breach of the peace."¹⁸⁹ This manifested the end of widespread public prize fighting bare-knuckle contests in England.¹⁹⁰

¹⁸⁷ Bare-knuckle also declined because improved training techniques and refined hitting methods made it an extraordinarily brutal and bloody affair. It became common for a fight to last three or four hours and to end only after a hundred or more rounds. In these battles, the punishment received by both fighters was tremendous. Thus, bare-knuckle boxing travelled the same road as bull baiting and bear baiting. It became too barbaric for a society, which was growing in sophistication, hence its demise. Boxing, as a sport, was preserved only by the introduction of the Queensberry rules. However, the sport that the fan of the eighteenth century had known was forever lost.

¹⁸⁸ See Simon Gardiner, et al., *Sports Law*, 3rd Edition, London: Cavendish Publishing Limited, 2006, pp. 597, 621-622, 642.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 621.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 597, 621-622, 642.

The decade of the 1880s witnessed the spawning and establishment of a governing body, the Amateur Boxing Association, for those who wished to participate at the grass roots level. Modern boxing was rescued from falling into the same disrepute as partly pugilism, by the innate love of the healthy-minded Briton for it and partly by the efforts of a few amateur clubs. The first of these to take it up on a large scale was the old Amateur Athletic Club, founded by John Chambers and others in 1866. During the second year of its existence, this club organised annual amateur championship competitions for handsome challenge cups presented by Lord Queensberry. Special rules, *Marquess of Queensberry rules*, whose development started c. 1865,¹⁹¹ were applied, and the matches took place in a roped ring on grass.

Since its publication in 1867 under patronage of the Marquess of Queensberry, the *rules*, regardless of reviews and modification, have been the general rules governing modern international boxing. John Chambers drafted it for the lightweight, middleweight, and heavyweight amateur championships held at Lillie Bridge in London. The twelve rules specified that fights should be "a fair stand-up boxing match" in a 24-foot-square ring. Rounds were to be three minutes long with one-minute rest intervals between rounds. Each fighter was to be given a ten-second count if he was knocked down. Generally, kicking, head-butting, or hitting with any part of the arm other than the knuckles of a closed fist (including hitting with the elbow, shoulder or forearm, as well as with open gloves, the wrist, the inside, back or side of the hand), hitting below the belt (i.e. groin area), holding, tripping, pushing, biting, spitting or wrestling were prohibited.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 621.

When prizefighting pugilism died out in the second half of the nineteenth century, it did so as a result of the birth and popularity of Queensbury boxing, a more controlled but nonetheless dangerous pastime, which provoked and still provokes controversy whenever the morality of contact sports is debated.

The principal argument of those who, even with the introduction of “Queensbury boxing,” wish it proscribed is that it is brutal and involves a high risk of brain damage and even death. Other arguments regarded the psychological effect of violent sport on those who watch it, and the accusations, which have a degree of validity, that there is corruption and fixing in the sport. However, the sport of boxing continued in England and Britain in general and became popular in the colonial domains of England. Perhaps it was the fear that banning of boxing was going to create more problems than it would solve that contributed to its continuity. In other words, a compelling reason for the continued legality of the sport stemmed from the fear that banning it would surely have driven it underground. Such a situation would allow fighting to go on, but without the supervision that is afforded by the sport’s governing bodies, the betting boards of control and, most importantly, the medical advisory boards. In addition, such a situation would definitely exacerbate the same problems that those who lobbied for its ban had identified.

As the use of bloated gloves of fair size became popular and bouts became shorter and greater importance was attached to strategic and defensive manoeuvres such as slipping, bobbing, countering and angling, and technical supremacy replaced brute force and weight divisions, the sport appeared

relatively safe, with serious injury less likely. Consequently, the relatively safe yet manly sport of boxing under the Queensbury rules attracted participants of all classes in England. Receiving popular promotion it became a great proletarian sport of late Victorian and twentieth century Britain, providing as it did dreams and opportunities of glory, social prestige, and riches for the common man.

Throughout the early twentieth century, international boxers, under the Queensbury rules, struggled to achieve legitimacy, aided and inspired by the influence of promoters like George Lewis “Tex” Rickard and the popularity of great champions from John L. Sullivan to Jack Dempsey. Shortly after this era, international boxing commissions and other sanctioning bodies were established to standardize the sport and ascertain recognized world champions.

English boxing, developed and gained currency and legitimacy in British society, and made entries into colonial holdings within the British Empire. Eventually, Queensbury rules-guided boxing (modern boxing), found roots in colonial environments, including Gold Coast, where it manifested in the first quarter of the twentieth century and has survived the collapse of colonialism.

Worldwide, professional and amateur boxing, fall under controlling bodies like the W.B.C., and W.B.A., the W.B.F., and I.B.C., the International Boxing Authority (I.B.A.), the W.B.O., and Association Internationale de Boxe Amateur (A.I.B.A.). It is a favourite sport and source of wealth, fame and social mobility for many who continually are attracted to professional promotions and amateur competitions like the Olympic and Commonwealth Games.

Globally, professional boxing, apart from football (soccer), remains the most popular sport. Ghana, indubitably, is renowned for its boxing talents and for the twentieth century it registered its name in international awareness as a top boxing nation. It has produced a number of celebrated world champions. The Ga, particularly those from Ga-Mashie and especially those from the area of Bukom have dominated the sport in terms of excellence and participation. Ga-Mashie, in Accra, produced the International Boxing Hall of Fame icon Azumah Nelson. Being the roots of Azumah Nelson, Ga-Mashie's relationship with pugilistic dynamics within indigenous politics, popular culture and colonial administration, and the rise of "modern" boxing in Ghana forms the basis of the discussion in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

THE GA, *ASAFO ATWELE* AND ROOTING OF BOXING IN GHANA

Nothing draws a crowd as quickly as a fight.

Old saying

Introduction

As indicated in the previous chapter, the cultural construction and activity, referred to as modern (English-style) boxing, is a popular sport in Ghana. According to Vieta, the advent and thriving of colonialism saw the suppression and in some cases the “discontinuity” of a number of indigenous sports, which had been created and organised by the African nationalities within colonial territories. Instead, the colonial administration, using its agents and African elites, gradually introduced and encouraged the spread of European sports – like football and boxing – to the people.¹ Informatively, some accessible *corpus* of literature on sports in Ghana, particularly the history of football, and the official website of the Central Region of Ghana,² reveals Cape Coast as the birthplace of that sport in the country. The “Passion of the Nation,” as it is usually referred to by sports *aficionados*, analysts and match commentators, was introduced into the country by British colonial civil servants and other company officials residing in Cape Coast, the seat of

¹ K.T Vieta, *The Flagbearers of Ghana: Profiles of One Hundred distinguished Ghanaians*, Accra: EMC Publications, 1990, p. 561.

² See for example Ohene Djan, *Football in Ghana*, Accra: Gapo Publication, 1980. Ohene Djan, *A Short History of Soccer in Ghana*, Accra: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1964. Mensah Oti-Asirifi, “History of Kumasi Asante Kotoko,” Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) dissertation in History, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, 2004. Wisdom Kwabena Amati, “History of Accra Hearts of Oak Sporting Club (1911-2000 AD),” B.A. dissertation in History, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, 2005, and Official website of the Central Region of Ghana - <http://www.centralregion.gov.gh/can2008.php>. (Information was accessed on June 12, 2009).

government before it was replaced in 1876 by Accra. The resident British imperial and colonial agents played the sport, and as a tradition, it continued in Cape Coast. Realising that football, a British cultural heritage, had the potential to develop in Gold Coast and aid their cultural imperialism agenda, the colonial establishment supported the formal introduction of association football into the territory in the 1900s. The political establishment, primarily, pursued this agenda of encouraging and entrenching the sport of football in the country through African students of their Western formal school building programme.

Although Accra was the colonial capital by 1900, the British rather chose to nurture the growth of the discipline and association football in Cape Coast. In fact, Cape Coast, predating Accra, had been the major citadel where Europeanization and Anglicisation started and took roots. Noted for colonial Anglo-Fante official ceremonies and afternoon tea parties at its Victoria Park at the beginning of the twentieth century, British nostalgia for Cape Coast maintained their relationship with the town. Having served for a long time as the main base of the British, the town contained a population of some British colonial civil servants and officials and continued its social dealings and commercial transactions with the colonial administrative structure. By 1900, the British still operated a considerable amount of their commercial dealings with the country through and in Cape Coast, which, because of its seaport, served as an important entrepot for colonial mercantile activities. Reasonably, Cape Coast, with such a background, became a good starting point for the British development of association football in the colonial territory.

Additionally, certain motivating factors must have enhanced that position. A complex pool of interrelated historical and prevailing factors, including British-Cape Coast historical and commercial attachments, presence of British colonial agents in Cape Coast, and the fact that informally the seeding of the sport had started in Cape Coast, led to the formal creation and inauguration of the first football club in Gold Coast *circa* 1903. This club was called Cape Coast Excelsior.³

One Mr. Briton,⁴ who was a British colonial agent of West Indian extraction (a Jamaican) resident in Cape Coast and a teacher of the Cape Coast Government Boys School, founded the club. He found, among his students, ready material to constitute the squad. He inspired the students, who were already sports conscious and, similar to the situation of other students in parts of the British Empire, like India and West Indies, were playing such English sports like cricket and tennis, to venture into football. These inspired students, motivated by this Anglicisation project and thrilled about football reports from other parts of the Empire, England and Europe, which they read from the few foreign newspapers including English ones, vigorously pursued football. From a group of twenty-two keen students, who embarked upon secret training sessions mostly in the night when it was full moon, at the

³ See David Goldblatt, *The Ball is Round: A Global History of Soccer*, New York: Penguin Group Inc., 2006 and 2008.

⁴ Ohene Djan, *Football in Ghana, op.cit.*, p. 3

Victoria Park, which was then a well-kept place for official ceremonies, came into existence Excelsior.⁵

The process of the formation of Excelsior, as a contribution to the formalisation of footballing in the colonial territory, received some support and encouragement from the Accra-based top colonial administrator, Sir Frederick M. Hodgson, who, having formally been governor from *circa* 1897-1900, was, like his kind in other colonial territories, a keen sportsman. He must have supported the formalisation enterprise to start in Cape Coast because its informal introduction, indigenous familiarisation and acknowledgement, and rudimentary local participation, started there. However, coming from a top colonial official and ambassador of English culture, that support, when contextualised within the position of sports and hegemony within the broader milieu of British cultural imperial history, was, by logical historical and theoretical reasons, provided for colonial administrative expediency. It represented a formal contribution to the subtle but forceful British imperial agenda to universalise British, and especially English, cultural values, norms and standards. Sir Frederick M. Hodgson was the main patron and mover of the pioneering challenge between Excelsior and a European side, comprising some European residents in Cape Coast and sailors from a ship,⁶ which had docked in the town's port. Having received the indulgence of Hodgson, the match attracted a huge cheering crowd of indigenes and British and European colonial officials and administrators. It

⁵ See "CAN 2008," sub article "History of Football in Cape Coast" on the official website of the Central Region of Ghana - <http://www.centralregion.gov.gh/can2008.php> . (Information was retrieved on June 12, 2009).

⁶ David Goldblatt, *op.cit.* p. 484.

was played on Boxing Day, December 26, 1903, at Victoria Park, which, ordered with markings and a goal post, became the first public space to be formalised as a football pitch, within Ghana. In its inaugural match Excelsior – “black Africa’s first football club”⁷ – lost by two goals to one.⁸ Friendly fixtures arranged for Excelsior and non-African civil servants in the town, and sailor teams from ships that docked at the port, which were officiated by European officials, with African officiating emerging after 1905, popularised football in the city and attracted the youth to the sport. Excelsior continued to play demonstration matches in the city and its neighbouring towns. More youth engaged in the sport as mushroom clubs emerged. This waxing culture spread to other coastal vicinities like Elmina, Saltpond, Winneba and, eventually, Accra and its adjoining Ga towns. Its spread, within a framework of a burgeoning formal national association football structure, subsequently spawned new clubs, which over the years engineered, within the colonial territory, an enduring mass recognition for the sport. Such enduring recognition consolidated the sport as a popular culture in the colonial territory of Gold Coast and postcolonial Ghana.

Like football, the pattern and order of modern boxing in Ghana, has its source and development from the colonial cultural dissemination project of the British, which ambitiously aimed to spread motifs of English (British) culture through the Empire. Unlike football, it first found roots and currency among the Ga, particularly among those of the central part of the burgeoning urban

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ “CAN 2008” the sub article “History of Football in Cape Coast,” *op.cit.*

city of Accra, which from 1876 served as seat of government. It later spread through the country and was embraced by other ethnic groups within the territory. The Ga, who were first to assimilate to a greater degree the sport, as a popular pursuit, have dominated it over the years. As quintessential boxers they have continuously produced national and international champions of the sport.

A Brief Cultural History of Ga-Mashie and its Assimilation of English-style Boxing: c. 1600 to c. 1930s

The easy assimilation of the sport by the Ga, as they fluidly entered it, emerges from the historical fact that before it came to them they developed and had an indigenous fisticuff sport called *Asafo Atwele*. Reasonably, the existence of that construction among the people largely enabled them to easily partake in and adopt the foreign style, which the agency of English colonialism brought to the Ga territory. Azumah Nelson is a partaker of that colonial legacy of boxing among the Ga. Before this study proceeds to examine the Azumah Nelson legend in Ghanaian boxing history, it is important at this stage to interrogate the historical saga of modern boxing as it started among the Ga and flourished in Gold Coast and later Ghana, particularly when it came under governmental supervision both in the colonial and postcolonial periods. Such a social history should give us insight into the foundation of the sport in the country, contributions of the pioneer movers of that enterprise, and how such contributors opened the floodgates for latter day champions, like Azumah Nelson, to emerge and use the sport to make a living and meaningful contribution to society.

Akyeampong's seminal study, has hinted that the translocation of the colonial administrative capital from Cape Coast to Accra triggered a burgeoning but violent urban politics in Accra.⁹ Those changes engendered, for reasons to be examined, a progression and growth of Ga martial culture, which negotiated the shaping of the combat sport of *Asafo Atwele*, to promote martial and social qualities like self-defense, courage, social solidarity, hardiness and swiftness, and social and political acclaim for individuals and groups among the Ga. Such urban developments, particularly the shaping of the indigenous fisticuff *Asafo Atwele*, consequently contributed in stimulating Ga interest in modern boxing and helped to shape and direct its growth among that ethnic nationality.

The selection of Accra as capital did not only mean the urbanisation of the area and increase in population density, which comes with the attendant problems of social competition among persons and groups for survival and over the control of resources. It also meant the spread and intensification of colonial capitalism to Accra and that, itself, introduced a clash of interests between the indigenous political leaders and colonial administrators. The indigenous polity was thrown into a state of chieftaincy rivalry and cases of violence-associated destoolments became rife. The need for land for real estate development, a typical consequence of urbanisation, also led to land litigation problems between the indigenous custodians and private land developing firms associated with the colonial administration. The colonial administration

⁹ 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*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 2002.

desired to transform Accra into an ideal “modern” colonial city and that demanded that they took land from the indigenous population. There was also a wave of massive immigration of people into Accra, because of its transformation into the administrative and economic capital of Gold Coast. All these, which appeared to have threatened and possibly actualised a displacement of the indigenes, comprising the commoners, educated elites and wealthy Ga, from their lands as a result of the establishment of infrastructure and migrant need for *lebensraum*, made the Ga appear to be a depressed minority. Concomitant problems of urbanisation, such as unsanitary conditions associated with rapid and high population growth, and alienation of some of the chiefs from the people as they, in their determination to accumulate wealth within a capitalist colonial urban environment, illegally sold lands to real estate developers, triggered a polarization of the relationship between the indigenous regal leadership positions and the masses-oriented vigilante and military companies of the *Asafo* (pl. *Asafoi*).¹⁰

¹⁰ The *asafo* construction is of Akan origin. On the coast it was an integral part of Fante state formation and politics. Generally, it was the military or army of the town/state (*Oman*). It consisted of, apart from all able-bodied adults, all the respected and respectable quality men and women. These were the warriors, and they formed the main fighting machine for the people in times of war. In addition to their military role, the *asafo* also undertook civic works, cleaned the town, roads and paths of filth and weeds, and ensured that civil order and peace was maintained. It was also a vigilante group that ensured that social deviants and unwanted characters were controlled. These warrior groups had captains referred to as *Safohen*. They also had their own commanding officers known as *Supi* who were above the rank of *Safohen*. Young men and women were absorbed into the *asafo*, which their fathers belonged. *Asafo* titles and responsibilities were inherited patrilineally. (See De-Valera N.Y.M. Botchway, “Prophet Jemisimiham Jehu-Appiah (Akaboha I) The Man, His Vision and Work”, M.Phil., (History) thesis, University of Cape Coast, Cape Coast, 2004, p. 54). Social pressures and unrests, which were heightened by Akan state formation and consolidation from the 1650s, and inter-ethnic competition for commercial dominance in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, which often resulted in wars, encouraged the need for security and internal cohesion of Ga Towns. That led to the assimilation of the *asafo* concept and organisation, circa eighteenth century, which provided a place for all able-bodied men and women in Ga society, even those of servile background, to put themselves to the security and internal cohesion of the polity. The relevance of security of town even provided and guaranteed common people and those of

The *asafo* was one of the military institutions which the indigenous setting of Accra accommodated. As part of the rite marking the passage from childhood to adulthood, called *kromotsu*, every Ga male had to be initiated into an *asafo* group. Because they resembled those of the Akan coastal ones, it has been assumed that they were copied from a Fante or Akwamu model.¹¹ However, there is a certain difference between the Ga *asafo* and those of their Akan Fante groups. For illustration, those in Cape Coast and Elmina are associated with particular quarters and wards whereas in Ga-Mashie, the companies resemble broad age grades, each straddling a number of different indigenous quarters or *akutsei*.¹²

The *asafo* contained an established chain of command of heritable offices. The *asafoatsemei* (captains or fathers of the *asafo*) headed the sections of the companies in each *akutso*. These were accountable to one *shipi* (military commander). Each *akutso* had a military leader called *akwashon onukpa*. The *akwashon mantse*, theoretically the senior military commander for Ga-Mashie was, historically provided by the Kpakpatse lineage (*we*) of the Asere *akutso*. Rallied for different civic functions, these age grades always divided when Accra went to war. The age grades, as members, joined the men of their own lineage and marched with the leaders of their individual *akutso*. Within the realms of town politics, where the collective bulk of “chiefs” (*mantsemei*) and

servile background who fought for the town and showed military prowess, the possibility of attaining leadership positions in the *asafo* and community and social incorporation respectively.

¹¹ Abraham Akrong, “Integration and adaptation : A case study of La and Osu *asafo* religious culture,” *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana*, (hereafter *T.H.S.G.*), New Series, 2, 1998, and C.C. Reindorf, *History of the Gold Coast and Asante*, Basel: Missionsbuchhandlung, 1895, pp. 111-128.

¹² The singular of *Akutsei* is *Akutso*.

royals were usually deemed as the “head” and *asafobii* (members of the *asafoi*) as “legs” of the body politics of the town, the *asafoi* were seen as the institutional expression of “commoner” interests. In that ideological framework, the *asafoi* were obliged to eagerly defend the rights of the ordinary *Manbii* (townspeople, citizens) and *oblahii* (young men, nontitled “commoners”), keep in check the privilege of chiefs and *oblempomei* (rich men who through their wealth have become honorary stool holders) and stop them from abusing their advantaged positions. *

David Kimble’s detailed work on Gold Coast, regarded the institution of *asafo* throughout that colony as an essential part of the customary checks and balances against indigenous political authority. Nevertheless, Kimble revealed that between 1913 and 1919 the *asafo* became an unsettling influence on the institution of chieftaincy.¹³ Kimble seemed, however, to suggest that the companies became redundant at a certain (unspecified) period. However, having been an active and permanent part of the social and political landscape of their communities, the institution of *asafo* re-emerged strongly (by unidentified persons) particularly from 1913 to provide a valve for popular dissatisfaction with the socio-political order.¹⁴

The nature and dynamics of Ga social and political action was such that the *asafobii* expected their *mantsemei* to provide leadership and protect what they perceived to be the interest of the people. From the time the colonial capital was relocated to Accra – a period when British political

¹³ See David Kimble, *The Political History of Ghana: The Rise of Gold Coast Nationalism 1850-1928*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963, p. 469-472.

¹⁴ David Kimble, *op.cit.* p. 469-472.

pressure increased on the *mantsemei* to co-operate and most indigenous “rulers” fell prey to capitalist and corrupt tendencies of a running urbanisation process – the *asafoatsemei* and *asafoi* emerged at the forefront to oppose policies and actions of the rulers, which they judged inimical to the people’s interest. Writing about the Ga *asafo* companies in Accra, but resonating Kimble, Parker suggested that like their Akan counterparts in states like Akyem Abuakwa and Kwawu, the *asafo* functioned as a vehicle for raising “young man” grievances.¹⁵ Such “young men” generally would be the virile youth. However, Parker’s “young man,” in addition to the above understanding, seemed to propose a category of educated, wealthy, and therefore persuasive men. Such members, considering themselves as bastions of “tradition” and political action in a milieu of a rapidly expanding and “modern” fringe, could co-opt the institution against the *mantsemei* and unite popular anger against them if they were found alienating the people and mortgaging the common property, customs and interests of the people. Such a situation of manipulation is what will naturally contribute to and make it possible for such elements, manifesting during the Ratepayers and Manbii Party struggles of the 1920s to the 1940s, to co-opt the *asafoi*, rely on their support and use them to animate their political rivalry and engage in their clashes.

As the indigenous leadership was put to test, when the capital was relocated, the power and respect of the leadership seemed to wane within the

¹⁵ J.S Parker, “Ga State and Society in Early Colonial Accra, 1860s-1920s,” Ph.D. thesis, School of Oriental and African Studies, (University of London), 1995, p. 316-317. (This can also be found at the British Library via the Electronic Theses Online System (EThOS) supported Portable Document Format (P.D.F.) file)

soaring divisive urban politics of Accra. With chiefs contesting one another for wealth, authority and recognition within that budding capitalist commercial colonial city of Accra, and European commerce, development of railways, roads and introduction of the Ford Truck, having some undesired consequences on commoner economics, such as pushing Ga market women out of business and depriving the Ga labourers as carriers,¹⁶ the commoners naturally reacted. The labouring masses, of which most were *asafobii*, feeling politically and economically endangered found a means to create solidarity and internal cohesion and security. Dominating the warrior – *tabilo* (pl. *tabiloi*), vigilante, self-help and community building organisation of *asafo* of the indigenous state, the labouring class and ordinary Ga citizens resorted to the creation of the martial sport of *Asafo Atwele* to inject social cohesion within their rank. Such cohesiveness was needed by that majority to move beyond and insulate itself against the divisiveness of a prevailing elite and urban politics of Accra (the area of present Central Accra), which was also the seat of the coast-domiciled Ga-Mashie state. Furthermore, the common Ga citizenry and *asafobii* caucus, having experienced the adverse effects of the forces of change within the urbanisation process in colonial Accra and the estrangement of the chiefs from the people and customs, became the protectors of tradition and indigenous Ga-Mashie socio-political identity within ancient martial values and *esprit de corp* of the Ga *asafo* construction. It was in the light of such determination and realisation that they sought to resurrect the

¹⁶ Dominic Fortescue, "The Accra Crowd, the Asafo and the Opposition to the Municipal Corporations Ordinance 1924-1925," *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 24:3, 1990, pp. 348-374.

martial essence of *asafo* and its vigilante and communalistic spirit that supported social cohesion and order. This was a period in the colonial history of Gold Coast when inter state warfare, which featured the *asafo*, had ceased. That cessation did not render the *asafo* useless. It, in fact, encouraged the *asafobii* to channel the Ga martial spirit into another avenue, unique in the *asafo* history of Gold Coast, where it could be used to engender state security and cohesion not in the face of war but the threats of divisive urban politics. The enterprise to restore the security of the indigenous social and political system and balance demanded the employment of cultural, religious and *asafo* (warrior) symbology. The symbolism and symbolisation of martial greatness, which, within the construction of *asafo* martial ethos, derived from unarmed hand-to-hand bare-knuckle (*Atwele*) fisticuff combat (*Nomo*), was to be invoked. This practice and its symbolism, which promoted the martial virtues of fitness, swiftness and strength as well as the social virtues of healthy competition, bravado, courage and beauty, contributed to the development of *Asafo Atwele*, by the *asafobii* of Ga-Mashie, and formed part of their wider determination to restore traditional values to strengthen Ga identity and solve contemporary problems.

The Ga-Mashie state, which produced *Asafo Atwele* during the colonial period when Accra became the colonial administrative capital, is a product of an interesting history of indigenous state formation and the dynamics of inter-state political struggle for economic and political hegemony in Gold Coast, which goes back into the sixteenth century. Today, the geographical frame or area of indigenous Ga-Mashie, which is normally referred to as Central Accra,

lies, metaphorically, as an isle of “tradition” in an ocean of “modernity” of the virtually boundless and ever-expanding capital city of Ghana and one of the fast growing cosmopolises in West Africa. The locale, of that old but still pulsing “traditional” nerve centre of “modern” Accra is distinguished by tracing the “Asafoatse Nettey Road” also called “Horse Road,” westwards from the premises of Bank of Ghana, where the road manifest intersections with the popular “High Street” and “Thorpe Road,” which, like “Pagan Road,” connects Asafoatse Nettey Road to ‘Kojo Thompson Road,’ which proceeds to the north and parallels the “Kwame Nkrumah Avenue.” High Street, proceeding along the coast, passes through Ussher Town and merges into “Cleland Road” and “Winneba Road” at Jamestown. Along the Asafoatse Nettey Road in the westward progression are important landmarks like the Ghana Post Office buildings, Lutterodt Road, Asafoatse Nettey’s House, Wesleyan Mission, and Palladium cinema. Other roads, named after significant historical and political Ga figures, such as “Ga Mantse Street,” “Nii Owoo Street,” “Bannerman Road,” “Abossey-Okai Road,” “Hansen Road,” “Kofi Oku Street,” “Bruce Road,” and “Adedemkpo (Adadaimkpo) Road” join or cross the Asafoatse Nettey Road, which terminates on the old railway line that proceeds along the eastern bank of the Korle Lagoon. Hemmed between Asafoatse Nettey Road and the Gulf of Guinea section of the Atlantic Ocean, approximately within latitudes 0’12W and 0’13W and longitudes 5.31N and 5.32N, is Ga-Mashie or Central Accra.

The Ga kingdom of [Old] Accra, by the sixteenth century had emerged as a notable political state in Gold Coast. This was roughly sited between the

Fante territory on the western seaboard, which ended at Beraku, Aguna, and the polity of Ningo, on the east.¹⁷ Like the other petty kingdoms and commonwealths on the coast, whose capitals existed at some distance from the coast,¹⁸ Ayawaso, the capital of Accra, was located inland on the plains some eleven miles (about 17.702784 kilometres) from the rest of the Accra *aklowai* (villages) and *majii* (towns), which were in close proximity to the sea. European trading activities, particularly those of the Portuguese, prevailed in Accra at this time.¹⁹ The people of the coastal villages of Accra indulged in fishing and salt mining, particularly from existing lagoons²⁰ to compensate for the limited agricultural capacity of their coastal plain and to supply the larger inland towns.²¹ However, a major economic role played by Accra, which sustained and boosted her economy was the intermediary position she occupied in the trade, particularly, the gold trade, between the European merchants and settlements along the Ga coast and the inland states. By the seventeenth century, Great Accra was a thriving urban centre surrounded by numerous satellite settlements and inhabited by traders and artisans.²² By the seventeenth century Accra was both economically prosperous and politically

¹⁷ W. Walton Claridge, *The Gold Coast and Ashanti*, (Vol.1), London: Frank Cass and Co. Ltd, 1964, p. 56.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

²⁰ Oral tradition holds that the Ga, like the peoples of the Slave Coast, had no history of maritime navigation, and that their fishing and angling activities were limited to the lagoons before the Twi-speaking Fante, their neighbours in the west, introduced seagoing canoes. [See C.C. Reindorf, *History of the Gold Coast and Asante*, p. 269, and Robin Law, *The Slave Coast of West Africa 1550-1750: The Impact of the Atlantic Slave Trade on an African Society*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991, pp. 41-42]. By the 1780s, however, the Ga were definitely engaged in sea fishing. See F.R. Irvine, *The Fishes and Fisheries of the Gold Coast*, London: The Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1947, p. 23-24.

²¹ See R.A. Kea, "Trade, State Formation and Warfare on the Gold Coast, 1600-1826," Ph.D. thesis, University of London, 1974, pp. 196-197.

²² See R.A. Kea, *Settlements, Trade and Politics in the Seventeenth Century Gold Coast*, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1982, p 199

powerful. The political supremacy of Accra covered several inland Akan communities including Akwamu. Consisting of Great Accra, which was off shore and constituted Ayawaso, and Little Accra, comprising small coastal *aklowa* (villages) and *kose* (countryside settlements) from Small Beraku, Aprang, through Labadi to Ningo, the Accra polity, however, during this century, attracted the avarice of many states. Such cupidity manifested in a series of martial clashes between 1677 and 1680, in a struggle over economic and political hegemony. In fact, a protracted war, which had ensued between the “Accras” and Akwamu, and had lasted from 1669 until 1680, wasted a vast extent of the country as many towns were burnt and all the plantations destroyed. The Accras were completely crushed and their territory was reduced to the position of a tributary province of Akwamu. Those who escaped the Akwamu authority either found refuge in the European forts²³ or fled to Popo [in the east on the coast of Togo]. Others also went to the kingdom of Fetu. Little Accra, and environs under the Dutch fort, was burnt to the ground and some of its inhabitants relocated to Soko under the walls of James fort.²⁴ The devastation unleashed by the prolonged struggle led to the fragmentation of the Ga-Mashie polity, which was the core of the Ga state. The regal family, which was also fragmented, dispersed into exile. The Ga

²³ Note that the Ga seemed to have been unwilling to allow European traders to construct permanent establishment after they destroyed a Portuguese fort in 1576. Through a series of agreements the Dutch West India Company built Fort Crèvecoeur at Aprang in Little Accra in 1649 and in 1661, the Danes who had replaced a weak Swedish presence, were granted total ownership of a fort at the *nshonaman* (coastal town) of Osu about two miles to the east of the Dutch settlement. In addition, an English fort, James Fort, would be built by the Royal African Company half a mile to the west of the Dutch fort in 1672-1673. [See Barbot for a description of the forts *circa* 1680. Jean Barbot, *Barbot on Guinea: The writings of Jean Barbot on West Africa 1678-1712*, 2 Vols., (eds.) P.E.H. Hair, Adam Jones, and Robin Law, London: Hukluyt Society, 1992, pp. 430-453].

²⁴ W.W. Claridge, *op.cit.*, p. 121.

coastal settlements or “seaside towns” (*nshonamajii*) such as Osu, Labadi, Teshie, Nungua, and Tema abandoned the suzerainty of the weakened Ga-Mashie polity and gave their allegiance to the Akwamu suzerain. The Dutch and other European settlers, representing European nations, abandoned their dependency on the Ga state. Denmark, who in 1657 supplanted Sweden, took her possessions including her headquarters – Ursu Lodge, which it fortified and renamed Christiansborg,²⁵ and England, who between 1650 and 1673 had established settlements and trade posts (forts) on the Accra coast, also abandoned their dependency on the Ga state. The forts of the Europeans, which represented their settlements, manifested in the vicinities of Dutch Accra, English Accra and Danish (Christiansborg) Accra. Because of the protection that they gave to the Ga settlements that were domiciled around them, and the economic and commercial rewards they generated, which were enjoyed by the Europeans and the indigenous vicinities because of the pivotal roles of commerce that they played in the Atlantic trading activities, these forts and European settlements served as a catalyst for the urban growth of those three Accra *nshonamajii* that existed in proximity to them. These local vicinities were *Kinka*, an indigenous name given to Dutch Accra,²⁶ which after 1868 when jurisdiction over the town passed to the British became Ussher Town, *Nleshi (Inleshie)*, the Ga designation for English Accra, and Osu of Danish (Christiansborg) Accra. Because of the subjugation of the Accras by

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

²⁶ This Ga name for Dutch Accra clearly cognates with the Fante term for the Dutch, which is *Kanka*. The etymology of the Ga and Fante terms remains hidden. According to Zimmermann, it means a Dutch person. According to Christaller, the Twi term for Dutch Accra is Nkran (Accra) Kankan, whose inhabitants are called Kanka, Kinka, Kenka or Ginga. It is also a term for a Dutch. [See J.G. Christaller, *Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language Called Tshi (Twi)*, Basel: Basel Evangelical Society, 1933, (Second Edition) p. 226.

Akwamu, which, splitting them, shaped them as individual Ga vicinities to identify with European powers, and led to the abandonment of European dependency on the Ga-Mashie state, the areas of Dutch Accra, English Accra and Danish (Christiansborg) Accra took on distinct identities. It was also same with the other areas of La (Labadi), Teshie, Nungua and Tema.

The economic devastation, which the struggles, during the war and for several years after the war, unleashed, was so great that the forts of Accra (Dutch and English) and Christiansborg had to be supplied with provisions from the windward Settlements.²⁷ In 1730, the Ga state was reconstituted, when an Accra (Ga)-Akyem-Akwapim alliance, defeated Akwamu and removed her suzerainty. The newly reconstituted Ga-Mashie then established its capital, Accra, in close proximity to the Atlantic Ocean.

Thus at the time that Accra became the colonial administrative capital, the Ga-Mashie state was divided into two major towns, namely, Jamestown (alias Nleshi, Inleshie or English Accra) and Ussher Town (Dutch Accra). The areas of Osu (Christiansborg), La (Labadi), Teshie, Nungua and Tema, maintained their distinct political identities and independence of the Ga-Mashie polity. The binary demarcation of the Ga-Mashie unit constituted seven indigenous *akutsei* (quarters) or sections.²⁸ The former – Jamestown – which derived its name from the English fort in that locality, contained Sempe, Akanmaje or Akumadzie (Akpangaje) and Inleshie Alata, and the latter, which derived its name from a Dutch fort constituted Gbese, Abola [Tafo],

²⁷ W. W. Claridge, *op. cit.*, p. 121.

²⁸ See M. J. Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Ga People*, London: Oxford University Press, 1937, p. 2.

Otublohum and Asere.²⁹ The social corridors of this primordial coastal Ga-Mashie state formation, which had been reconstituted as late as 1730, when the Ga liberated themselves from Akwamu imperial hegemony, was an instrumental platform on which *Asafo Atwele* in the twentieth century was organised and rooted.

Originally constructed for the *asafo* as a sport and a utilitarian marker of social formation and security, it also received participation from young boys who were not members of the *asafo*. On that trajectory, it did not only exist as a martial sport reserved for the *asafo* of able bodied men who used it to engender a martial *esprit de corps*, bravery, physical training, fitness which were necessary for internal security and unity in defence of town and for insulation against the divisive colonial inspired urban politics. It also assumed the nature of a mass sport, which on a civil and non-martial level became associated with the commoners and labouring class and was normally performed on the common social space of the beach and the popular assembly venues within the geographical spaces of Jamestown and Ussher Town, particularly, in the sub-quarter of Bukom in Ussher Town. Hence, the *asafobii*

²⁹ The names of the sections reflect the influence of some non-Ga ethnic elements in the social formation and ethnic composition of those sections. The control of the Ga-Mashie area by the Akwamu from 1680 to 1730 saw the presence of English, Dutch, Danish, Nigerian, Fante, and Akwamu elements in those areas. The Europeans were there because of their imperial and colonial interests. The English also brought in Nigerian artisans and slaves known as Alata for their labour. The Akwamu came as result of their imperial agenda and the Fante largely came as immigrant fishermen. Consequently, some of these immigrants were instrumental in the formation of some of the sections and some consequently were incorporated into the Ga polity. The Jamestown area, because of the pronounced English presence and activities, which were there, is locally known as Nleshi (*Inleshie*), which is a corruption of English. During their foundation, the Alata, Abola (possibly a Ga variation, which refers to Fante immigrants from Abora in Cape Coast) and Otublohum sections received significant numbers of immigrants, from the Nigerians, Fante, and Akwamu respectively. Incidentally, Akumadzie (Akanmaji) is also known as Akpangaje, and Akpangaje in Ga means vulture. It was named so because of the prevalence of vultures there.

attempt to revitalise and reinforce old Ga martial tradition, which featured and shaped *Asafo Atwele*, paved the way for the birth of organised modern boxing in Accra, which naturally absorbed the Ga, primarily those of Ga-Mashie, and made them prominent partakers in that sport. Modern boxing, in terms of its employment of the fist and ability to promote courage, fitness, strength, tact, group solidarity, and social prestige, was similar to that of the Ga *Asafo Atwele*.

Organised modern boxing would start taking strong roots from the 1930s and the British colonial administration, in their attempt to stem the seeming violence that was associated with that indigenous fisticuff sport of *Asafo Atwele*, would ban it among its creators. The proscription of the bare-knuckle fight induced the Ga to find an alternative. That alternative fisticuff sport was the budding culture of the English-style modern boxing, which the Ga resorted to and have excelled in as participants.

As participants, many slum dwelling elements especially in Accra and, later, those in other urban centres, primarily, came to use the sport as a tool of social mobility for the human agent and its society. This popular culture would not serve as just a continuation of the *Asafo Atwele* martial art. *Asafo Atwele* had reinforced Ga martial ethos during the colonial urbanisation project of Accra and revered bodily strength, hardiness, fitness and ability to use the fist (*Atwele*) to fight (*Nomo*). Within the colonial and postcolonial milieu, it provided people, particularly the Ga, a means for the realisation of personal and social development, recognition and respect within localities through the exhibition of pugilistic strength and skills. With time, it became an avenue to

make quick money, and a channel for participants to do the prestigious thing of travelling to *abrokyiri* or abroad, especially England. Furthermore, for some local boxers and their national supporters, who craved encounters between local boxers and European boxers on the international stage, in which they desired victory, it subtly was a means – symbolic and definite – to challenge notions of colonial and European administrative authority and racial superiority, which pervaded the colonial period.

Before the ban on *Asafo Atwele* was implemented, the Ga-Mashie area of Jamestown and Ussher Town, enthusiastically participated in it during the first quarter of the twentieth century. What was the nature of this sport, which was created from the *asafo* quest of new roles, within a colonial urbanised setting where warfare had been illegalized and where the commoners sought to forge mass camaraderie and revitalise threatened Ga traditions in the face of the prevailing divisive politics and crisis of urbanisation of Accra?

As organised as they were, the *Asafo Atwele* competitions expressed combats between the various members of the *asafo* companies from the *akutsei* of the dually demarcated Ga-Mashie state. Under the instruction and guidance of leaders of the *asafo* groups, bare-knuckle contests were organised on individual or group free-for-all bases for adult virile male members. These combatants engaged enthusiastically in these competitive nevertheless solidarity fights to achieve social honours for their *asafo*, quarters, themselves, and families. It was also an alternative way for the youthful *asafo* male who participated in it as a combatant, showcasing martial skills and courage, to acquire the societal recognition and identity as *mokpakpa* (a term which can be

construed to mean a “virtuous,” “proper,” or “brave” man). Within the indigenous Ga-Mashie notions of civic virtue was the idea of the “virtuous” man. The concept of *mokpakpa* was not subsumed entirely into an ideology of material accumulation. *Mokpakpa* was also the courageous fighter, whose courage and bravery qualified him as a successful warrior. To have fought as a soldier in the category of the *asafɔ* was a vital constituent in the social identity – the status – of the *mokpakpa*. Reporting in the early eighteenth century, the Danish clergyman Rask, gave an illustration on that concept, when he noted that “in the olden days” a Ga man could not become a headman “caboecer”³⁰ (*mokpakpa*) without first having been to war as a combatant, or killing a selection of wild animals, eventhough the rule was no longer rigorously adhered to.³¹ Indigenous Ga-Mashie therefore venerated courageous fighters and excellent combatants in martial duels. Because organised inter and intra ethnic warfare, which was proscribed within the colonial milieu of *Pax Britannia* in Accra, could not afford young males with the opportunity to acquire the status of *mokpakpa*, *Asafɔ Atwele* became an alternative. Within indigenous Ga-Mashie, the martial construction of *Asafɔ Atwele*, which also required from it players, particularly the young male participants, warrior’s bravery, courage, ferocious spirit and physical strength, was another platform particularly for the adult combatants who were able to demonstrate valued warrior qualities, to access the social recognition as *mokpakpa*. At times boys of the same age, because their fathers were *asafobii* which meant that in future

³⁰ Caboecer comes from the Portuguese word *cabecier* or *cabecear*, which can be approximated to headman.

³¹ Irene Quaye, “The Ga and their neighbours 1600-1742,” Ph.D. thesis, University of Ghana, Legon, 1972, pp. 256-257.

they after puberty became adult *asafobii*, had competitions arranged for them by the older *asafobii*.

Although the *asafoi* accommodate female members, they were forbidden to partake in the sport. Even if females were deprived active participation in the sport as combatants, they originally, within the context of the indigenous construction of *asafu*, performed certain martial roles before the advent of the andro-centric *Asafu Atwele*. Generally, women's participation in the actions of *asafu* was limited by some practical considerations during war and by taboos in times of peace and war. For example, a woman's participation in the deeds of her *asafu* was, as a rule in the Ghanaian context, restricted by taboo when she was in her menses, an experience that was deemed contaminating and, if allowed in proximity to them, capable of reducing the effectiveness of 'sacred' objects and *tsofa* (spiritual force, or "medicine") of the *asafu*. According to Aggrey, it is from women that the *asafu*, at times get "something," which is a taboo to it, (menstrual pollutant) to prepare potent antidote charms against rival companies.³²

Some researches about pre-colonial African social and military organisation reveal that women's function varied depending on whether their communities were at peace or involved in bellicosity.³³ The *asafu* of the Ga society had their women's section under female captains called *asafuanyemei*,

³² J.E.K. Aggrey, *Asafu*, Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, 1978, pp. 45-46.

³³ See R. S. Smith, *Warfare and Diplomacy in Pre-Colonial West Africa*, London: Currey, 1989, pp. 43, 59, 130. See also Adam Jones, "'My Arse for Akou': The wartime ritual of women on the nineteenth century Gold Coast," *Cahiers d'Etudes africaines*, 132, 33-4, 1993, pp. 545-566.

who in principle had the same powers and performed functions as the male counterpart *Asafoatse*. An all-female singing and dancing section also existed in Accra called *adowafoi*. In the indigenous setting of Ga, women, during war, either performed on the battlefield chores like cooking, nursing and carrying of luggage or undertook rituals at home. For example, contemporary records on the Awuna Campaign of the last quarter of the eighteenth century and Katamansu War of 1826 show that Ga women on the battlefield were not allowed, by the men, to engage in combat. They performed auxilliary chores, including singing to praise their male compatriots and dancing *asayere* in camp. Those who stayed back home performed the ritual *asayere* war dance in which they took on the *persona* of their fighting kinsmen³⁴ to keep the spirits of their fighters up and to confront and ridicule deserters and those who stayed away for their cowardice. As these reports indicate, women played crucial roles in military campaigns. Their role however went beyond the mere provision of service and praise. Sometimes some went into the firing line to reload muskets and pick up the gun of their fallen men.³⁵ Field reports about a situation where some Ga women, during wars in 1860s-1870s, had charged into enemy lines and terrified them because of the enemy's conviction that

³⁴ See Isert in English, *Letters on West Africa and the Slave Trade: Paul Erdmann Isert's Journey to Guinea and the Caribbean Islands in Columbia (1788)*, trans. and ed., Selena Axelrod Winsnes, (Fontes Historiae Africae, Series Varia, VII). Oxford: Oxford University Press for the British Academy, 1992, p. 136-137, and C.C. Reindorf, *op.cit.*, p. 211. On the remains of *asayere* groups, described to M.J. Field in the 1930s, as 'women's *asafɔ*' see M.J. Field, *Social organization of the Ga people*, London: Crown Agents for the Colonies, 1940, p. 103.

³⁵ See *African Times*, London, September 22, 1866; cf. Kwame Arhin, "The Political and Military role of Akan women," in Christine Oppong (ed.), *Female and male in West Africa*, London: George Allen, 1983, pp. 91-98.

they were being driven by supernatural powers.³⁶ Although Ga women are largely absent from accounts of precolonial military conflict, it is apparent, however, drawing on the illustrations of Isert, Reindorf and Field, that Ga women's role in wartime transcended the mere provision of service and praise. Through supplication to deities, ritualised actions, figurative assumption of the *persona* of their men folk and challenging cowards with ritual dances, Ga women exhibited their indigenous right to contribute, and contributed to, combat and martial culture of asafo. It would be reasonable to suggest, as an explanation, that the patrilineal and patriarchal Ga society³⁷ possibly restricted women's direct participation in military combat, as physical combatants, for the utilitarian reason that no society and asafo would want to risk their extinction by consciously sending their mothers and sisters to the battlefield to be annihilated and maimed. Therefore, even if *asafo* women were capable of fighting, they, as the nurturers of society and not physically robust as men, were to be restricted and protected from participating in all martial activities that were physically violent, brutal and prone to injury and death. It must have been for such reasons that the women folk in Ga-Mashie were excluded from *Asafo Atwele*.

The women and girls were thus disenfranchised in such a sport because it was not considered proper for females, considering

³⁶ M.J. Field, "Spirit Possession in Ghana," in John Beattie and John Middleton (eds.), *Spirit Mediumship and Society in Africa*, London: 1969, p. 12

³⁷ Ga society is largely patriarchal and androcratic. There are clear differences in life crisis rituals and *rites de passage* like *kpodziemo* (out dooring of newly born babies), *kromotsu*, funeral rites and others which expressly show Ga society as one, which accommodates male superordination and female subordination. See for example the works of Adam Jones, *op.cit.* 1993, p. 547, and M. Kilson, *African Urban Kinsmen: The Ga of Central Accra*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974, pp. 53-56. Additional illustration is that women were referred to as *abekuloi* (literally meaning left-handed) which, in Ga social thought and cosmology, carried and still carries a negative and uncomplimentary connotation.

their [physiological and anatomical] composition, to partake in that [precarious male-dominated] fisticuff sport. They were only allowed to observe the engagements, use uncomplimentary words to taunt the adversaries of their favourites, cheer their favourites, naturally those who were members of their *asafo*, and encourage them to fight.³⁸

This exclusion of women from *Asafo Atwele* would continue and prevail within the context of English styled and modern boxing when it takes root in Gold Coast and Ghana. With its establishment, the latter for a long time, remained an exclusive andro-centric sport within the Ga-Mashie and Gold Coast (Ghana) social milieu. It was only during the 1990s that a national formal experimentation with organised female boxing was conducted in Ghana. Interestingly, this experimental enterprise started from the Ga-Mashie section of Bukom.

Internationally, women's boxing made a debut in the Olympic Games at a demonstration bout in 1904. However, for a long time that activity was proscribed in most nations.³⁹ The Swedish Amateur Boxing Association pioneered its revival in 1988, and in 1997 the British Amateur Boxing Association allowed its first competition for women. The A.I.B.A. accepted new rules for Women's Boxing at the end of the nineteenth century and approved the first European Cup for Women in 1999 and the first World Championship for women in 2001 in Scranton, Pennsylvania. Although women fought professionally in many countries, in the United Kingdom, the

³⁸ Godwin Nii Dzani Kotey, 50 years old, President of the United Boxing Coaches Association of Ghana, personal interview at his Atupkai Block residence in Gbese, Accra, February 19, 2009.

³⁹ During the 1970s, a popular female boxer, by the name Cathy 'Cat' Davis, emerged from the U.S.A., and some of her fights were televised and she managed to appear on the cover of the *Ring* magazine.

British Boxing Board of Control (B.B.B.C.) refused to issue licences to women until 1998. A stronger rise in women's boxing came from the 1990s onwards, and coincided with a surge in professional women sports leagues such as the Women's National Basketball Association (W.N.B.A.) in 1996 and Women's United Soccer Association (W.U.S.A.) in 2000 and emergence of champion boxers such as Stephanie Jaramillo Delia "Chikita" Gonzalez and Laura Serrano. Others are Christy Martin, Laila Ali, the daughter of Muhammad Ali, Jackie Frazier-Lyde, Lucia Rijker, and Sumya Anani.

Within the Ghanaian context, this construction of female boxing, however, has not been popular and has not been able to insert itself strongly as a recognised activity in the prevailing popular culture of sports in the country. In other words, compared to men's boxing, it lacked popularity and exposure. This might be attributed to the fact that women's boxing, in its nascent state, naturally confronted a society filled with stereotypes and which commonly categorized professions as either "men's work" or "women's work," or because most people did not believe and still do not believe they would find the same calibre as in men's boxing. Thus, due to the prevalent general indigenous cultural perception that boxing is a manly and "dangerous" sport for women, women's boxing did not receive popular reception and encouragement in the country.⁴⁰ Pioneered and animated by Ga females, who had had long periods

⁴⁰ Rashidi Williams, alias Believer, 49 years old, Boxing coach of Believers Boxing Gym and General Secretary of the United Boxing Coaches Association of Ghana. He started training boxers in the 1980s. Personal interview at Believers Boxing Gym, Havana, Accra, February 20, 2009.

of familiarisation with boxing in Central Accra, like Yakor Chavez,⁴¹ Amerley Turkson and Gifty Tiger, this construction has remained in a state of virtual comatose in Ghana.⁴²

The exhibition of strength, fitness and courage by the warriors in *Asafo Atwele* had a sociological importance. It was cathartic since it, initially, directed the energies of a disgruntled commoner rank, which could have disrupted social serenity, into sports. In addition, it, on another degree, helped to revitalise and reinforce societal trust in the *asafo* as a vibrant force with strong and courageous members, capable of defending Ga-Mashie people from foreign attacks, and if the need arose, could be relied upon for security, order and justice. In other words, by instilling the spirit of bravado in young people and eliciting such from them as members of the *asafo*, it was contributing to invoking communal respect for the *asafo*. Naturally, such invocation had the propensity for making that organ to be recognised by the society as an influential constituent of Ga indigenous social formation, martial and strong, which was still capable of defending the Ga-Mashie indigenous constituencies in times of threats from outside invaders.

Although the pugilistic engagements it reflected appeared to be inter-company competitions of rivalry, the combats also served in the true spirit of sports, as tools for creating solidarity among the *asafo* and the sections from

⁴¹ Yakor Chavez has managed to become a referee and trainer at the Wisdom Boxing Gym in Accra. (Information was obtained from Rashidi Williams, *ibid.*) For some information about Yakor Chavez, see George Amponsah's *The Fighting Spirit*, (circa 2007), which is an 80 minutes documentary of boxing in Bukom. Produced with the assistance of Guardian Films and funded by CBA DFID, Channel4 Brit Doc and ITVS, this documentary tells the story of three Bukom fighters – two male boxers and the female boxer Yakor Chavez, the “First Lady of Boxing” – as they battle their way from Bukom with the determination to access the “major” rings of Europe and America to compete for fame and bigger laurels in the business.

⁴² Rashidi Williams, personal interview, *op.cit.*

where they came, thereby helping to minimise actual conflicts between those elements. The sport became a marker of social prestige and popularity. Strong contestants and renowned group champions had the praise of the female sections in their communities, *asafo* and society as a whole and, as we shall see, it engendered courting and marriages.

Asafo Atwele accentuated physical strength and fitness and they became important qualities of manhood among the Ga. Fighting became one way of exhibiting such manhood. Unarmed fighting therefore became an integral part of Ga culture and the hard bodied, swift, nimble footed, fast handed, and taut, well-carved muscled men became epitomes of enhanced beauty and masculinity. These bodily characteristics were not only aesthetic to Ga perception of the masculine body. The active, fast and muscled man also was deemed hardworking and such recognition was prestigious since laziness was frowned upon in that social milieu. The body of the Ga-Mashie male, in that context, had to be conditioned to be active, fight and be strong to work hard not only to make a livelihood for the person but also to contribute to the growth of society as a whole. Fighting was thus a way and an acceptable one, of course, in Ga-Mashie society, to ensure the development of courage, physical fitness and beauty. Through fights, solidarity, among groups and individuals, could be promoted and enhanced and, where there was disagreement or dispute between two people or two groups, pugilistic duels and contests became acceptable tools for settling such grudges. Noticeably, social survival, recreation, and standards for masculine bodily beauty within

the context of the *Asafo Atwele*-conditioned Ga-Mashie locale, to a large degree, came to be defined with fights and strong bodies.

Godwin Dzani Kotey, who is the chairperson of the United Boxing Coaches Association of Ghana, and an indigene of Atukpai (Otukpai) in the Gbese *akutso*, explained that fighting (*Nomo*) and the development of a fighting culture, based on pugilistic constructions, and the notion of a strong and fast body being representative of beauty among the Ga [Mashie], represents recreation and aesthetics. They are “products of the legal tradition of the *asafo* pugilistic contests and bare-knuckle fights, which had made fighting to appear as a source of recreation.”⁴³ He explained further that:

The [intra]-*Akutso* and inter-*asafo* challenges of the seven *akutsei*, which normally took place on Tuesdays, and at other time Saturdays and Sundays, were constructions for social recreation. The Ga people do not go fishing on Tuesdays. Net mending and swimming took a considerable portion of the day. In the afternoon, planned and scheduled or spontaneous fights between groups took place, primarily, on the beaches. Winners and champions were applauded, and the losers were encouraged. The first quarter of the twentieth century also witnessed these competitions taking place mostly on Sundays, or any of the days mentioned earlier, on which fights occurred. After communal swimming by elements from the two parts of Ga-Mashie, it was very common to hear one person, representing one of the towns or sections, with the fists raised upwards hollering *Ododiodio*, which was a call for a pugilistic challenge from the members of the other town or sections. In acceptance of the challenge, the response *ooo aiee* was hollered back. After such [ritualistic antiphonic] calls had been made on behalf of members of the sections, the swimmers grouped themselves into their respective *asafoi*. Series of verbal sparring took place and some brow beating techniques, which could put fear into their opponents and paralyse their fighting energy, were demonstrated. The fights, which manifested according to age groups, with the minimum age for participation being 12 years, then began after such demonstrations, which commonly featured trembling bodies

⁴³Godwin Nii Dzani Kotey, personal interview, *op.cit.*

and shaking fists, signifying that bodies and fists had been invigorated by supernatural powers and *tsofa* or have been possessed and become strengthened by their deities, had ended.⁴⁴

Asafo Atwele, which primarily involved the use of the fist (*atwele*) to hit (*kala*, pronounced as *kla*) or deliver rapid punches called *kalamo* (pronounced as *klamo*) at one's opponent(s), also had a variant which, like Thai kick boxing, accommodated the use of the legs to dispense foot kicks and stamps called *ntia* or "to step" (*naa mo*) at one's contender. Even though it always ended in town, at public centres of assembly, the beach, where it normally would start, served as a good place for such combats because its sands provided a natural cushion for fighters if they were downed. It is only rational to suggest that, the tradition of *Asafo Atwele*, with its emphasis on swiftness, courage, physical fitness and mastery of strong and effective punching through *kla*, was naturally, what prepared Ga fighters, physically for the English styled modern boxing, which took roots in colonial Accra and became a popular sport in the colonial territory and postcolonial Ghana.

After fighting for sometime on the beach between thirty to sixty minutes, the fighting groups would, on the instruction of the captains called *Asafoatsemei*, leave the geographical space of the beach and continue the fighting in town, which normally featured the fights of able bodied men of over eighteen years. The fights, in the glare of cheering spectators, continued at local venues and squares of popular assembly in town, commonly in the Bukom Square area,⁴⁵ which is in the *Asere Akutso* of Ussher Town, where most of the people were illiterate fisher folks.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁵ The "Square," which still exists today, has continued to host a vibrant night life, food stalls, and cultural activities. Serving Accra Central the Square has remained as the main hub of political hustings during national (Ghanaian) and local elections and political campaigns, and it has continued to serve as a football pitch for colts football and a focal point for traditional cultural exchanges.

⁴⁶ Godwin Nii Dzani Kotey, personal interview, *op.cit.*

Bukom, where eventually modern boxing was to take strong roots, indubitably was the hub of Ga-Mashie *Asafo Atwele* engagements in the first quarter of the twentieth century.

Historically, political action in Ga-Mashie, which, from time to time, brought commoners and royals together in mass meetings or palavers to engender consultation, consensus, and popular action to resolve issues and deal with matters of national socio-political interest, was centred on three sacred meeting locations. These were Sakumotsoshishi,⁴⁷ Mojawe,⁴⁸ which was the site of the appeal court of the *mantsemei*, and Amugina, which was the original site of the ancient shrine of the deity Amugi. With urbanisation and population growth in Accra, which meant that new spacious sites were required for popular assembly, which would create the platform for secular national congregation and democratic discussion of national issues, the sites, in the early years of the colonial period, were joined by two purely secular and bigger spaces. The Akoto-Lamptey (Lante) Square was the first to be added and Bukom Square, in the centre of the Asere akutso, where the *Akwashon mantse* of the Ga military command structure hailed from, followed it from the 1910s. The presence of the high military commander in Asere quarter, which made it a centre of military importance and *asafo* activities, beside the spaciousness of the Bukom Square, obviously contributed to making Bukom an important centre for the pursuance and practice of the martial sport and activity of *Asafo Atwele*.

⁴⁷ It translates as “under the tree (or abode) of Sakumo.” Sakumo is considered throughout Ga-Mashie as a powerful war deity and a great source of ritual knowledge and power.

⁴⁸ It is literally translated as “house of blood.”

Victorious groups sang and danced. Generally all the combating groups, that is if one group conceded defeat without first retreating, since at times group members took to premature retreats by fleeing, would congratulate one another and commit themselves to the promise of meeting again to do or undo one another in future engagements.

The actual combats featuring *klamo*, which at times were accompanied by *ntia*, the venue and assembly, in totality, served largely as platforms for spectators and contestants to socialise. In addition, the sport, “which pulled women spectators, helped bachelors and combatants searching for wives to attract, from the congregation, female suitors who, within the Ga-Mashie social milieu, desired strong men.”⁴⁹

A man’s body, for it to be considered beautiful and desirable, had to be tough, firm and/or muscular. It showed strength, and meant that that person was hardworking and not lazy. It was therefore proper for the males to do things that would make their bodies look and be strong. Apart from showing “manly” courage and martial valour, which every Ga-Mashie male was expected to have, fighting, therefore, was one way of making one’s body beautiful, strong and desirable. Fighting, which, under the aegis of *Asafo Atwele* became a sport, was one way for men to show that they were strong and could provide security to their lovers, wives, themselves, and families. The evenings, after such engagements had ended, saw the playing of drums, and one which was popular was the “Agbe” drumming, which was accompanied with singing and dancing.⁵⁰

Fighting thus became, and has continued to be, a common character trait of the people of Ga-Mashie and by extension, probably because of fundamental cultural unity, the Ga in general.

⁴⁹ Godwin Nii Dzani Kotey, personal interview, *op. cit.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* N.B. The *Agbe* singing and drumming would be discussed in the next chapter as a cultural product which was introduced into Ga-Mashie by different groups of repatriated free “Afro-Brazilians” who returning from Brazil from 1829 stayed among the Ga in Ga-Mashie.

For the majority [of people], it was considered and gained social acceptance as a normal activity to take place in society. Moreover, apart from its position as a sporting and recreational activity it also came to have the value of being used to settle personal and group differences and disputes.⁵¹

Furthermore,

We [Ga] love to fight but, essentially, not for destructive purposes. We fight to settle scores, entertain ourselves, create the spirit and image of “macho” [*machismo*], acquire and enhance social prestige and fame and to forge groups and interpersonal solidarity.⁵²

This notion, which is traceable to the genesis of *Asafo Atwele*, which yielded a fighting oriented character trait in most Ga-Mashie commoners, is still prevalent. Currently, this notion and trait is even borne by children.

Go out there [the various neighbourhoods in Jamestown and Ussher Town] now. Take a stroll through some of the historic vicinities in this area of Ga-Mashie, like Havana, Adedemkpo, Jamestown, Agbado (Mudor) Swalaba, where today we have all these modern boxing gyms. Explore the locales within the Ododiodio constituency⁵³ in general, or go to Bukom in particular, in Ussher Town, it is 3:30pm, the kids have returned from school, they are hungry and trying to get food, some are on the beach waiting to get a share of the catch [fish]. Within these settings of social interaction, I can bet you that you would see street and beach fights. The fighters, as long as they use their fists would not be separated until one concedes defeat. That would end their misunderstanding.⁵⁴

Note that:

Fighting, with the fist, among us [the Ga-Mashie], came to be a source of settling disputes and it came to form an integral part of our culture. Because of this [unique construction] of

⁵¹ Godwin Nii Dzani Kotey, personal interview, *op.cit.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ This area, comprising Ussher Town, forms one of the many existing electoral constituencies for parliamentary and presidential elections in the country's postcolonial republican tradition. Being a historical citadel of Ga *Asafo Atwele* and radical urban politics of the 1920s and 1930s, it was named after that formal call for *Asafo Atwele* challenge – *Ododiodio* – obviously, for the sake of maintaining among posterity a historical memory of the cultural legacy of that sport which evolved out of the martial spirit of the Ga-Mashie and flourished in Ussher Town.

⁵⁴ Godwin Nii Dzani Kotey, personal interview, *op.cit.*

fisticuffs culture, which, historically, the *asafo* and [its martial ethos] promoted [and mortised] in the cultural matrix of indigenous Accra, most Ga elements within [the precincts of] the Ga-Mashie traditional area, therefore, have, consciously or unconsciously, continuously cultivated and [nurtured] a fighting spirit.⁵⁵

Considering the battered and bloodied faces and the attendant injuries that accompanied *Asafo Atwele*, there is no doubt that it was violent. However, in its unadulterated form as a cultural construction of a people, it was accepted by the people who, in their original thought, deemed it as possessing a utilitarian value of social importance. It inspired bravery and courage and settled grudges. The English colonial administration, paying no attention to or unaware of the inherent positive values, aesthetics and creative energies of *Asafo Atwele* deeming it negative and violent, banned it, particularly, during a period when urban politicians, struggling for power within the local colonial government politics, had “hijacked” the sport and its participants to promote political violence and intimidation to support their political ambitions. If the issue was about the settling of disputes, then, in the perspective of the colonial administration, which needed social order for its selfish goal of governing, there were other “legal” and “non-violent” ways, including the use of the police and colonial law courts, for such a goal.

Regardless of the prohibition, the customary Ga-Mashie commoner proclivity for fisticuff combat sports and the premium that they placed on strong, physically fit and swift bodies, serving as markers of beauty and social recognition, continued to exist in the Ga-Mashie cultural psyche. The existence of those cultural and psychological forces naturally directed (they

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

are still directing) many of the Ga-Mashie elements to have a strong affiliation to and partake in modern boxing.

It is logical to suggest that the strong pugilistic cultural background of Ga-Mashie, and the fact that, in collective terms, the Ga were the first group in the country to have been introduced to modern boxing, which they adopted with all seriousness, have largely contributed to the historical and contemporary dominance of the sport in the country.⁵⁶

Evidently, by the beginning of the twentieth century the Ga, especially those of Ga-Mashie, had developed a taste for fisticuff combats and a cultural milieu that could accommodate modern boxing. A strong body was required for the promotion of such a sporting taste. Within such an environment, the quintessential masculine body came to be one that had been conditioned for hard work and tough combat-like sports. Theoretically, the premium on the strong, hard muscular and taut body, which epitomised beauty, reasonably, must have been a directive principle for the Ga to develop a *habitus*, which guided and has continued to direct them into the combat sport of modern boxing, which customarily has also projected strong, hard, muscular or taut bodies as symbols of beauty and manhood. *Asafo Atwele* did not only lead the commoners to modern boxing. It generally led the ordinary classes, masses, and Ga society to appreciate strong masculine bodies used for hard work, such as fighting, as beautiful. Starting with Ga-Mashie, eventually to gain currency as a characteristic of the Ga as a whole, the notion that strong bodies are beautiful and must be enhanced, maintained and displayed by hard work and through activities like fighting and combat sports, defined a pugilistic *habitus* for the Ga Mashie.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

Theoretically, such a perception must have naturally encouraged them to revel in *Asafo Atwele* and eventually participate and become famous in modern boxing. Within this theoretical framework, we can posit that most of the boxing greats of the Ga, primarily those from Ga-Mashie and Bukom, were led into modern boxing because of a commoner psychological constitution, which determined their *habitus* for participation in that energy-driven and strong body required sport. Azumah Nelson and his participation in modern boxing are products of that prevalent *habitus*. The combat sport of modern boxing became a preferred substitute to *Asafo Atwele*, since it also served as a platform for the exhibition and promotion of the ideals of recreation and bodily beauty, resourcefulness, power and social prestige.

For us [the Ga], fighting (*Nomo*), which includes wrestling (*abotri*), but especially fights with the bare-fist (*atwele*), is a natural thing. *Abotri* and *atwele* fights have been part of our natural indigenous martial culture. *Akotoku*, [the Ga nomenclature for modern boxing, which accommodates the use of “cushioned” gloves, and evolved from the Ga word *kotoku*⁵⁷], has also become a way of life for us. [These fighting constructs have formed part of us. There is nothing wrong with them, especially *akotoku*. Fisticuff combat and boxing are beautiful and showcase intelligence and skill, as one, by the use of skill and force, encapsulated in strength, is able to subdue another in rivalry and friendship at the same time. They have been used for survival, friendship, settling disputes, encouraging bravery, and displaying and enhancing personal bodily beauty. Unarmed fist combats, and boxing, have continued to form part of our cultural heritage. *Asafo Atwele* instilled it in us and our ancestors liked it. We are, presently, only continuing with that tradition and living that nature in us, as we still accommodate fisticuff fights in our communities as

⁵⁷ The Ga word *kotoku* (plural. *kotokui*), similar to the Twi *kotokuo* can be literally be construed as “bag or sack.” The term (*a*)*kotoku* (sack), became the Ga term for modern boxing because of the sack-like form and bag-like nature of the gloves, which the sport acomodated. The gloves were shaped and did act like “bags/sacks for the fists (*atwele*).” It is worthy to note that dressing gloves, including stockings, especially for ladies are known in Ga, as *kausuu*, which evolved from the Dutch *kous*. See: M.E. Kropp Dakubu, (ed.), *Ga-English Dictionary*, Accra: Black Mask Ltd., 1999, p. 79.

normal and modern boxing as enjoyable and pleasant. By boxing, we, represented by the numerous Ga boxers of yesteryear and presently, only have lived a Ga culture, spawned by Ga-Mashie, through a borrowed construction. By partaking in modern boxing, we are being ourselves as we live our ancient fighting tradition today. We naturally gravitate to boxing, which is a fighting and combat sport.⁵⁸

Evidently, these statements support the theory that the historical and prevailing Ga affinity for modern boxing is derived immediately from *Asafo Atwele*, which was supported by the perception that strong bodies are beautiful, which, within the realms of sports, must be committed to strong ones, particularly to combat ones like boxing and, to a lesser extent, *abotri* (wrestling). Such perception, we reason, from this theoretical and historical estimation of the Ga-Mashie history of *Asafo Atwele*, has largely informed and directed their sporting *habitus* for pugilistic fighting and generated massive interest and participation in modern boxing.

Asafo Atwele gave way to the development of organised modern boxing in the 1930s. Turbulent urban politics of Central Accra continued into the 1930s. Within that atmosphere *Asafo Atwele* continued as a sport with a purpose. The settling, in 1927, of a long standing feud between Jamestown and Ussher Town, which had been produced by regal struggles for political premiership in Accra, heightened by the Indirect Rule system, and feuds and litigation over lands, which even led Jamestown to declare autonomy from Ussher Town and the Ga Mantse (Chief), affected organised *Asafo Atwele*. Before 1927, those regal authorities of those towns, in some cases, also employed *Asafo Atwele* contests to test the might and *asafo* capabilities of one

⁵⁸ Godwin Nii Dzani Kotey, personal interview, *op.cit.*

another. However, after the reunion, *Asafo Atwele* continued and was highly promoted as a sport to create friendships and serve as a safety valve outlet to suck all political emotions and misgivings that had intensified in elements of the two towns. It was also to create an *esprit de corps* among the *asafo* groups and the general commoner section of the two towns which comprised largely artisans, traders and fishermen.

Yielding new champions and fighters from those professions, the fishermen guild was particularly noted for producing some of the best fighters. Becoming more organised as not only an *asafo* sport that celebrated historic Ga martial spirit but also a mass sport some “educated” – literate – political elements, in the late 1920s and early 1930s, attempted to use the participants and their sporting skills of fighting in a political way. In an attempt to harness the strength and fighting resource of the participants, these politicians tried to control *Asafo Atwele* and to use the participants, whom they recruited into their respective camps, to intimidate and use force against each other’s political challenger. The redirection of that resource and the chaos it yielded caught the attention of the colonial administration. Realising that it negatively affected social order and peace, the colonial administration illegalized it and used that opportunity as an excuse to encourage and promote its own construction of organised modern boxing to replace *Asafo Atwele*. Through that process, the administration contributed in extending and formally rooting another British cultural motif in Gold Coast and postcolonial Ghana.

The turbulent urban politics of Accra intensified as the “educated” elites and the colonial administration became highly antagonistic of one

another, partly due to the economic depression, which started in 1929. Economic stress within the country led to the cocoa hold-ups and boycott of European goods, which were manifestations of local opposition against low prices for cocoa. This further strained the not so cordial political relationship between the local nationalists, constituting the chiefs and educated elites on one hand and the colonial administrators on the other. Although the local nationalists were antagonistic of the colonial system, they were not strongly united in their struggle. That caucus was divided into the pro-traditional authority group of the Aborigines Right Protection Society (A.R.P.S.) and the pro-educated elite group of the National Congress of British West Africa (N.C.B.W.A.), which was the brainchild of the renowned Gold Coast nationalist and intellectual, J.E. Casely-Hayford. Each group wanted to spearhead the struggle for recognition and wanted to out rival the other in that pursuit. The chiefs thought that they must lead the nationalist struggle and represent the people. They saw themselves as leaders of the indigenous authority structure, a perception which the colonial authority strengthened as it made the chiefs, through the Native Administrative Ordinance, major conduits of colonial governance in the Lord Lugard-spawned Indirect Rule system. The educated elites thought differently. They also felt that their economic power and their status as “formally” educated professionals, had qualified them to have greater participation within, if not assume the role of leading the people, in matters affecting their political, social and economic well-being within the colonial setting. Accra, being the capital, had been brought into this

contest as its indigenous but urban related politics was divided along the interest and ideological lines of these rival national groups.

Within the context of Accra's Municipal elections of the mid 1920s, which provided opportunities for the representatives of the people to sit in the Legislative Assembly, two competing parties, spearheaded by nationalist politicians soliciting for the franchise of the people, had emerged. These were the commoner-oriented [Ga] Manbii (Ga Citizens or People) Party and the elitist Ratepayers Association, which were led by the lawyer A.W. Kojo Thompson⁵⁹ and Dr. F.W. Nanka Bruce, respectively. The former appeared to be "people"-oriented, chief-centred and was pro-A.R.P.S. and the latter derived support from the elitist N.C.B.W.A. Because the franchise system of the time was not based on universal suffrage, the Ratepayers Association would dominate the elections of the time from 1927 to 1934. This was because many of the supporters of the Manbii Party were poor and not ratepayers. They were therefore not qualified to vote under the laws of the prevailing franchise system of the Municipality. Within this ferment of a seeming class struggle – commoners against bourgeoisie elites – which operated within the politically tensed and charged urban space of Accra, with the hot points being the Ussher Town stronghold of the Manbii Party and Jamestown stronghold of the Ratepayers, the Manbii Party struggled and contested the Ratepayers strongly for political popularity and ascendancy. Through organisational help, campaign and media propaganda support from two radical West African politicians – Nnamdi Azikiwe from Nigeria, who was editor of the *African*

⁵⁹ See S.S. Quarcoopome, "The Politics and Nationalism of A.W. Kojo Thompson: 1924-1944," *Research Review*, NS, Vol. 7, Nos. 1 and 2, 1991, pp. 11-21.

Morning Post and, the Russian-trained communist and Pan Africanist, I.T.A. Wallace Johnson from Sierra Leone, whose ideological inclinations made him anti-elitism and anti-colonialism and supporter of masses- inclined political movements – Thompson’s Manbii Party won the 1935 elections.⁶⁰

Within this competitive political atmosphere, it became common for supporters of the parties to clash and, through linguistic fencing and songs, insult one another. Such clashes also manifested violent physical forms. Political antics and displays, in pursuance of political campaign and power, materialised and it was within that framework that the belligerent politicians decided to employ *Asafo Atwele* contests and fighters to promote their political rivalry, within the sphere of sports and real violent confrontations of politics-inspired thuggery. Their employees and their art became tools for engendering and stoking the turbulent urban political rivalry and violent clashes. Existing *Asafo Atwele* groups, and newly organised ones, mainly constituting combatants handpicked from the youth section of the towns, became more organised along these political lines of rivalry. On their new trajectory they, through the financial and logistical support of their patron nationalist politicians, contested one another for ultra-sports reasons and became more or less the fighting wings of the rival parties. In Ga-Mashie, the *asafo* sport construction therefore had become an instrument for the search of political power by nationalist politicians, who wanted to go to the Legislative Assembly. *Asafo Atwele* groups, whether contesting each other in the name of sport and leisure or as fighting wings of political factions, to symbolically

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 16-17.

signify and establish the political anteriority of their respective patrons, now did so largely as partisan factions. An interesting feature of this new arrangement was the provision of uniforms in the form of casual shorts with distinctive colours for each *Asafo Atwele* group. In these shorts, which the patrons provided, and colours, the *asafo* combatants asserted community identities and political inclinations, as they contested one another on the beaches and in town and bloodied each other overtly in the spirit of sport and covertly in the spirit of a prevailing competitive turbulent urban politics. Prevailing in Accra, within the context of its municipality politics, as a violent political tool for partisan interest and agenda, *Asafo Atwele* compelled the Colonial Authority to perceive it as dangerous to political and social order of Accra and the colonial territory. The colonial administration appreciated how gradually, but dangerously, the masses were being politically sensitized and encouraged, by “educated” and radical nationalist politicians, to form fighting wings in support of partisan politics in Accra. The violence, maiming and political thuggery that it was put to, especially those that heralded the electioneering campaigns which led to the election of the Manbii Party in 1935, revealed to the colonial administration how it could be socially disruptive and dangerous to social security, order and peace. Regardless of its inherent sporting character, it, in the estimation of the government, had become a decadent and undesirable form of leisure. Consequently, banning it around 1935, the colonial administration redirected the skills of the participants and fighting energy and pugilistic habitus of its creators into state-controlled and regulated modern boxing.

Determined to eliminate all vestiges and promoters of “popular” radicalism, which conditioned an era of violent municipal politics and gave *Asafo Atwele* an ultra-sport role to play, the government decided to emasculate two main architects of popular radicalism within the Manbii Party. These were Azikiwe and Wallace Johnson. In 1936, when Wallace Johnson wrote an article titled “Has the African a God” in the *African Morning Post*, which attacked European imperialism and so-called civilising mission, he was arrested and, based on the content of the article, which was considered seditious, he was fined £50.⁶¹ He was proclaimed *persona non grata* in the colonial territory of Gold Coast, and was deported to Sierra Leone. In 1937, after he was acquitted of the charge of sedition, Azikiwe left for Nigeria.

It must however be noted that, the idea and practice of modern boxing had reached Accra, before the ban on *Asafo Atwele* was enforced. In an embryonic stage, it was pursued within the shadows of some academic circles and informal groups of urban dwellers who had had connections with some English agents in the country. It was therefore not very popular, as compared to *Asafo Atwele*. After the ban, the government, it is reported, however, gave encouragement to one Briton, Maxwell Lawford, who had been in charge of the Achimota College (formerly Prince of Wales College and School founded in 1927) students boxing club, and was managing the Achimota Printing Press, to establish boxing clubs in parts of Accra, including Osu (Danish Accra) and Bukom. This policy was intended to bring the lingering fisticuff spirit of *Asafo*

⁶¹ Hakim Adi and Marika Sherwood, *Pan African History: Political Figures from African and Diaspora since 1787*, London and New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2003, p. 182.

Atwele and its pugilistic skills into those boxing clubs for easy regulation and monitoring by the government.⁶²

Thus before the ban on *Asafo Atwele* was implemented, the College, which promoted games and sports like cricket, hockey, lawn tennis, football, volleyball, athletics and swimming and advanced exclusive activities for girls such as tenikort, netball, stoolball and rounders,⁶³ by the opening years of the 1930s, was already nurturing a boxing club, exclusively for its male students.⁶⁴ Moreover, records on the Ghana Amateur Boxing Association (the G.A.B.A) reveal that before the 1930s, modern boxing was being practiced privately in Accra, on an informal level through the instrumentality of one expatriate District Commissioner called Williams. On that level, it is on record that Williams, as late as 1926, obviously inspired particularly by the indigenous pugilistic culture in Accra, started to stage modern English-style boxing fights at the back of his bungalow.⁶⁵ Commissioner Williams would later team up with one Lt. Col. Banford, who was a colonial police commissioner, to organise amateur boxing bouts even outside Accra proper, as far as Nsawam, at the Cadbury and Fry Yard. The assertion that, by the second half of the 1920s modern boxing had informally started with some individuals in the Ga-Mashie (Accra Central) is also corroborated by Ebenezer Sowah Laryea, alias

⁶² Emmanuel Akyeampong, *op.cit.* p. 54.

⁶³ Francis Agbodeka, *Achimota in the National Setting: A Unique Educational Experiment in West Africa*, Accra: Afram Publications Ltd., 1977, p. 125.

⁶⁴ Report on Achimota College, 1930, as indicated in *Ibid.*

⁶⁵ Document titled "Ghana Amateur Boxing Association (the G.A.B.A.)," (typescript), [Accra], G.A.B.A., n.d., p. 1. This seven paged document, which is a brief situation analysis of the condition of amateur boxing in Ghana, from 2004 to 2008, was obtained from the office of Mr. Ohene Karikari, who is the Deputy Sports Development Officer of the Sports Council, Accra and Secretary to the G.A.B.A.

Surpriser Sowah. This reflects in an article in the *Daily Graphic*⁶⁶ in 1951 on Roy Ankrah, alias John Theophilus Otoo Ankrah, Jnr., who, born within the Asere Jorshie (Djornshie) Street area of Ussher Town,⁶⁷ spent some of his childhood days within Otublohum,⁶⁸ and toughened up in Bukom, became the first Gold Coaster and African to clinch the British Empire's featherweight title in April, 1951.

Surpriser Sowah, who was a product of that early development, established and managed a boxing Gym, the Sparta Boxing Gym at Swalaba sometime around 1933,⁶⁹ and became the first boxing trainer of Roy Ankrah.⁷⁰ Sowah was born in August 1912 in that community noted for *Asafo Atwele*.⁷¹ According to Sowah, the territory of Gold Coast had not until the early twenties been a country which, in comparison to other countries, could be placed on the sporting [boxing] map. Then suddenly [in the twenties] a small group of youth in Accra formed an amateur boxing club. Out of that number, emerged two enterprising lads whose names shall continue to live in the boxing history of the country. They were Seth Odamtten and "Charleston"

⁶⁶ Note that this newspaper which was founded in the 1950s, during the colonial period, carried the name *Daily Graphic* until Ghana came under the Flt. Lt. J.J. Rawlings-led P.N.D.C. government, when the name was changed to *People's Daily Graphic*, "to remind the people that it belongs to them." From about the beginning of 1983 to December 31, 1993 the name was *People's Daily Graphic*. The name was changed to *Daily Graphic* in 1994. This transition occurred during January 1 and 3, 1994. In the context of this study, the name *Daily Graphic* is used when reference is made to the newspaper and articles that it carried before the change of name in 1983. It is also used to cover references from the newspaper when it became *Daily Graphic* after 1993. All references that are made to the newspaper from the time its name was changed, by the P.N.D.C., to January 1, 1994 carry the name *People's Daily Graphic*.

⁶⁷ [Ebenezer] "Surpriser" Sowah [Laryea], "The Life History of Roy Ankrah," *Daily Graphic*, (hereafter *D.G.*) Accra, November 24, 1951, p. 2. (See the picture inserted below that page. Annotated, it shows the Asere Jorshie Street, Accra, where Roy Ankrah was born).

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁶⁹ "The Man Who "Made" Them Champs," *Spectator*, Accra, September 28, 1996, p. 15.

⁷⁰ [Ebenezer] "Surpriser" Sowah [Laryea], "The Life History of Roy Ankrah," *op.cit.*, p. 1.

⁷¹ "The Man Who "Made" Them Champs," *op.cit.*, p. 15.

Sykes, the latter taking his name from the ballroom dance called Charleston, which was in vogue at the time.⁷² Odamtten and Sykes fought several epic battles in Accra (Central Accra). Most of the youth who were thrilled by this “new” sport were inspired by these demonstrations, many, wanting to become pugilists, joined it, and that is how boxing developed in the colonial territory of Gold Coast.⁷³

Surpriser Sowah who was in his early teens was one of such inspired youth. Like others, he copied the styles of those “heroes”, joined the culture and in time became the featherweight champion of Gold Coast, after which he established his own boxing gym.⁷⁴ He related in 1996 that he took to boxing early in life, in his early teens, and by the age of 17, which would have been the year 1929, had joined up with two others, possibly Odamtten and Sykes, to chart a career in the fistic sport, in keeping with the vogue among most of the youth of Accra.⁷⁵ The report highlighted that:

[organised modern] boxing, [although prevailing on an informal and small scale alongside *Asafo Atwele*] had then barely become a popular sport in the Gold Coast, because it had just been introduced [and was being promoted] by men like Edmund Bannerman (Boss of Tarkwa [Tarqua(h)]).⁷⁶

This Edmund Bannerman with the “borrowed” sobriquet Boss of Tarqua(h) was not the renowned Edmund Bannerman alias “B of T” who was one of the many Bannermans, who flourished in the nineteenth century Gold

⁷² [Ebenezer] “Surpriser” Sowah [Laryea], “The Life History of Roy Ankrah,” *op.cit.*, p. 1.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵ “The Man Who “Made” Them Champs,” *op.cit.*, p. 15.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

Coast,⁷⁷ and whose several public activities provides remarkable and valuable reading today.⁷⁸ However, that pioneer of modern boxing in Accra was perhaps, if not definitely, a descendant of the real Boss of Tarqua(h), who died

⁷⁷ Edmund Bannerman was born in Accra, in 1832. He was the third son of Honourable James Bannerman. James Bannerman was of African and British (Scottish) parentage and had been Civil Commandant at Christiansborg and later Lieutenant Governor of British Settlements in Gold Coast in 1850. Edmund's mother was *Oheneba* (Princess) Yaa Hom (Yahoon), daughter of Asantehene (Chief of Asante) Osei Yaw Akoto, who ruled Asante from 1824 to 1837. Between 1838 and 1847, Edmund with his senior brothers, Charles and James, (the Bannerman Brothers) attended public schools in England, after which he returned to Gold Coast. He served for about ten years as a civil servant. He saw service as civil Commandant in Her Majesty Settlements in Keta and Winneba between 1858 and 1864, after serving as secretary to successive Governors from 1848 to 1858. He worked as a journalist with the *Western Echo* of Cape Coast and as Editor of the *West African Herald*. He maintained friendship James Hutton Brew of Cape Coast, and they enjoyed popularity in Ga land and Fanteland as two demagogues of those days. From 1877 to 1901, he, although not trained as a Solicitor, drew on his experience in his long career in the public service and newspaper work, and practiced as Solicitor and Commissioner of Oaths. Edmund was a great nationalist and political agitator. He resented the idea of just a few Africans serving as Members in the Legislative Council. When a vacancy occurred in 1873 after Honourable George Blankson's place became vacant (due to his arrest by the Fante Chiefs on charges of alleged complicity with the then Asantehene, King Kofi Karikari), Edmund did not feel satisfied when two Mercantile Members namely, Francis Chapman Grant (a leading African merchant from Cape Coast) and W. Cleaver (an expatriate trading agent in the Service of F. & A. Swanzy, then stationed at Cape Coast) were appointed. At a protest meeting in Accra, Edmund pressed the claim for two local members on the ground that "now the new Unofficial Members were ignorant of the needs of the eastern region."

Popularly known as the "Boss of Tarkwa" or "B of T" after his imposing Jamestown residence Tarqua(h) (Tarkwa) House, he became popular with the Ga people for his support of the Deputation Scheme of 1882-1887. This was a scheme which nurtured the idea of boycotting the local British Administration, and proceeding to Westminster, London, on a deputation to air grievances with Her Majesty's Government on the spot. He had problems with the colonial administration as his agitations made him a casualty of many troubles with the colonial administration. This antagonism nearly ruined his career completely and prevented him from becoming a Member of the Legislative Council. In 1894, an opportunity fittingly came his way for membership in the Legislative Council. A vacancy occurred for the appointment of a third Unofficial Member to the Legislative Council. Four contestants from Accra alone contested for the position. These were John Vanderpuije, "the educated divisional chief of Ussher Town, who lived comfortably in European Style"; Edmund Bannerman, a well-known editor, solicitor, and a man of public affairs; J. H. Fearon, a progressive practising solicitor; and B. Quartey-Papafio, a legal practitioner. However, because he had antagonised the colonial administration, Chief Vanderpuije won the day. Governor Hodgson refused to consider Edmund Bannerman, "whose periodic fits of insobriety render him unfitted for honourable' position, "while F. H. Fearon and E. Quartey-Papafio, although more influential in Accra than Vanderpuije were ruled out - one was a native of Sierra Leone, and the other had a record which was not. . . altogether untarnished." (Parts of this information were obtained online. See "The Gallery of Gold Coast Celebrities: EDMUND BANNERMAN; 1832-1903," by I.S. Ephson, on <http://mijaku.com/content/view/23/2/>). (Information was retrieved on March 20, 2009). See also the section "Edmund Bannerman (1832-1903) in I.S. Ephson, *Gallery of Gold Coast Celebrities – 1632-1958*, Accra: Ilen Publications, Ltd., 1969, pp. 78-81.

⁷⁸ The interested reader can read David Kimble, *op.cit.*

at his residence, Tarqua(h) House, Jamestown, Accra, on April 19, 1903, at the ripe old age of 71 years.⁷⁹

Surpriser Sowah further added that:

However because of the indigenous fighting that already existed, it [boxing] quickly caught on.”⁸⁰ He, (and naturally other youths) “joined the then only (local) club in Accra – Accra School of Boxing run by [Edmund] Bannerman, Jimmy Wilde, and Battling Kojo, at Akoto Lante [in the Ga-Mashie area].⁸¹

These illuminating accounts strengthen the assertion that before the proscribing of *Asafo Atwele* and the mandating of Lawford to help in the establishment of boxing clubs in Accra during the second half of the 1930s, some luminaries of English and African extraction, like Williams and Edmund Bannerman had already started to experiment with modern boxing on a small scale in Accra. Considering the latter’s elitist British ancestry, which must have made him to visit England, it is possible that he had an earlier exposure to the rudiments of English boxing, and realising the pugilistic capabilities of the locals, had started to introduce the sport to a handful of youth in Accra.

These pioneering works paved the way for the growth and popularity of modern boxing as it came to be highly accepted by the Ga in Accra, particularly in the 1930s. The ban and government interest in rooting the boxing culture in Accra opened the floodgates for the establishment of boxing clubs in Accra, particularly in Jamestown and Ussher Town. Whether perceived as a harmless product of private fulfilment of leisure and

⁷⁹ See “The Gallery of Gold Coast Celebrities: EDMUND BANNERMAN; 1832-1903,” by I.S. Ephson, on <http://mijaku.com/content/view/23/2/>

⁸⁰ “The Man Who “Made” Them Champs,” *op.cit.*, p. 15.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

recreational craving, experimentation with a novel idea and concept, or pursuance of European cultural ideals, Williams and Bannerman, because they introduced and promoted English style boxing, became or served as “indirect” agents of the British cultural dissemination and imperialist enterprise in the Empire. They may have been conscious or unconscious of such a role. Nevertheless, within the context a colonial territory, where many people commonly craved for the hegemonic position of the colonisers and their cultural values and standards, often considered advanced, the pioneers must have had a craving for that cultural product. Therefore, they must have perceived the sport as a marker of civility and considered their initiative as a contribution to the progress of the prevailing urban popular culture of sports and recreation in Accra.

The “small group of youths in Accra who formed an amateur boxing club,” referenced by Sowah as the sowers of the seed of organised modern boxing, we reason, must have constituted two contemporaneous groups. The first being the handful, possibly including Odamtten and Sykes, who in 1926, when Surpriser Sowah was about 14 years old, were instructed by Williams behind his bungalow, and the second being Bannerman, Wilde and Kojo who also, later, established their Club at Akoto-Lante (Akoto-Lamptey). These pioneering efforts, which before the ban, had yielded small informal boxing groups and formal clubs like Bannerman’s and Sowah’s, as well as local boxing heroes, encouraged various demonstration fights and contests to be staged within Accra. Such engagements also manifested outside Accra, in a place like Nsawam, where venues like Cadbury and Fry Yard and the Mikado

Cinema⁸² accommodated some of those early spectacles. Like missionaries of popular culture, the early boxers, through their demonstration fights, further extended the frontiers of the sport that they were developing as they staged some of their fights and presented the culture into other parts of the colony. Surpiser Sowah related for example that members of his Sparta Club travelled and toured. He claimed that: “They toured the provinces to Kumasi, Sekondi, Kibi, Koforidua and Nsawam.” He added that: “In fact everywhere that people wanted boxers to appear we appeared and fought.”⁸³

The ban and Lawford’s encouragement promoted the gradual emergence and proliferation of boxing groups in Accra. Such a development inspired a burgeoning of organised amateur boxing in Accra. This amateur boxing came under the control of the colonial administration – an administration, which had encouraged the emergence of such a pugilistic culture and schemed for it to be under the regulation and monitoring of the state. This situation of government paternalism, in boxing, inspired state-supported championships. By 1935, Sir Arnold Weinholt Hodson, who was governor from 1934-1941, and affectionately known as “the Sunshine Governor” in Gold Coast, had showed great interest in boxing and had even provided a trophy to such state-supported boxing championship ventures. Significantly, the initial government-sponsored championships in the 1930s were important for the grooming of early local boxers and experts for the country. The spectacles attracted the participation of budding local boxers, made champions in Accra, and nurtured some of the personnel who were to

⁸² K.T. Vieta, *op.cit.*, p. 564.

⁸³ [Ebenezer] “Surpiser” Sowah [Laryea], “The Life History of Roy Ankrah,” *op.cit.*, p. 1.

contribute to the gradual growth of boxing in the country. One of such persons was John Ebenezer Samuel (J.E.S.) de Graft-Hayford, (b. 1912 – d. 2002). He was born in the U.K. and descended from a German mother and an African father who evolved from the notable Hayford family of nationalists, academics, and Christian missionaries in Gold Coast.⁸⁴ He returned to Gold Coast *circa* 1914, and while he lived in Accra he partook in bare-fist fighting. With the emergence of modern boxing he became one of the local amateur and professional boxers and carried the aliases Chocolate Kid and Johnnie. The initial colonial championships, backed by the colonial establishment, in Accra, attracted his participation and he became a welterweight and middleweight titlist in such early spectacles of the 1930s in Accra.⁸⁵ When de-Graft Hayford retired from boxing *circa* 1941 and, through personal growth and career development, became Africa's first Air Commander and Chief of the Air Staff south of the Sahara and the third African to be commissioned into the British army, he ultimately became a prominent statesman in the country and served as one of the people who assisted in the cultivation of the sport in the country. In 1953 he served as an executive member of the Gold Coast Boxing Board of Control (the G.C.B.B.C.), and was on a committee that was constituted to make recommendations to the G.C.B.B.C. for the establishment of a stadium. Moreover, he was instrumental in the fashioning of the Ghana Boxing Board of Control (the G.B.B.C.) and, from *circa* 1974 to 1978, he was a key member

⁸⁴ See Amirrortotheenemy, "Quote," *Other Events on July 7th*, July 7th People's Independent Inquiry Forum. J7 Information, Research and Analysis. p. 1, January 8, 2007, online posting. <<http://s13.invisionfree.com/julyseventh/ar/t77.htm>>. (Information was retrieved on January, 14, 2011). See also F.P. Miller, et al. (eds.), *J.E.S. de-Graft-Hayford*, Mauritius: VDM Publishing House Ltd. /Alphascript Publishing, 2010.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

of the G.B.B.C. and served as one of the technocrats who assisted the country to get its first W.B.C. titlist. Thus, as underscored the early Accra championships of the 1930s were key events for the growth of the culture of modern boxing in Ghana.

An example of an early Accra championship also took place in October 1937, which constituted welterweight bouts between Dempsey Armah and Jackado Quarcoo, who represented Battling Bukor, the champion of Nsawam, and Jimmy “Brown Bomber” Brewater and Fireboy Lartey. Constituting, in addition, a catch-weight contest between Mickey Walker Allotey and Octopus Nortey [Nortei] (Nortei, who received some training from Surpriser Sowah, later became the West African heavyweight,⁸⁶ it attracted the spectatorship of top colonial officials. This body of spectators included the then colonial Governor.⁸⁷

Notably, as numerous tournaments were eventually held and new champions emerged to clinch local titles and coveted international titles, boxing became a popular past time for many people in Accra. With the colonial administration exhibiting a virtual interest in promoting modern boxing in the country, especially in the capital, more Ga youth, especially those from Ga-Mashie, where the different gyms had sprouted, entered the sport. However, we can perceive the encouragement of modern boxing in Accra, particularly for Ga-Mashie and among the Ga as a whole, as a pacification gesture to the people. Such a pacification gesture, we reason, must have been necessitated by the ban imposed by a hegemonic group on an

⁸⁶ “The Man Who Made Them Champs,” *op.cit.*, p. 1

⁸⁷ See *African Morning Post*, Accra, October 5, 1937.

indigenous group's cultural product, which the former considered unhealthy for order in the administrative capital of Gold Coast. On this thought trajectory, the introduction of another fisticuff sport to the Ga who, within the context of power relations in the command structure of colonialism in Gold Coast, formed part of the minority or subordinate nationality group, represented an imperial force's way of placating a subordinated group's loss of its own pugilistic culture. This placation, however, was being done by the superordinate nationality to perpetuate its authority in ensuring the suppression of an indigenous sport, and to promote its cultural product with its English oriented social and cultural codes, standards, laws and values among the indigenous community. By actively encouraging and succeeding in drawing the minority to participate in it, under the aegis of the colonial administration, the colonial authority materialised one of the old methods of British colonial cultural imperialism. This was the peddling and imposition, among its subjects, of the idea of shared values. Thus, the promotion of modern English style boxing in Accra and, the ultimate adoption of it by the subordinate nationality, which were all enhanced by the ban, were, in a way, products of the application of subtle and overt colonial force by the superordinate nationality. However, that acceptance can also be seen as a product of colonial psychological manipulation of the minority nationality, who consciously or unconsciously must have accepted this foreign fisticuff sport, because it included certain inherent qualities and values, which their indigenous sport promoted. Such perceived shared values within these sports, beneficial to participants, included the values of swiftness, the growth of a

healthy competitive spirit, camaraderie, agility, tact, courage, bravado, social prestige, fame, group solidarity and physical fitness. The notion of shared values, by the superordinate nationality and subordinate nationality, then must have made it easier for the British to get the Ga to accept their version of pugilism. By bringing the minority nationality into modern boxing, which, regarding participation and inherent values, appeared as a common and shared sport for the two nationalities, the hegemonic class aimed to delude the minority nationality with the illusion of shared values. That was to ensure, and it did, that the indigenes did not surge to protect or reclaim their indigenous sport, which was a product of their culture. Such a surge, within that colonial milieu, would have registered as a cultural challenge against the historical British attempt to use subtle means, such as the promotion of English popular cultural motifs within colonial territories, in maintaining and ensuring its political and economic control through the scheme of cultural intrusion and imperialism.

From one standpoint, the acceptance and adoption of modern boxing by the Ga [Mashie] in particular, and by extension the colonial Gold Coast in general, after *Asafo Atwele* had been proscribed, does represent a successful British cultural imperialist venture, obtained through political coercion and subtle means such as the notion of shared values. From another viewpoint, after becoming an accepted sport, it did not only draw ambitious young men into it for its recreational value; it became part of the popular culture of colonial Gold Coast and postcolonial Ghana, serving as a cultural motif of economic and social utility. From the 1930s, that sport and its order has

continued to provide opportunities for many participants, including Surpriser Sowah, Roy Ankrah and Azumah Nelson, to make a living as coaches and boxers, gain social recognition, international fame, and generate wealth for personal and communal use. From the ongoing discourse on the development of boxing in Accra, which traces out cultural, moral and economic roots of that sport, which were products of social structures of marginality of many in the commoner group in the inner city of colonial Accra, the sport became a (sub) proletarian bodily trade. This trade has manifested as a supplement to *Asafo Atwele* and/or an alternative to more conventional avenues of livelihood and mobility such as the school, the low-wage labour market, and the informal street economy of the ghettos in Ga-Mashie, urban Accra and ultimately the country.

Following the establishment of Sparta Boxing Club, and inspired by government efforts at popularising boxing in schools and among the masses in Accra, other boxing clubs emerged in Accra. They included the Community Centre Boxing Club, Marconi Boxing Club, Catholic Youth Organisation (C.Y.O.) Boxing Club and Golden Gloves Boxing Club and were very active on the Ghanaian boxing scene⁸⁸ whose hub was Accra Central. Two main boxing clubs in Ga-Mashie dominated that boxing scene. They were the Marconi and Sparta clubs. Their distinctive boxing styles and orientations largely influenced boxers in the Ga-Mashie area of Ussher Town during the 1950s. The pioneer coach of the “Spartans” was Surpriser Sowah. The Marconi group trained near the Palladium Theatre and its famous coach was

⁸⁸ “Ghana Amateur Boxing Association,” *op. cit.*, p. 1.

known as coach Squire, or Dr. Square.⁸⁹ In bouts, the “Marconians” who were also known as “the brawlers”⁹⁰ preferred, and were renowned for, the employment of physical strength to fight their way through their opponents’ resistance. They were “fighters,” not boxers, as they placed little emphasis on technique and skill.⁹¹ “The “Spartans” emphasised strategy, skill and tact and “its products were not only “fighters” but “boxers.” They “boxed” because they were tactful and strategic. That is what boxing is and should be.”⁹²

The Sparta Boxing Club had a definite boxing style that was easily identified – backshift, sidestepping, sweep-ducking and others. The coach Surpriser Sowah was able to translate the peculiar fighting traits of animals like the leap of a frog or the fighting stance of a fowl into boxing styles and taught them with success.⁹³ No wonder the Spartan tradition was able to produce some of the great boxing giants of the country. It trained Okai D.D.J. of then Accra Standfast fame (Football Team), Satan Sackey, and Octopus Nortei. Others were Swordfish Ben, Sugar Ray Akwei, Snr., Attuquaye (also spelt Atukwei) Clottey, and Alhaji Awudu Kongoro. It gave Roy Ankrah, the foundations of boxing to become the first Ghanaian boxer to claim a quasi-international title – a British Commonwealth title. Spearheaded by Ga-Mashie, which had boxing clubs and boxers who were becoming local heroes, the

⁸⁹ Emmanuel Akyeampong, *op. cit.*, p. 57.

⁹⁰ Amarkai Amarteifio, 67 years old, was once the Secretary for Youth and Sports in the Provisional National Defense Council government (hereafter P.N.D.C.) in Ghana. He is a boxing enthusiast, personal friend of Azumah Nelson, Barrister-at-Law, Diplomat (The Consul General of Sweden and the Dean of the Honorary Consular Corps of Ghana,) personal interview at his office, Ayawaso Chambers, Osu R.E., Accra. December 15, 2010.

⁹¹ Rashidi Williams, personal interview, *op.cit.* Rashidi Williams is also a grandson of the legendary Surpriser Sowah of Sparta Club.

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ “The Man who Made Them Champs,” *op.cit.*, p. 15

growing boxing culture in the capital steadily encouraged the growth of the sport in the country. “It was that same Spartan tradition of “classical boxing” that eventually produced champions like D.K. Poison and Azumah Nelson in the 1970s and 1980s respectively.”⁹⁴

These early clubs were not appropriately equipped with gadgets to train their boxers. They relied on nature’s resources for training and used the beaches very much. The beach, which used to provide space for *Asafo Atwele* manoeuvres and combat training, also provided space for jogging, shadow boxing and sparring. Beach sand and sawdust were used to fill sacks, made from jute fibre and other strong fibre, to create punching bags for training. Few clubs could afford to buy one or two gloves; these were shared by the trainees. Clubs without sponsors therefore relied on fees collected from trainees to buy gloves. By sharing the situation in his club, Surpriser Sowah gave a picture of the scarcity and virtual absence of adequate resources and equipment, including safety ones, which made the sport very dangerous for the boxing clubs of the time. He recounted that:

Whatever equipment we [and this could have been so for the others] had then was limited to not more than four pairs of old boxing gloves, skipping ropes, one speedball, one floor-to-ceiling ball, two pads and three punching bags – there were no head gears, protectors or cups and mouth pieces or gum shields. That was really the time boxing was dangerous⁹⁵

The gallant effort of an early club like Sparta, as underscored, was responsible for the schooling of luminaries like Attuquaye Clottey and Roy Ankrah who also passed on what they learnt to many of the latter day boxing

⁹⁴ Amarkai Amarteifio, personal interview, *op.cit.*

⁹⁵ “The Man who Made Them Champs,” *op.cit.*

greats who have made the country proud on the international scene. For example Attuquaye Clottey who, *circa* 1972, with the assistance of Justice D.F. Annan, H. Attoh Quarshie and H.P. Nyamitei, three boxing administration gurus from Ga-Mashie, established Akotoku Academy,⁹⁶ a name which was purportedly borrowed from an older school in Adabraka where Clottey had a training stint under the trainer Teacher Thompson, coached Ghana's first world champion, D.K. (David Kotei) Poison. He tutored Azumah Nelson and discovered Ike Quartey, a former W.B.A. welterweight champion, his trainer Oko Odamtten, and the former W.B.C. International bantamweight champion Alfred Kotey. Roy Ankrah, a protégé of Sparta, at one time also trained Floyd Klutei Robertson, who became the thirteenth wearer of the Commonwealth featherweight belt and third West African to wear that belt, and the first Ghanaian to fight for a World Boxing Championship belt. Robertson in turn discovered Nana Yaw Konadu⁹⁷ who was originally from the Brong Ahafo Region in Ghana. Konadu shot into fame in 1984 and within a decade he annexed the W.B.A., I.B.C., Commonwealth, and prestigious continental and national titles in super-flyweight and bantamweight divisions.

Growth in popular participation and interest for the burgeoning boxing culture saw a major boost in the country, particularly in the 1950s, which led to the spread and springing up of clubs in other parts of the country, particularly in the Eastern and Western sections, because of two main reasons.

⁹⁶ Nana Ato Dadzie and Kwamena Ahwoi, *Justice Daniel Francis Annan: In the Service of Democracy*, Accra: Institute for Democratic Governance and Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2010, p. 103.

⁹⁷ "The Man who Made Them Champs," *op.cit.*

One was the clinching of an international boxing title in 1951 by Roy Ankrah, which inspired many Ga boxers and made many African Gold Coasters proud because, symbolically, it marked a subtle victory of a colonial territory over the colonial power. That victory contributed in attracting greater popular interest for boxing.

In addition to the Roy Ankrah factor was the Jack Roy factor. Through advice from Jack Roy, a British boxer and coach, the first government of Ghana, which was formed by the Convention Peoples Party (C.P.P.), was encouraged to push the sport beyond the borders of Accra if it wanted to have a strong and formidable national team and professionals capable of clinching international laurels for the glory of the country. In the direction of ensuring that the sport did not remain a predominantly Accra/Ga, Eastern and Western Region activity, but a national one, efforts were made to revamp and give the budding amateur organisation a wider operational coverage in Ghana.

The Roy Ankrah factor is a product of his legend, which goes back into the 1930s. In 1939, he became the featherweight and lightweight champion of Gold Coast. This breakthrough to professionalism came when Acam Syndicate, which was one of the early boxing syndicates that was operating at this nascent stage of the G.C.B.B.C.-supervised amateur boxing in Accra and Gold Coast, promoted Roy Ankrah to fight and defeat Jimmy Borland. In 1996, Surpriser, then an octogenarian, recounted: "I could remember, Roy was a strong boxer and unbeatable."⁹⁸ In 1941, he beat and defeated Tiger Mumuni to win the bantamweight championship. When World War II started, he joined

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 15

the Gold Coast Regiment to Burma. From 1943, he exhibited his boxing talent in the Far East in different exhibition and competitive bouts. In just a short time, he became known as a good boxer from Gold Coast. He also met and boxed, in exhibitions, the legendary American boxer Sugar Ray Robinson.⁹⁹ He defeated contenders like Sergeant Evans, Sergeant Briggs of the British Army, the all India-China-Burma champion John Miller and the Filipino, Young Tarley. He sparred with the former British and Commonwealth middleweight champion, Freddie Mills, who, having proceeded into the heavyweights, served for about a year with the Royal Air Force (R.A.F.) in the Far East. After serving as a light entertainer – boxer – for the British troops, Mills had an early return to England in 1946, and, later in 1950, he assisted Roy Ankrah's entrance into licenced professional boxing in Britain.

Roy Ankrah won about four exhibition bouts in Madras and in 1947 when he returned to Gold Coast he, at the Old Polo Ground in Accra, defeated Kid Hesse, then the lightweight champion of Gold Coast. He stayed in Gold Coast for sometime, fought in Nigeria and defeated Stoker Kid Parry at the Lagos Race Course to annex the West African featherweight title. He and his accomplishments became great sources of inspiration for many young boxers in the Ga-Mashie area and Swalaba, and many joined the sport.

Through the instrumentality of one Mr. Rodger Lutterodt, an Accra-based promoter, Roy Ankrah went to Glasgow, Scotland, and with the help of

⁹⁹ "Roy Wins---Invited to Fight Saddler," *D.G.*, September 20, 1951, p. 8. Note that Sugar Ray Robinson (1921-1989), who became the welterweight and middleweight champion of the world, is indubitably one of the greatest boxers in history. Robinson was the only boxer in history to win the middleweight title five times, and he retired with 175 victories in about 202 professional fights.

one Gold Coaster in Glasgow, called Mr. Herbert George, he got his boxing licence and started to train and fight. Roy Ankrah “made his [professional] debut in Britain in 1950 on the recommendation of Freddie Mills.”¹⁰⁰ In that year, he, with a combination of Knockouts (K.Os.), Technical Knockouts (T.K.Os.) and Points (P.), defeated contenders like George Lamont, Zeke Brown, Len Shaw, Peter Morrison, Joe King, Danny Nagle, Denny Dennis, Jim McCann, Gene Cafery, Francisco Latore, Tommy Bailey, Luis Romero, Bernard Pugh, and Tony Lombard. In 1951, he, under the management of Joe McKean, defeated Speedy Bandes and on April 30, 1951, defeated Ronnie Clayton to claim the British Commonwealth featherweight championship belt. Being the second colonial West African to have won an international title, the first being Battling Siki of Senegal, who, in 1922, during a heavyweight bout, knocked out the French Georges Carpentier,¹⁰¹ Roy’s victory over an Englishman, had political implications. Like Max Schmeling who, in an encounter with Joe Louis, was the spectre of anathema Nazism, and detested by many Americans, Clayton was a sporting spectre of British colonialism in Gold Coast. The defeat of Clayton was naturally welcome by many African Gold Coasters who felt that Roy had made them proud, perforated the ego of British imperialists, and shaken the myth of white superiority, which had been at the vanguard of colonialism. That welcome and acknowledgement of Roy’s accomplishment inspired popular interest for boxing in Gold Coast.

¹⁰⁰ This Information was culled from *Ring Record Book*, 1955 edition, p. 721. See “Roy Ankrah,” *BoxRec Boxing Encyclopedia*, http://boxrec.com/media/index.php/Roy_Ankrah (Information was retrieved September 27, 2010).

¹⁰¹ [Ebenezer] “Surpiser” Sowah [Laryea], “The Life History of Roy Ankrah,” *op.cit.*, p. 4.

The international exposure, opportunity of travelling abroad and seeing new places, meeting high political officials including the Queen of England,¹⁰² the fame, and honour done him on his return to Gold Coast, including regal gift presentations from Asantehene Otumfour Sir Agyeman Prempeh II, Nana Ofori Atta, Omanhene of Akyem Abuakwa, congratulations from the Governor, Sir Charles Arden Clarke and Mr. Kwame Nkrumah, leader of Government Business and, congratulatory dance from G.C.B.B.C.,¹⁰³ were worthy. They were sources of encouragement for many youth, particularly those in Accra to take boxing seriously since it was a giver of opportunities. Roy's legend inspired boxers in the 1950's, through the 1960s and 1970s. His heroism and accomplishments inspired not only gifts but also paeans especially from the women folk in Ga-Mashie who, reinventing their roles in the *Asafo Atwele* traditions where they supported their husbands and heroes, composed songs in Ga, which they sang to praise Roy and encourage the male youth to follow his example. One song when translated read like this:

*Roy Ankrah has gone overseas [England], Atukwei [Attuquaye] Clottey would be returning from afar, It is nothing but their self-effort, Bukom youth should be steadfast in their efforts.*¹⁰⁴

Reasonably, such honours, paeans and the pride that Roy bequeathed to the colonial territory and its people, particularly the deprived youth in the inner city of Accra, like Bukom and its environs, was enough to encourage the less fortunate youth to take the sport seriously and for those who did not partake in it to follow it with passion. That pattern has continued, where for

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 2, see inserted picture of Roy Ankrah and Queen Elizabeth II.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁰⁴ This is the interpretation Emmanuel Akyeampong gives to the original in Ga. See Emmanuel Akyeampong, *op.cit.*, p. 57.

many a Ga youth, boxing still represents an avenue for social mobility and recognition, making money, proving worth, enhancing good health, and partaking in and living a cultural legacy.¹⁰⁵ In commenting on the truism of the generational tradition where the successes of early Ga boxers continue to inspire others, particularly young and up and coming boxers, trainer Believer said that:

I train many youth today. Boxing keeps them off the street and it occupies their time, as it does not get them into trouble. However, they all want to become like the Roys and those he inspired like the Floyd Robertsons, D.K. Poisons and Azumah Nelsons. This aspiration has become part of the youth who love boxing. The Robertsons and Azumahs also wanted to become like their heroes and, similarly, gain the recognition that they got. This tradition also keeps the passion and spirit of boxing alive among us [Ga-Mashie and Ga people].¹⁰⁶

The victory of Roy also put the country on the international boxing scene as a waxing boxing nation capable of producing champions in the future. Besides generating popular enthusiasm, which intensified amateur training and competitions in Accra, the victory invited boxing into the sporting activities of the army, which, locally, had been generally, hesitant about the sport. Boxing was not strongly encouraged in the army because of the fear that it could damage spleens enlarged and weakened by endemic malaria.¹⁰⁷ Its gradual growth occurred when World War II broke out. With the help of one

¹⁰⁵ Rashidi Williams, personal interview, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* As at the time that I was conducting this interview, at Believers Gym on February 20, 2009, there were about fifteen boxers, mostly from Ga-Mashie, at training. Engaging in sparring sessions, and shadow boxing under a tree and on a cement concrete floor, they had only one punching bag and about six old car tyres which they used for jumping exercises. They all seemed serious and determined in their training. In my conversations with them they disclosed to me that they wanted to use boxing to improve themselves and that of the community since they came from deprived homes. They also said that the early boxing heroes continued to inspire them and that they wanted to be like them.

¹⁰⁷ Emmanuel Akyeampong, *op.cit.*, p. 52.

many a Ga youth, boxing still represents an avenue for social mobility and recognition, making money, proving worth, enhancing good health, and partaking in and living a cultural legacy.¹⁰⁵ In commenting on the truism of the generational tradition where the successes of early Ga boxers continue to inspire others, particularly young and up and coming boxers, trainer Believer said that:

I train many youth today. Boxing keeps them off the street and it occupies their time, as it does not get them into trouble. However, they all want to become like the Roys and those he inspired like the Floyd Robertsons, D.K. Poisons and Azumah Nelsons. This aspiration has become part of the youth who love boxing. The Robertsons and Azumahs also wanted to become like their heroes and, similarly, gain the recognition that they got. This tradition also keeps the passion and spirit of boxing alive among us [Ga-Mashie and Ga people].¹⁰⁶

The victory of Roy also put the country on the international boxing scene as a waxing boxing nation capable of producing champions in the future. Besides generating popular enthusiasm, which intensified amateur training and competitions in Accra, the victory invited boxing into the sporting activities of the army, which, locally, had been generally, hesitant about the sport. Boxing was not strongly encouraged in the army because of the fear that it could damage spleens enlarged and weakened by endemic malaria.¹⁰⁷ Its gradual growth occurred when World War II broke out. With the help of one

¹⁰⁵ Rashidi Williams, personal interview, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* As at the time that I was conducting this interview, at Believers Gym on February 20, 2009, there were about fifteen boxers, mostly from Ga-Mashie, at training. Engaging in sparring sessions, and shadow boxing under a tree and on a cement concrete floor, they had only one punching bag and about six old car tyres which they used for jumping exercises. They all seemed serious and determined in their training. In my conversations with them they disclosed to me that they wanted to use boxing to improve themselves and that of the community since they came from deprived homes. They also said that the early boxing heroes continued to inspire them and that they wanted to be like them.

¹⁰⁷ Emmanuel Akyeampong, *op. cit.*, p. 52.

Major Tomlin, an army Physical Training Instructor, it received some encouragement in the army and in the colony of Gold Coast for that matter. It was through that military experiment, particularly within the army, that Roy had the opportunity to exhibit his skill later in Burma. However, the 1950s, particularly after the ex-serviceman Roy's major victory, witnessed much growth of boxing in the army. The enthusiasm for boxing, which Roy's victory unleashed, affected other areas in Ghana and led to the emergence of new clubs in Asante Region and later the Trans-Volta area. In fact, his earlier victories and successes in England, before he beat Clayton, inspired the formation of boxing clubs. This was reported even at a place like Oda, where in the Old and New Towns "young men had formed the clubs because they were encouraged to do so by the successes of Roy Ankrah, the "Black Flash" in England."¹⁰⁸ The growth of boxing in Gold Coast in the 1950s saw many boxers becoming famous for their prowess and a concurrent emergence of more champions on the amateur scene. On the scene were provincial (regional), national and West African champions and local heroes. This era can boast of a roll call of notable old and new boxers like Jack Toller, who in 1951 was the heavyweight champion of Gold Coasts and West Africa, Billy Wells, who was the welter and middleweight champion of Gold Coast, and Billy Kwaku Nkran who, one time, was the middleweight champion of Ashanti Region. Others were Gaskia Kafaru, Armstrong Agbana, Lucifer Bonsu, Thunder Latukwei and Surpriser Botchway. Similar to Roy, others, like Ogli Tettey, had gone professional internationally. Such boxers, like

¹⁰⁸ "Newly Formed Boxing Clubs Will Compete," *D.G.*, April 19, 1951, p. 8.

Richard Armah who was fighting abroad in places like England, Brussels¹⁰⁹ and Scotland,¹¹⁰ ventured in search of laurels. Other sensations included Jack Armstrong who, in the welterweight division, was the leading impression in the Western Province. He, like others, was inspired to go to England to look for international laurels.¹¹¹ This tradition of boxing heroes travelling abroad in search of glory became fashionable in the 1950s and some boxing managers, realising the emergence of great boxers in the country started to scout and negotiate for some of them to go abroad to fight. A manager from the United Kingdom, in 1951, started to negotiate for Attuquaye Clottey, a lightweight boxer, from the Sparta Boxing Club in Accra, to fight in England.¹¹² On that trajectory, several Ga boxers found their way to London in the 1950s in search of fame and fortune. These many personalities included Floyd Klutei Robertson, Kimpo Amarfio, Dennis Adjei, "London Kid," P.J. Cobblah, and Sugar Gibiliru.¹¹³

In addition to Roy Ankrah's victory and accomplishments, Jack Roy's advice to the government to support and improve boxing and enhance its organisation in order to make it a nationwide sport, also influenced the growth of amateur and professional boxing in the country. Organised amateur sports development had been largely undertaken in pre-independence Ghana by interested and enthusiastic individuals, informal groups and students in schools. Few autonomous sports associations existed and managed their own

¹⁰⁹ "Richard Armah will fight in Brussels," *D.G.*, November 8, 1951, p. 5.

¹¹⁰ "Armstrong was worthy points winner over Armah," *D.G.*, November 15, 1951, p. 8.

¹¹¹ "Armstrong can bring honour to the Gold Coast," *D.G.*, November 8, 1951, p. 5.

¹¹² "U.K. Manager wants Clottey," *D.G.*, October 18, 1951, p. 8.

¹¹³ Emmanuel Akyeampong, *op. cit.* p. 47.

affairs, under the recognition and ceremonial control of the colonial administration. By the end of the 1940s decade, some groups that existed, with some organising local and international matches and linked to some international bodies included the Ashanti Amateur Sports Association, Amateur Athletic Association, Accra Regional Athletic Association, Amateur Cricket Association and Amateur Tennis Association. Some of them, like Ashanti Amateur Sports Association, by the close of 1950, had affiliated themselves to the regulatory Gold Coast Amateur Athletic Association.¹¹⁴ Some engaged in local leagues and international competitions. For example, there was an Accra Cricket League and members were engaged in international tournaments, which pitched them against other countries which included Nigeria.¹¹⁵

The G.C.B.B.C. was in charge of regulating rules, ratings and activities of the embryonic amateur and professional boxing fraternity in Gold Coast. Operating within a colonial territory as a subsidiary of the B.B.B.C., it was required to and, in fact, did take instructions from that hegemonic body on issues regarding regulations and control of the sport as practised in the subordinate territory. For example, in 1951, it took a new rule from the B.B.B.C., which stipulated that a boxer could not hold more than one title at a time. This affected such boxers as Billy Wells, who being Gold Coast's heavy, middle, and welterweight champion at the time, was required to relinquish two

¹¹⁴ Public Records and Archives Administration Department, Accra (hereafter P.R.A.A.D. Accra) RG. 9/1/1. See constitution of the Ashanti Amateur Sports Association, pg. 1, paragraph 4(b).

¹¹⁵ International Cricket Match – Ghana and Nigeria in Gold Coast Cricket Association File P.R.A.A.D. Accra, RG. 9/1/8.

of the titles.¹¹⁶ Such true illustration reflects, within a colonial setting and period, the paternalistic arrangement over the supervision of sports and more particularly boxing, between Gold Coast and British. The amateur aspect of sports in general, including boxing, regarding the sanctioning of their establishment, activities and organisation, was under the administrative and organisational direction and responsibility of the Gold Coast Amateur Sports Council (G.C.A.S.C.), which was a subsidiary of a “superintending” body in England. In 1952, the enacting of the Gold Coast Amateur Sports Ordinance, Number 14, revealed a recent legal attempt by government to promote amateur sport in the country. It enforced the power of the G.C.A.S.C to control the various amateur groups.¹¹⁷ The Council, which was mandated to promote, encourage and control sports, was authorised to grant affiliation status to an association if it was satisfied that such a group truly existed. However, the mandate did not empower the G.C.A.S.C to support sporting associations financially and otherwise.¹¹⁸ This period could be adequately referred to as the “self-help” or “individual enterprise” era.¹¹⁹ Groups, including amateur boxing fraternities, were left, largely to their own devices, as they continued with the self-help tradition. However, by the end of the 1950s, a decade which saw the country gaining its independence, which occurred on March 6, 1957, the need for fuller official backing to sports promotion and development

¹¹⁶ “A Boxer can hold only one title,” *D.G.*, November 9, 1951, p. 8.

¹¹⁷ See Ghana’s Official Homepage, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

¹¹⁸ K.T. Vieta, *op. cit.*, p. 561.

¹¹⁹ A statement by Honourable E.T. Mensah, Minister for Youth and Sports, “Meet The Press,” February 1988, p. 24, as recorded in the opening pages (see pp.1-8) of Antoinette Yaa Ansah and Gede Augustine Julius, “A Descriptive List of Records of the Ministry of Youth and Sports 1949-1980 in the National Archives of Ghana,” Diploma in Archival Studies dissertation, Department of Library and Archive Studies, University of Ghana, Legon, Accra, 1999.

gradually had been realised. Within that decade Gold Coast, which Kwame Nkrumah, in 1952, stated had attracted the admiration of Africans, people of African descent and non Africans because it was reflecting positive changes and achievements, “which have never been surpassed by any subject people within such a short time,”¹²⁰ engaged in major international sporting engagements. These, serving as platforms to attract international attention to the country, included the 1952 Olympics Games and Empire (Commonwealth) Games of 1954 at Vancouver and 1958 in Cardiff.

Governments, Boxers and the Masses, and the Nationalisation of Boxing in Ghana: c. 1958 to c. 1980

At independence, Kwame Nkrumah and his government, freeing amateur sports from the superintendence of England, made further attempts to support and encourage the development of sport with the aim of instilling discipline in sportspersons to propel them to achieve glory for Ghana. By the end of 1958, a Central Organisation of Sports (C.O.S.) had been formed with Ohene Djan, later appointed as its first director. Certain sports including football, athletics, boxing, lawn and table tennis, basketball and hockey, were selected for development.¹²¹ Aside the attention paid to these disciplines, the C.O.S. set up sporting clubs, which, receiving government assistance, included football clubs, like the Ghana Real Republicans and Ghana Academicals. Employment was given to sport personalities in state organisations, like the United Ghana Farms Council and Security Agencies, and they were

¹²⁰ “Premier Calls for Hard Work” *D.G.*, August 5, 1952, p. 8.

¹²¹ K.T. Vieta, *op. cit.* p. 561

encouraged to train to win laurels and achieve successes for Ghana, in sports, at continental and international levels.¹²²

Thus, for and within independent Ghana, the C.O.S. represented the first organised body and ministry of government, which provided the first governmental effort at advancing sports. The setting up of government organisations, by the successive governments, that have come after the first republic, to improve Ghanaian sports is a convention inspired by the C.O.S. Change of governments has customarily led to change in the names and policy of state organisations in charge of sport. For example, after the First Republic was toppled through a coup in 1966, the C.O.S. was replaced with Ministry of Education, Culture and Sports. In 1978, it became Sport Ministry, in 1979, it became Ministry of Culture and Sports and in the Third Republic and the era of the Provisional National Defence Council (P.N.D.C.), it was known as the Ministry of Youth and Sports. Regardless of changes in names and modification of policies, these state agencies, have been committed, in different degrees though, to develop sports in the country.¹²³

Their primary aim since the 1950s, have, essentially, been to use sports (i) for national development, stability and progress, (ii) to enhance national consciousness, and (iii) help the systematic development and promotion of sports, at national and international levels, to foster friendship, pleasure, realization of good health, and provide avenues for gainful employment, especially for the youth.¹²⁴

¹²² See Antoinette Yaa Ansah and Gede Augustine Julius, *op. cit.*

¹²³ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

Over time these offices, in pursuance of their mandate, have worked with different sub-agencies including the National Youth Council (N.Y.C.) and National Sports Council (N.S.C.), which have been responsible for sports grading and in charge of voluntary sporting associations. Such associations included, for example the National Sports College in Winneba, which, in 1984, was established to, among other duties, train athletes and sportspersons and certify coaches. Other associations and disciplines, which these councils have been mandated, over the years, to promote and encourage popular participation for recreation and excellence include known traditional ones like football and boxing and less known ones like chess, sports for the physically challenged, women in sports, weightlifting, body building and base/softball.¹²⁵

Incidentally, the 1950s eventually attracted some physical support from government, not just colonial-originated official recognition, mentorship, regulation and control, for the advancement of sports in the country. This development, which contributed in gradually moving the sports setting from the “self-help era” where financial support had been negligible, became unavoidable when the administration of the country gradually started to shift to African control, with Nkrumah at the fore.

Reverting to the discussion on boxing, it has been underscored that Roy Ankrah influenced its growth and popularity in the 1950s and attracted more participants into it.

As the sport ventured into other parts of the country, its spread and popularity at the amateur level, inspired national amateur competitions. With

¹²⁵ “Meet the Press,” p. 5, in Antoinette Yaa Ansah and Gede Augustine Julius, *op. cit.*

patronage and consent of G.C.B.B.C. and G.C.A.S.C. and participation of local promoters and clubs, international amateur boxing competitions were also organised in Accra between Ghanaian boxers, largely from Accra, and others from neighbouring countries. An early one was organised in August 1952 in Accra, between Ghana and Nigeria.¹²⁶

As the sport spread to other areas the prevailing problem of lack of logistics, which hit Accra first, did not abate in those new areas. Following Accra, and places like Bukom where through local initiative makeshift rings and other accoutrements, were made, it became necessary also for other locales to put up rings and provide the basic logistics like gloves, pads and punch bags. For example the boxing fraternity in Nsawam, which was one of the first places to embrace boxing had by October 1952, managed through the Catholic Youth Organisation (C.Y.O.), to build a boxing ring made of cement, which stood in front of the Grand Stand of the C.Y.O.-established stadium.¹²⁷ Through such initiative and enthusiasm, attitudes that manifested also in other localities, it, consequently, was reported in November 1952 that boxing was progressing in Nsawam.¹²⁸

By 1952, the escalating popularity of the sport in the colony had made possible a number of formal and informal contests in localities like Kumasi, Accra, Oda, Nsawam, Koforidua, and parts of the Western province. Consequently, the G.C.B.B.C., obviously convinced that the sport had taken

¹²⁶ P.R.A.A.D., Accra RG. 9/1/10, See letter with reference number SC/OB/68.

¹²⁷ P.R.A.A.D., Accra RG. 9/1/10, Letter from Organiser to the Gold Coast Amateur Sports Council (G.C.A.S.C), Accra, 1952.

¹²⁸ P.R.A.A.D. Accra RG. 9/1/10, See document dated 26-11-1952, and captioned "C.Y.O. Sports Stadium, Nsawam."

roots, issued the new ratings. The ratings for the quarter ending of December 31, 1952, were as follows: for heavyweight, the champion was Jack Toller, followed by Kobla Geyevu, Swordfish Ben, Kid Foster, Lucifer Yermo and Jack Foster Solomon. The middleweight champion was Billy Wells followed by Gaskia Kafaru, Terrible Quarshie, Battling Coca Cola, Kwatelai Quartey, Amaa Aku, with Billy Adams being a probable. The welterweight division had London Kid as champion, followed by Surpriser Botchway, Billy Kotey, Thunder Lartukwei, Mighty Joe Williams, Casino Sawyerr, with Attuquaye Clottey, Atlas Mensah, Onion Tetteh, Mickey Jones, Armstrong Apenteng and Salifu Bukari as probables. For lightweight the title was vacant and the number one contender was Armstrong Agbana followed by Sugar Allotey, P.J. Cobblah, Adjetey Sowah, Nii France, with Kid Boye, Yaro Wicked Akwei and Torpedo Lamptey as probables. The featherweight title was vacant. The number one contender was Young Spider Neequaye, followed by Ginger Nyarko, Marvellous Tettey, and Octopus Djane with Bombardier Ayinla, Andrews Martey, Dragon Yartey, and Odartey Frans as probables. The champion for the bantamweight division was Young Spider Neequaye followed by Terror Ayivi and Seth Annum and, for flyweight the title was vacant. The contenders were Little Joe, Jr., Ogli Tettey, Terror Ayivi, and Influenza Armah, with Piercing Kid, Sugar Mamah and D.O. Charlie as probables.¹²⁹ With ratings like this, which testified that the country's boxing culture with its hub in Accra, was coming of age, the localities around the Volta River in the eastern part of the country (now Volta Region) also

¹²⁹ "New Boxing Ratings," *D.G.*, August 5, 1952, p. 8.

welcomed the culture and started to cultivate clubs. One of such clubs, which by 1953 was in existence, was Kpandu Amateur Boxing Club.¹³⁰ This promising crystallisation of the sport in the country led to the staging of the First Tournament of the Gold Coast [Colony] Amateur Boxing Association (the G.C.A.B.A.) at the Accra Sports Stadium on February 7, 1953, which provided thrills and excitements to the cheering crowd. This non-title performance featured contenders like S.K. Laryea, S. Mankattah, K. Amegbe, F. Kane, K. Mensah, T. Dove, F. Eme and B. Salifu, and some came from Accra, and clubs like Ashirife Boxing Club in Nsawam, and Sekondi-Takoradi Youth Council.¹³¹ The participation of Frans Dove, a 56-year-old Accra Barrister, in the competition was a strong testimony that the sport was increasingly gaining popularity in the country at the time.

Although it apparently was growing and becoming popular in the country, organised boxing faced financial problems and lacked facilities, particularly a national boxing stadium. The absence of a stadium became of much concern to the G.C.B.B.C. In pursuance of acquiring a national stadium, the Board, in May, 1953, commissioned a six-man committee, headed by Mr. Edmund Bannerman, who then was the vice-president of the Board, to make recommendations to a body of Stewards, for the establishment of one. The committee comprising Messrs, [J.E.S.] de Graft-Hayford, Kalmoni, Barton, Kwesi Mould and Wynbegger, after discussing a project for the establishment

¹³⁰ P.R.A.D.D. Accra, RG. 9/1/13, G.C.A.B.A. - Trans Volta Togoland Region File. See letter from Albert K. Ekudi to Acting Secretary of the Trans Volta-Togoland Amateur Boxing Association dated 18/2/57.

¹³¹ "Boxers Put Up Good Show at the First Colony Amateur Tourney," *D.G.*, February 9, 1953, p. 8.

of a stadium in Accra, drawing up a preliminary estimate and advising on the procedure to be adopted to bring the project into being, submitted its report to the president of the Board, Mr. George Crowe.¹³² It is reported that while the committee recommended a 46,000-seater stadium, it surprisingly and unprofessionally underestimated the cost of such stadium “strangely” at the meagre sum of “something” between £7,000 and £8,000.¹³³ It appeared that more money was needed for such a project. However, it is one thing quoting an amount for something and another thing being able to raise the amount. The initiative to raise the money had to come from the Board. In the spirit of self-help, which still lingered and characterised the development of sports, it was recommended that money should be generated through a small loan from the government and appeal to the public for funds. It was, however, suggested that the government, with Nkrumah as Leader of Government Business, later to become Prime Minister, was to be approached to give the Board a site, and it was agreed that would be nice to have the stadium erected near the sports stadium of the G.C.A.S.C. on Rowe Road in Accra.¹³⁴

The small loan did not come from the government, especially so from one which being “quasi” was not yet totally in charge of an independent country. Practically, a quasi-government, under the supervision of a governor, Sir Arden Clarke and the monarch of the British Empire, the Nkrumah government was still limited in what it could do and the policies it could pursue, including the granting of loans for the erection of boxing stadiums.

¹³² “Boxing Board to erect their own stadium,” *D.G.*, July 23, 1953, p. 8.

¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*

The country was still a colonial territory and remained so until 1957 when it became independent and, subsequently, a Republic in 1960. As a colonial territory controlled at the time, by a colonial administrative hegemony through the supervision of a quasi-African government, the country together with its internal bodies in charge of state politics and administration, were beset with a number of problems.

Within a ferment of problems such as local agitation for political independence and inter-party rivalry, often of violence and displayed along ethnic and regional lines, the political administrative structure naturally would face the task of mapping out the future of Gold Coast. Obviously, to such a government and its superordinate British administration, which were struggling with prevailing nationalist politics and economic problems, which both colony and metropolis were facing because of global economic problems which World War II unleashed, sponsoring the building of a boxing stadium was, by political and economic logic, the least of its concerns and priorities. Its priorities, considering the attention and financial sponsorship, which some projects received from the government at the time, appear to have been couched in an estimated £100 million Five Year Development Plan and Accelerated Development Plan for Education, which, from 1951 to 1954, saw some marked improvement in the telecommunication, transport and educational infrastructural sectors of the country.¹³⁵

¹³⁵ For information on the Development Plan and the mentor-mentee governmental relationship between the colonial government and the C.P.P. government from 1951 to 1957, see J.B Webster, A.A. Boahen and M. Tidy, *West Africa since 1800*, London: Longman, 1980, pp. 290-297.

From the financial coffers of the colony, run under a mentor-mentee governmental relationship between the colonial government and C.P.P. respectively, did not come funding for the boxing stadium project. Substantial funds could not be generated through appeals to the public. So, unfortunately, because of lack of funds this stadium to be built exclusively for boxing, never came into existence. This situation, where there has been an absence of a boxing stadium, has remained till date and major fights and spectacles are held at general sport stadia in Accra and various public entertainment venues where *ad hoc* rings are made for such transient spectacles.

Serving as a lesson, the failure to generate funds in the past to support the sport and provide infrastructure, facilities, and basic materials for the amateur sector in particular, brought about the realisation to the policy makers that boxing in general needed to be funded to improve its organisation and growth. This necessity therefore compelled the officials in charge of the sport's administration to plan a national crusade to generate funds to help the sport. On that course, the National Council of the G.C.A.B.A., a superordinate body of the G.C.A.B.A., was founded on October 1, 1956, to help improve amateur boxing in the country by helping to generate funds for it. The Council decided that a £3,000 appeal for funds should be launched to raise money to purchase equipment for clubs and promote amateur boxing in general. Furthermore, as a way of real decentralisation of boxing from Accra and further promotion of the sport among the young, especially those in the secondary and tertiary educational institutions, regional committees, it was suggested, should be set up in all the administrative regions in the country to

arrange amateur boxing locally and organise inter-school matches and regional championships.¹³⁶ In pursuance of the first objective, letters were sent to different prominent people, considered as boxing enthusiasts, to ask for funds. These included Messrs, T. Mead of Ho, Dugbatey of the Department of Housing in Accra, R.T. Orleans-Pobee of Adisadel College in Cape Coast and Bombay Daniels of the Department of Social Welfare, Cape Coast.¹³⁷ Similarly, letters were to be sent to heads of secondary schools and teacher training colleges to encourage them to promote boxing among the students in their institutions.

This campaign continued and in the midst of that effort, new clubs inspired through local initiative and surviving on their own devices continued to emerge in different localities. The Volta area for example witnessed the emergence of Ho Boys/Youth Club Boxing Group on November 26, 1956, which met thrice in a week, on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays, for training and, to financially support itself, charged monthly dues of 4d.¹³⁸

This campaign both for funds and in support of efforts of the G.C.A.B.A. and local gyms and clubs to promote amateur boxing in parts of the country continued for sometime. With such determination, the year 1957 witnessed an advert in the *Daily Graphic* announcing the distribution of free boxing gloves by the G.C.A.B.A. in Accra.¹³⁹ Purchased with funds from its

¹³⁶ P.R.A.A.D. Accra RG.9/1/13, G.C.A.B.A. Trans-Volta Togoland Region – File.

¹³⁷ P.R.A.A.D. Accra RG.9/1/13, G.C.A.B.A. Trans-Volta Togoland Region – File, Letter 3220, dated October 22, 1956, from Honourable Secretary to boxing enthusiasts.

¹³⁸ P.R.A.A.D. Accra RG.9/1/13, G.C.A.B.A. Trans-Volta Togoland Region – File, Letter dated February 6, 1957, from Welfare Officer, Department of Social Welfare and Community Development in Ho to L.G. Stratford.

¹³⁹ This was mentioned in a Letter from L.G. Stratford to the Secretary, G.C.A.B.A. See P.R.A.A.D. Accra RG.9/1/13 G.C.A.B.A. Trans-Volta Togoland Region – File.

coffers and little support from government, the gloves were to be distributed to interested boxing clubs in the country. Such complimentary overtures, encouraging to and necessary for the growth of boxing, inspired the formation of new clubs, especially in the Trans-Volta Togoland area, where, because of such encouraging goodwill, it was reported that matches for novices were held in Volta areas such as Kpandu and Ho.¹⁴⁰

Gaining political independence in 1957, Gold Coast became Ghana, a name, which, through the instrumentality of Nkrumah and J.B. Danquah, a Gold Coast politician, was, for African historical reminiscence and pride, adopted from the famous medieval Western Sudan Soninke Empire, which, noted for gold, military might, wealth and opulence, developed between the fifth and thirteenth centuries. All institutions, which hitherto reflected the name Gold Coast, changed to Ghana. Most of them assumed new mandates. Within the context of sports, G.C.A.S.C., which in 1957 had Sir Leslie M'Carthy and Sir Arku Korsah as president and vice-president respectively, became the Ghana Amateur Sports Council (the G.A.S.C.), which, towards the end of 1958, heralded the formation of the C.O.S. Similarly, the G.C.A.B.A. became the Ghana Amateur Boxing Association (the G.A.B.A.).

The G.A.B.A., which had Prime Minister Kwame Nkrumah and Sir Leslie M'Carthy as patron and president respectively, had a national council, which comprised R.P. Balfour, B.E. Carmen, W.B. Carter, W.R. Feaver, W.Q. Halm, J.C. Lucas, R. MacMillan (O.B.E.), S.E. Odamtten (O.B.E.), Major

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

General A.G. Paley (C.B.E., D.S.O.), and G.A. Zangger.¹⁴¹ In the spirit of renewed energy the G.A.B.A. was mandated to bring all existing and yet to be formed regional amateur boxing associations under its umbrella. It was to (i) foster amateur boxing in Ghana and (ii) Train coaches in accordance with the principles and rules of amateur boxing laid down by the International Amateur Boxing Association. Furthermore, it was to (iii) Institute a training programme for amateur boxers throughout the country, (iv) Run courses for prospective judges and referees (v) Train the national team of amateur boxers, and (vi) Train a national team to compete in the 1960 Olympic Games, which was to take place in Rome.¹⁴²

The newly constituted G.A.B.A. brought under its control the regional groups and quickly moved in pursuance and continuation of an earlier objective of the G.C.A.B.A. in 1957, to create a formidable team to represent the Gold Coast colony at the 1958 Empire Games (Commonwealth Games) at Cardiff. Earlier the G.C.A.B.A. formulated a plan to bring into the Gold Coast colony Flight Sergeant Jack W. Roy, who was a British boxing expert, to help revamp Gold Coast boxing through technical training and advice and to create a strong team for the colony. The G.A.B.A., now representing Ghana, without abandoning that colonial plan, committed itself at fulfilling it by inviting that boxing expert. This practice of importing sport experts from Europe to help build up the sports sector on the attainment of independence also manifested

¹⁴¹ See Programme Brochure, *National Individual Championships*, Accra: Guinea Press, 1958, p. 3. Refer P.R.A.A.D. Accra RG.9/1/23.

¹⁴² P.R.A.A.D. Accra G.A.B.A. File, RG.9/1/31. Re-organisation of Regional Associations Boxing letter from the G.A.B.A. to Regional Associations dated 13-06-1959. Reference number G.A.B.A./G.I./14/13.

within the realms of football. For example, the Ghana Amateur Football Association (the G.A.F.A.) also financed the famous English footballer Sir Stanley Matthews alias the Saint of Soccer, to come to Ghana to observe the soccer scene and make recommendation about soccer organisation in the country. That, in fact, led to recommendations which compelled the G.A.F.A. to employ into the country a number of foreign coaches from England, Sweden, Italy, West Germany and Hungary, to make “scientific” coaching available to many clubs and to assist in training and unearthing local talents.¹⁴³

Although this paradigm, was originally conceived to be a temporary measure adopted to pave the way for rapid Africanisation of the management and coaching sectors of sports in the country, it is evident that after many years of being independent, the country has not been able to entirely break free from that practice, particularly with its national teams. The national football teams, particularly the senior one, still rely heavily on foreign coaches who receive huge pays. This situation has drawn strong opposition to and criticism against the ruling body of football in the country, presently known as the Ghana Football Authority (the G.F.A.) from many local coaches and sports *aficionados*. Such critics think that it is not only a waste of national resources to employ and pay foreign coaches whilst there are good local coaches, but it is also a degrading act because it reveals the nation’s lack of confidence in its people, which is an insult to the image and capabilities of the African.

Besides the noted mandate of Jack Roy, he in addition, under the administrative dispensation of the G.A.B.A., was authorised to be national

¹⁴³ K.T. Vieta, *op.cit.*, p. 567.

coach, recruit and select boxers to constitute an excelling national team to represent the country at Cardiff. Roy Ankrah was mandated to assist Jack Roy. Having returned on the advice of Nkrumah, to Ghana in July 1955, after the French boxer Ray Famechon defeated him and curtailed his dream to fight the W.B.C. featherweight champion Sandy Saddler, Roy Ankrah first worked with the Worker's Brigade as coach, and subsequently with the C.O.S.¹⁴⁴ Chosen as an assistant coach he was required by the government to use his rich skills, experience, and knowledge of the local boxing terrain and its talented fighters, to support Jack Roy to constitute a formidable national side and improve boxing in general in the country. Roy Ankrah would be appointed by Parliament in 1960, as the first Ghanaian boxing coach of the national team.¹⁴⁵

The team that these men were mandated to build was to be designated as Black Bombers. The presence of the word "black" in that nomenclature, like the ideogram black lodestar in the flag of the country, was in reference to the conscious efforts of Nkrumah at positivising the colour black which, taken to stand for the African race, had for years under colonialism been demonised. The usage of "black," like the symbolic colour of the star, was employed to invent racial pride, African Personality and renaissance, and accentuate the excellence of things, persons and institutions of Ghanaian and African origin as whole. It was in that direction that Ohene Djan, who was chairperson of the G.A.F.A. in 1957 and later, in 1960, Director of the C.O.S., after constituting, in October 1960, a student-dominated national football team, the Academicals, who had a poor

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 574.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

performance in Lagos on October 10, re-organised and renamed it Black Stars.¹⁴⁶ The name Black Stars was chosen to give more inspiration to the group and to symbolise the spirit of African Personality, which was forcefully being stressed by President Nkrumah.¹⁴⁷ This is another classical example that demonstrates how sports and its powerful symbolism can be and has been employed as tools to achieve political objectives.

Jack Roy was to come to Ghana on January 27, 1958 and to take the boxing team to the VIth British Empire and Commonwealth Games in Cardiff, which was to start on July 18, 1958. As part of his preliminary work, he was to embark on a familiarisation tour to acquaint himself with the boxing scene through visits to the regions and clubs that constituted the regional associations.¹⁴⁸ He was also to instruct and coach boxers and coaches at the Accra Police Headquarters, Army P.T. School and the Accra clubs that constituted the Accra Regional Amateur Boxing for some 6-7 hours on some days, during his stay in Accra.¹⁴⁹ To further encourage the Ghana Army to pursue boxing, the G.A.B.A. suggested, obviously considering the benefits to be gained from Jack Roy, that more coaches and judges should be trained [by the national coaches] for that institution.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁶ This tradition has continued up till date. The various national teams for men and women at the various age levels such as the under 17 and under 20 teams bear names like "Black Starlets," and "Black Satellites." Others are the "Black Meteors," "Black Maidens," and "Black Queens."

¹⁴⁷ K.T. Vieta, *op.cit.* p. 567.

¹⁴⁸ P.R.A.A.D. Accra File No. RG.9/1/13, See letter written by Lt. Col. L.G. Young, Chairman of the National Council of the G.A.B.A. to the Regional Sports Officers, Secretary of Ministry of Education, Ghana Amateur Sports Council etc.

¹⁴⁹ P.R.A.A.D. Accra File No. RG.9/1/13, Letter written by Lt. Col. L.G. Young and dated January 22, 1958.

¹⁵⁰ P.R.A.A.D. Accra File No. RG.9/1/13, Letter with reference number BCI/6, and dated February 26, 1958, from J.R. Houston to Major General V. Parley (G.O.C.) Ghana Army.

From January, Jack Roy, with assistance from Roy Ankrah, committed himself to pursue his mandated task. In the quest to enhance the popularity of boxing on the national scene and spread it to other regions, Jack Roy and the G.A.B.A. engineered the organisation of Inter-Regional Championships. In the pursuance of that enterprise, sponsorship and support were obtained from companies and other stakeholders. For example, the beer manufacturing company, Accra Brewery, sponsored one on March 22, 1958, in Accra. That marked the beginning of the long history of the corporate world doing business with boxing in the country, which, as a prevailing tradition, has afforded such sponsors to use boxing shows and icons to advertise and sell their products.¹⁵¹

Such competitions were staged to prepare boxers for national championships, get Association executives and members together, and to serve as a training platform and selection of the national team for Empire and Commonwealth (and other international) Games.¹⁵² The initiative compelled many of the clubs in the regions to prepare eagerly for the contest, for it had the potential to select their members for the national team, and thereby boost the image of such clubs. Alongside the Inter-Regional Championships, the G.A.B.A. also initiated and encouraged National Individual Championships. It became popular from 1958, and constituted part of the boxing tourneys of the country into the 1960s.

¹⁵¹ Recently, in March 2009, the distributors of Smart Energy Drink in Accra helped to sponsor a workshop on coaching in boxing in Accra, which the President of the Ghana Professional Boxing Association, Moses Foh Amoaning and a British boxer organised for Ghanaian coaches. The sponsors also decided, in a commercial move, to use Joshua Clottey, an I.B.F. champion in Accra, as their product's ambassador.

¹⁵² P.R.A.A.D. Accra File No. RG.9/1/13, Letter with from J.R. Houston to Regional Clubs dated February 26, 1958. Reference number TVTR. /23.

Starting from 1958, the few contests within that year, followed by others in subsequent years, used to be held at Cadbury and Fry House, High Street in central Accra. The initiative of 1958, which produced some competitions charging spectators about 2/- and 1- for the preliminaries and 7/6, 5/- and 2/- for finals,¹⁵³ was a way to produce great boxers and champions out of the contestants. Furthermore, in line with the development agenda of the G.A.B.A., such initiative aimed to use the contest to raise funds, enhance public awareness, and solicit private sponsorship to support the growth of boxing and to get popular support and logistics for those that the country selects to represent it at international competitions.

Particularly for the impending Commonwealth Games of 1958, all the local major contests were to be used as a platform to enhance collaboration between the regional associations for concerted growth¹⁵⁴ and appeal for funds from the general public, including individuals and companies, to support the national boxing delegation. The G.A.B.A., determined to pursue the reinvigorated catch-them-young policy, where boxing is introduced early to the youth especially in schools, encouraged heads of some second cycle schools to start boxing clubs in their schools. As revealed in a correspondence from the headmaster of Bishop Herman Secondary School to the G.A.B.A., it appeared that the desire to establish the clubs and strengthen those in existence was there. However, many of the schools, with Bishop Herman as an example,

¹⁵³ These are indicated on the G.A.B.A. Boxing National Individual Championships poster of 1958, and in the Programme Brochure, *National Individual Championships*, Accra: Guinea Press Limited, 1958. See P.R.A.A.D. Accra RG.9/1/23.

¹⁵⁴ P.R.A.A.D. Accra G.A.B.A. File, RG.9/1/30. Letter with reference number AR. 59, the G.A.B.A., dated May 05, 1958.

lacked the basic facilities and coaches.¹⁵⁵ It was in pursuance of ameliorating this problem that the G.A.B.A. decided that Jack Roy and Roy Ankrah must, from 1959, be commissioned to train students in schools and to distribute gloves to the boxing clubs in the schools.¹⁵⁶

The G.A.B.A's campaign to encourage and draw people and company support to boxing inspired the institution and pursuance of other corporate world sponsored tournaments. For example, a major one was the tournament for the U.T.C. Trophy, which, staged to get the Champion Boxing Club of Ghana¹⁵⁷ and, reasonably, further encourage the growth of clubs and popular interest participation in boxing, was organised for clubs. These included those in the army, police and school-based ones, constituting operational ones like Adisadel College Boxing Club in Cape Coast, Ghanass Boxing Club in Koforidua, St. Francis Training College Boxing Club in Hohoe, and Bishop Herman Secondary School Boxing Club in Kpandu.

Through a series of justify-your-claim (inclusion) bouts and the Inter-Regional tournaments for regional boxers, a national team, dominated by boxers from Accra, particularly Ga, who excelled in the contests, was raised for the Cardiff Games.

By this period, almost all regions in Ghana had a boxing association. They supported themselves and periodically depended on government assistance, some support from firms and companies, and membership dues to

¹⁵⁵ P.R.A.A.D. Accra G.A.B.A. File, RG.9/1/31. Letter from the G.A.B.A. to Bishop Herman Secondary School with reference number MT. 0908/93 (9.08/59).

¹⁵⁶ P.R.A.A.D. Accra G.A.B.A. File, RG.9/1/31. Letter from the G.A.B.A. to Bishop Herman Secondary School, with reference number G.A.B.A./TVT./7.35 and dated 12-08-59.

¹⁵⁷ P.R.A.A.D. Accra G.A.B.A. File, RG.9/1/31. Letter from the G.A.B.A. to Regional and School clubs dated July 22, 1959, with reference number G.A.B.A./LCT.16/SF.1/2.

organise tournaments and buy the little equipment that they could afford. Within this atmosphere of capacity building by the associations, it was reported that comparatively the Accra and Sekondi-Takoradi (Western Region) associations, in terms of organisation and logistics, were more progressive than the other regions.¹⁵⁸ The advantageous position of Accra as the headquarters, thereby having first hand contact with uncommon funds and national facilities and as starting point of boxing in the country, reasonably, considering exposure and experience, explained its comparatively better position. The latter must have also had uncommon resources because of its position as a harbour city and possibly had easier access to equipment and gear, which, with the presence of the harbour, easily came from abroad to the area. In addition as a port city, it naturally attracted international visitors, who might have been enthusiasts of the sport. That situation must have contributed in the strengthening of the sport, through effective organisation of the clubs, in order to meet such popular demand and make money for the association. Such advantages and necessity must have been keys to its progress.

Incidentally, Eddie Blay, one of the boxing greats, who at the Tokyo Olympic Games of 1964 won a Bronze medal for the Black Bombers,¹⁵⁹ originally came from that locality, although it was in Accra that he mainly pursued his craft. “He came from Ekwe, a village near Sekondi.”¹⁶⁰

¹⁵⁸ P.R.A.A.D. Accra G.A.B.A. File, RG.9/1/30. Letter with reference number AR. 59, the G.A.B.A., dated May 05, 1958.

¹⁵⁹ K.T. Vieta, *op.cit.*, p. 575.

¹⁶⁰ Eddie Blay, Jnr., 33 years old, son of Eddie Blay, personal interview, Loreto Hotel, Ankaful, Cape Coast, January 29, 2011.

The Accra association, which, by 1959 had Captain Amoah as Chairperson, was dominated in terms of numbers by clubs from Bukom. It also had the Y.M.C.A. Boxing Group, Accra Community Centre Boxing Club, Builders Brigade Boxing Club at Kanda, Christiansborg Amateur Boxing Club, Star Amateur Boxing Club and the Police and Army boxing groups, which were *ex-officio* members. However, this pacesetter of a boxing association, which had been running training courses for referees, judges and coaches, for itself and other regions and, held club tourneys, regardless of its comparative advantage over the other regions, still lacked equipment. In a letter to the G.A.B.A., the secretary, T.N. Quaye, lamented that the region that had provided ninety-nine percent of the national team lacked equipment and that shadow boxing had become the order of the day for its boxers. The lamentation therefore suggested that the Accra association, considering its financial difficulties, its debt of over G. £100 (100 Ghanaian pounds)¹⁶¹ to firms, and a meagre saving of G. £56 in bank, needed to be supported.¹⁶²

By the end of 1958, the nation had an impressive list of clubs. Asante Region could boast of clubs like the Obuasi Boxing Club, Kwadaso Builders Brigade Amateur Boxing Club, Kumasi Y.M.C.A. Amateur Boxing Club, Ayidja Boxing Club, Ghana Police Force Boxing Club and Ghana Regiment Boxing Club.¹⁶³ The Western Region Association had J.E. Hagan, the Regional Commissioner as its Patron, with J.W. Todd Esq., and J.A. Osei as

¹⁶¹ Ghana after independence used the Ghanaian pound until July 19, 1965 when the government, for nationalist and decimalization purposes, introduced the Cedi.

¹⁶² P.R.A.A.D. Accra, G.A.B.A. File, RG9/1/31. Letter from Greater Accra Regional Amateur Boxing Association to the G.A.B.A., dated July 07, 1959.

¹⁶³ P.R.A.A.D. Accra, G.A.B.A. File, Letter from Ashanti Regional Amateur Boxing Association to the G.A.B.A., dated June 26, 1959.

its president and chairperson, respectively. In a correspondence from its Secretary, H.B. Dadzie, to the G.A.B.A., it was indicated that it had clubs like The Takoradi Amateur Club, Sekondi UP-Hill School of Boxing, Tarkwa and Aboso Amateur Boxing Club, U.A.C./Hayford Boxing Club, Nanta Boxing Club, Tarkwa Miners Club and Ghana Army Boxing Club, which was an *ex-officio* member of the region's association.¹⁶⁴ The Northern Region, whose association had Alhaji Y. Tali Tolon-Na, M.P., as its president and Salifu Yakubu as its chairman, comprised Amateur School of Boxing with some 20 members, Tamale Boxing Club, Army Boxing Club with about 25 members and Bawku Boxing Club with some 30 active members. Other areas like Pusiga, Bolga and Yendi expressed interest in having boxing clubs established there and recognised by the G.A.B.A.¹⁶⁵ The Eastern Regional association constituted clubs like Ring Boxing Club, Topen Boxing Club, Saahene Boxing Club, Community Centre Boxing Club and Ghanass Boxing Club. The year of 1959, however, witnessed complaints from most of the associations that support that used to trickle down to them from the government was not forthcoming. It had therefore made it difficult for them to organise the sports, purchase equipment and training facilities. The G.A.B.A., being their representative and being responsible for the welfare of boxers, bore the brunt of the criticism for failing to extract more fluid support flow from the government. It appears that the problem had resulted because, in promoting other sports, whose ambassadors it sent to Cardiff, money had to be used to

¹⁶⁴ P.R.A.A.D. Accra, G.A.B.A. File, Letter from H.B. Dadzie to the G.A.B.A., dated July 09, 1959.

¹⁶⁵ P.R.A.A.D. G.A.B.A. File, Letter from the Northern Region Amateur Boxing Association to the G.A.B.A., dated June 25, 1959.

support them in their training and travelling. Such expenses, and the fulfilment of other government responsibilities, must have hindered the flow of support to the associations.

Similarly, the year 1960, which was hosting an Olympic Games, also required the government to make provision to finance the sport ambassadors of Ghana to represent her in Rome, the venue for the Games. The paucity of grants to the regional associations, reasonably, was also a result of the requirement, of government channelling funds into the preparation of the national teams, which included the Black Bombers for that international assignment. The demands and complaints of the local associations, registering the fear that boxing was losing its energy, became a concern to the G.A.B.A. which, as a way of pacifying them and going to their aid, suggested that the regional situation should be visited and remedies given to ensure that the sport did not die. This required organisational revamping of the sport and encouragement to the associations. Jack Roy advised the G.A.B.A. to send core members, himself and Roy Ankrah to the Regions to experience the associations and their problems, and inspire and encourage them to pursue the sport, so that the boxing, which was bringing fame to Ghana, would live. The advice produced a regional tour, which ended with the production of recommendations, made by the Organising Secretary of the G.A.B.A., National Coach, and Assistant Coach, for the improvement of boxing in the country.

As indicated, Ghana raised a team, from a series of Inter-Regional Championships and Accra-held National Individual Championships in 1958,

to represent her in Cardiff. Most of the boxers who made showmanship of themselves were from Accra. They included feather weights like James Tetteh, Sammy Abbey, John Allen, and Floyd Quartey from Y.M.C.A. Club; light middle weights like Boye Laryea from the Police Club, Tetteh Thompson and J. Quayson from the Y.M.C.A. Club, and Henry Alhassan Braimah from Community Centre Boxing Club. There was also the middleweight fighter Atinga Frafra, and the light-heavyweight boxer Okoe Anum, both from the Police. Ike Quartey, a lightweight boxer, also from the Y.M.C.A. Club, made his presence felt. The probables for Cardiff who were selected at the end of the competitions included Private Tijani Dosumu from the Ghana Army, Okoe Anum, Samuel Osei, Alhassan Braimah, who had been adjudged “the Best Boxer of the Year” by the G.A.B.A., Joseph Lartey, Ike Quartey, Tetteh Thompson, Floyd Quartey, Charles Allotey, John Allen and Samuel Abbey. The final entry for Cardiff, after the probables had gone through series of tests, comprised the bantamweight fighter John Allen, Floyd Quartey who was a featherweight boxer, Ike Quartey, who was in the lightweight division, the welterweight boxer Joseph Lartey, Braimah Alhassan who belonged to the lightweight category, and the middleweight fighter Samuel Osei. This *corpus* of boxers, which constituted personnel from the police and army, and students, with connections to the Jamestown and Ussher Town areas, left for Cardiff from Takoradi on May 21, 1958, after permission was obtained for them to proceed on leave of absence to pursue a national assignment. As proud boxing ambassadors, the first for that matter, for Ghana, all of them seeing their dreams of travelling abroad and achieving fame through boxing fulfilled, they,

full of optimism, left with Roy Ankrah and Jack Roy, who had had a coaching stint with the British Team, which won two Gold medals at the 1956 Summer Olympic Games at Melbourne.

This team of debutants at the international level, were unable to produce encouraging results, and it was reported that, generally, the Ghanaian sportspersons, in Cardiff, “although equalled or excelled their individual best performance in nearly every event contested, they possessed enormous natural ability, which by European standard, it hardly exploited to produce the best results.”¹⁶⁶

The team returned to Ghana when the Games closed. It was after this unsuccessful appearance that the G.A.B.A., facing criticism over paucity of support to associations, and realising the need for quick organisational revamping and preparation of boxers for the assignment in Rome, allowed the Jack Roy-inspired regional tour to take off to elicit constructive recommendations and support from the C.O.S to strengthen its organisation and enhance its competitiveness.

In pursuance of the need to constitute quickly a national team, the G.A.B.A. authorised that regional championships should be held and national individual championship should be staged in April 1960, to expedite selection and formation of a team. To find support for such contests, the G.A.B.A. made an appeal to the public for donations and trophies. From 1959 to the time the national team left for Rome in 1960, it appealed to and solicited funds from various local and international sources to amass logistics to support its

¹⁶⁶ P.R.A.A.D. Accra RG.9/1/24 – Ghana Olympic Association (G.A.B.A./GOA.2/SF.2), Report by R.A. Jewkes, (AAA. Honorary Senior Coach).

competitions, associations and national team. These included Accra Brewery, which it asked to support an Annual Brewery Cup to host regional boxers in their regions and finally in Accra in 1960. The G.A.B.A. also appealed for support from Aspro-Nicholas Limited, an English pharmaceutical company, which was interested in sports. The G.A.B.A. entreated this company, which had even provided the trophy for the Ohene Djan-instituted 1957 “Aspro Cup” national football knock-out programme, to provide the trophies for the different contests it intended to organise to prepare the boxers for the 1960 Olympics. It further asked Parkinson and Howard Limited in Tema for financial donation to support its cause of growing boxing and the national team.

It was in July 1959, that the national tour, mandated by the G.A.B.A. and the C.O.S., took off. The entourage leaving Accra visited the regions and most importantly their capitals and completed the tour in Kumasi, from where they left to Accra on August 1, 1959. The national coaches, employing some boxers from Accra and regional associations, used the opportunity to organise instructive demonstration bouts for local boxers and instructed them on potent techniques for fighting. They also gave technical advice to various coaches, listened to the grievances of gyms and local clubs concerning scarcity of facility and organisational weakness in the associations. The delegation, in spite of the apparent problems, encouraged regional associations to encourage the formation of boxing clubs in schools. The delegation visited schools and gave lectures about boxing to students. In some cases, like their visit to St. Thomas and Methodist School in Obuasi, their appeal for collegiate boxing

received the full support of the staff. In others like Opoku Ware Secondary School, in Kumasi, the school's boxing club received them cordially. However, for unknown reasons, may be due to a personal distaste for boxing or a dwindling in interest for the sport, the Principal, Reverend Father P.R. Burgess, disrupted that cordial reception as he, arriving late, ordered the delegation to leave the school's premises, addressing the national coach thus "You are out of bounds on this compound, sir, will you go."¹⁶⁷ The team, in an exposé on the Ghanaian boxing scene, which it presented to the G.A.B.A., observed that there was a great deal of interest in amateur boxing among the youth in all the regions and that there were enthusiastic people who were willing to spare their time in boosting the sport in the country. It, however, suggested that this could be achieved through well-organised District and Regional associations. The report indicated that there was lack of trained coaches, which being a problem, made it impossible for boxers to achieve their aim (excel) in the sport. The prevalence of the problem of scarcity of equipment became apparent. The report revealed that most of the active clubs had no adequate equipment and coaches, trainers and managers complained that meeting the needs of boxers had become difficult if not impossible. This, they contended, prevented them from attaining a high standard in the techniques of amateur boxing. As reported, it was apparent that except the daily practices among boxing members of individual boxing clubs, regular tournaments, which could assist boxers to gain more experiences, were not organised in most regions. This was due to lack of support and sponsorship.

¹⁶⁷ P.R.A.A.D. Accra RG.9/1/24. See sheet 10 of report of the Regional Tour of the G.A.B.A. in 1959.

The coverage showed that generally the associations were weak because most clubs were not or were loosely affiliated to them. Furthermore, many of those that were affiliated did not pay their dues on regular basis because of the fact that the command and operational structure of the associations were not properly organised and so did not function properly.¹⁶⁸ The team recommended that, with support from government through the C.O.S. and the G.A.B.A., existing plans for the organisation of courses to train coaches, referees and judges should be implemented immediately for the benefit of the clubs and associations as a whole. That the National Council must consider the provision of equipment to the regions to help to promote regular tournaments among clubs. This was to be decided on its merits, that is to regions whose affiliated clubs are “Paid-up”. This, it was hoped, would ensure efficacy in the regions’ administration. In addition, the associations had to be re-organised to be more representative instead of being an institution of people collected from one or two clubs in town. Jack Roy and the team suggested decentralisation of regional amateur boxing where the associations were directly in charge of the organisation and supervision of clubs in every “nook and cranny” within districts in the region. They therefore recommended the necessity of forming District Amateur Boxing Associations (D.A.B.A.) for effective administration on the level of Regional Amateur Boxing Associations (R.A.B.A.). Periodically, they were to have regional conferences to share ideas and to confluence their efforts toward the improvement and strengthening of organised boxing in Ghana.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

For the Eastern R.A.B.A. the Koforidua D.A.B.A. was to cater for Koforidua, Akropong, Suhum, New Tafo, Larteh, Somanya, Agomanya etc.; and Nsawam for clubs at Nsawam, Asamankese, Oda, Kade, Akim Swedru, Akim Oda, etc. For the Volta R.A.B.A. Ho was to cater for Ho, Tsito, Aflao etc., and Kpandu for Kpandu, Peki, Hohoe, etc. For the Western R.A.B.A., Sekondi-Takoradi was to organize clubs in Sekondi, Takoradi, etc.; Cape Coast was to be responsible for clubs in Cape Coast, Ankaful, Elmina, Agona Swedru, Anomabu etc.; and Tarkwa was to cater for clubs in Tarkwa, Aboso, Awaso, etc. For the Ashanti (Asante) R.A.B.A., the Kumasi D.A.B.A. was to supervise clubs in Kumasi, Obuasi, Mampong, Konongo, etc., and the Brong Ahafo A.B.A. was made in-charge of clubs in Sunyani, Bechem, Berekum, Dormaa Ahenkro, Teppa, Ahafo-Mem, Wenchi, etc. For the Northern R.A.B.A., Tamale was to cater for Tamale, Yendi, Damango, Pong-Tamale, etc.; and Bawku was to be responsible for clubs in Bawku, Bolgatanga, Navorongo, Pusiga, etc. The Accra R.A.B.A. constituted the Accra Proper D.A.B.A., which catered for Ga-Mashie, Osu, Labadi, Adabraka, etc., and the Tema D.A.B.A.

The team suggested that for uniformity, all clubs were to be designated as Amateur Boxing Clubs, for example, Suhum Amateur Boxing Club and not designations like Tamale School of Boxing, which gave the impression that the latter was professional-inclined.¹⁶⁹ Hence, from the latter part of 1959, many boxing groups bearing definite and descriptive names qualified them with the suggested designation.

¹⁶⁹ P.R.A.A.D. Accra RG.9/1/24. See sheets 11 and 12 of report of the Regional Tour of the G.A.B.A. in 1959.

To meet the challenges of the time, working efficiently in organising and promoting boxing, it was suggested for the G.A.B.A. to re-organise to do away with some of its inefficiencies when it comes to the governing of the sport and its promotion. In line with the objective of becoming an able entity, certain principles were recommended to guide the re-organisation. By 1960, when a renewed national team went to the Olympics in Rome, the G.A.B.A. was largely re-organising along such principles suggested in 1959. These included the principle of decentralisation and the working out of a rule-book containing the stated aims and objects of the G.A.B.A., constitution of the governing bodies and terms of reference.

In addition, a National body (a re-worked G.A.B.A.) responsible to the Sports Council was to be (re)established. The two, according to the suggestion, were to be responsible for the organisation of all National and International tournaments, etc., and deal with problems at the national level. Furthermore, the country was to be partitioned into boxing regions with their Councils. The regions were made responsible for the governing of the sport and giving assistance to the National Council, and the sub-Council and committees in the various districts and towns. These bodies were responsible for ensuring that amateur clubs became affiliated to the regional body and the National Council.

The re-organisation was also to ensure the establishment of Club Management Committees with the mandate, subject to authorisation of Regional Committees, to organise inter-club matches. With regards to Area and Town committees, which had been quickly established, the

recommendation asked that they should be mandated to foster the true spirit of amateur boxing and stimulate active interest in it within their locality, through the organisation of frequent boxing contests and assisting clubs to run their own tournaments. They, also, were to be made responsible to their Regional Councils for good conduct, organisation, administration and control of all amateur boxing activities in their zone. Further, in line with the recommendation, they were to ensure that clubs were affiliated to the National body through their Regional Councils, and to look after the welfare and interest of all concerning the sport in their zone.

Under the re-organisation project, the Regional Councils, which were to be established, were to have the right to elect their members to represent them at the National Council. They were to be mandated to foster the true spirit of amateur boxing, look after the interest and welfare of all concerned with the sport in their regions, and be responsible to the National Council and the G.A.B.A. for the good conduct, administration, organisation and control of all amateur boxing activities in their sectors.

They were to ensure that all members who competed in any tournament organised under their jurisdiction were members of an affiliated club.¹⁷⁰ Consequently, from 1959, most of the regional championships, particularly, organised to prepare boxers for Rome, and for future engagements, were organised by the councils with the mandate of the G.A.B.A.

¹⁷⁰ For the directives, which were given to undergird the re-organisation, project see P.R.A.A.D. Accra RG.9/1/24. See sheet 38, captioned Ghana Amateur Boxing Association – Re-Organisation, which is an addendum to the reports of the Regional Tour of the G.A.B.A. in 1959.

Apparently renewed and reinvigorated by these arrangements, the G.A.B.A. and the coaches, determined to get boxing laurels for Ghana, committed themselves to preparing a team for Rome. The preparation for the Olympics drew some support from the C.O.S. but it appears that it was inadequate to the aid that was needed for the revamping exercise. This is because necessary preliminary activities like the Individual Championship, which needed trophies and other logistics, still faced some problems. By 1960, the G.A.B.A., for lack of adequate funds, was still depending on private benefactors for basics like trophies, and even that did not always yield positive results. For example Aspro-Nicholas, of England, which, prior to 1959/1960, had been providing logistics like trophies for some contests including boxing, when contacted for support for the 1959/1960 boxing contest, revealed to the G.A.B.A. that it could no longer support the boxing enterprise.¹⁷¹ Responding to an appeal for support, Parkinson and Howard, through its office in Tema, in March 1960, donated £5.00 to the G.A.B.A. to help it organise the preparatory bouts.¹⁷² Fees and some support from regional associations and the Accra Brewery all helped the G.A.B.A. to stage, in April 1960, the Individual Championship. Since the country was lacking a boxing stadium, it was held at the Accra Community Centre Boxing Arena, and it drew many spectators,

¹⁷¹ P.R.A.A.D. Accra RG.9/1/23. Letter from G.S. Wilcox, Area Manager, to Charles K. Mensah Torkonoo, dated February 24, 1960.

¹⁷² P.R.A.A.D. Accra RG.9/1/23. Letter from A.J. Granville, Director of the company, to the G.A.B.A., dated March 21, 1960, with reference number F.S./816/AJG/D.

possibly including government dignitaries like Krobo Edusei, whom the G.A.B.A. had invited.¹⁷³

Displaying different boxers, the competition was a success. The national team, which emerged featured some of the boxers who went to Cardiff, and had experienced the international condition, and new boxers. It included the flyweight Cassius Aryee, featherweight Eddie Blay, middleweight Braimah Alhassan, lightweight Adjarnoh, bantamweight Williams, light-welterweight Ike Quartey, welterweight Nyarko Tetteh, light-middleweight Joseph Lartey and light-heavyweight Jojo Myles. In preparing them, the G.A.B.A. convinced government to give the team a preliminary international competitive boxing exposure through friendly contests and educational tour in some countries abroad. In that direction, they were scheduled for friendly encounters in Egypt, where Fathia, the wife of Kwame Nkrumah came from, and Switzerland. Through an arrangement with the Egyptian and Swiss governments, the tour materialised and the two governments paid a significant portion of the cost of preparation and travel allowances. The rest of the budget to cover other expenses, which stood at £G853, was to be borne by the Ghana government.¹⁷⁴ This pre-Rome Olympic Boxing Tourney, which started from July 12, 1960, manifested contests in Cairo, Zurich and Basel, and tremendously gave the team, which performed admirably, the needed experience and prepared it for the task ahead.

¹⁷³ P.R.A.A.D. Accra RG.9/1/23. Letter, dated March 24, 1960, with reference number G.A.B.A./12/208. From Captain G.E. Amuah, chairman of the Accra Boxing Association, to Honourable Krobo Edusei, of the Ministry of Transport and Communication.

¹⁷⁴ P.R.A.A.D Accra, RG.9/1/23. Letter, from the G.A.B.A. to Amateur Sports Council. Dated January 25, 1960, with reference number G.A.B.A./2/SF.2/23.

In August, Mr. G.W. Amarteifio, a member of the G.A.B.A. and a local boxing referee, through nomination from the G.A.B.A. and on the invitation of the A.I.B.A., which came in April 1960,¹⁷⁵ took an international course and examination to enable him gain international credence to operate in West Africa and internationally. On the approval of the G.A.B.A. the nominee went for the training in August and it was expected of him to go to Rome on September 14, 1960, after the training, and help with officiating at the Games. Reasonably, such a development and arrangement were products of the A.I.B.A.'s recognition of the burgeoning Ghanaian industry and exploits of its amateurs. Moreover, it was the contribution of the A.I.B.A. to assist the tireless efforts of the G.A.B.A. to enhance and strengthen the culture in Ghana.

The Black Bombers, after their productive training tour, went to Rome to compete.* The people and government of Ghana were hopeful of an impressive performance. This team, under the management of Roy Ankrah, who before the team went to Rome, was appointed by the Ghanaian parliament as the first Ghanaian boxing coach,¹⁷⁶ thus replacing Jack Roy, performed to the expectation of the people and government, which felt a Ghanaian coach, at this period in the development of boxing, was capable of managing the national team. This position, he occupied up to 1980, when he retired from active coaching and became an attaché to the Greater Accra Regional Sports Council as a senior boxing coach. Relieved of his position as

¹⁷⁵ P.R.A.A.D. Accra RG.9/1/24 - Ghana Olympic Association (G.A.B.A./GOA2/SF.2), Letter from Charles K. Mensah Torkonoo to Director of Social Welfare, dated April 21, 1960, with reference number G.A.B.A./2/SF.2/45.

¹⁷⁶ K.T. Vieta, *op.cit.*, p. 574.

head coach, Jack Roy however stayed with the team and supported it with some technical assistance.

From the impressive performance, Ike Quartey won a Silver medal in the welterweight division, a medal, which for a long time remained the highest medal won by Ghana at an Olympics competition. On its return to Ghana, the government, the G.A.B.A., and people received the team cordially. Encouragingly Ghanaian boxing, at this stage in 1960, reviewing and considering its humble beginnings from the ghettos of Ga-Mashie through the towns and cities in the country, had finally made its mark on the international Olympic level. However, at the domestic level, it continued to struggle to survive due to inadequate support from the government. It appears that football drew maximum attention and support from the government to the peril of boxing. By the way, this situation in fact, even prevails today, approximately, a decade into the twenty-first century.

Although football is the most popular sport in the country, it is observable, comparing the number of international laurels of victory that the two sports had brought, that boxing brought more esteem than football. Unlike football, which from 1957 was adopted by Nkrumah, and of which he tasked the football zealot Ohene Djan to implement bold schemes to make a showpiece in Africa, boxing, continued to develop on its own effort, through determined boxers who, largely depending on inadequately equipped gyms, particularly in Accra, made fame for themselves and Ghana.

After 1960, the survival of amateur boxing continued, and continues, to depend largely on the initiatives of the under-funded G.A.B.A. Moreover

that continuation has been sustained through some support from the corporate world and the very determination of local amateurs, who, unrelenting through the years, continue to produce international champions.¹⁷⁷ It is apparent that on independence in 1957, the country was beaming with boxing potentials, which, if well supported, promised a bright future in that area of sports. Moreover Roy Ankrah's legend and the talent of other boxers were good justifications for the government of the country to select boxing for development¹⁷⁸ it is, however, clear that it was football, which received much funding and logistical attention from the C.O.S. This study opines that it was Nkrumah's personal interest in football, which had also been selected for sport development in Ghana,¹⁷⁹ which engineered that bias against boxing. The *Pan African Sports* reported that Nkrumah, mandating Ohene Djan to promote the growth and organisation of Ghana soccer to become a powerful force on the continent, wrote that: "Your task will be arduous but you must fight hard. And in your fight remember organisation decides everything. You have my personal support and that of my government."¹⁸⁰ Even after the re-organisation exercise of the G.A.B.A. in 1959, which inspired preparation for Rome in 1960, Nkrumah's proclivity for football prevailed as evidenced in his writing to Ohene Djan on June 12, 1960. In it he categorically revealed his inclination thus, "My interest in soccer is so great that I propose in the near future the formation of a model club which will offer leadership and inspiration of clubs

¹⁷⁷ Ohene Karikari, 45 years old, Deputy Sports Development Officer of the Sports Council, Accra and Secretary to the G.A.B.A. personal interview in his office at the Sports Council, Ohene Djan Sports Stadium, Accra on February 6, 2009.

¹⁷⁸ K.T. Vieta, *op.cit.*, 561.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁰ As reported in *Ibid.*, p. 566.

in the country.”¹⁸¹ Such executive interest naturally would inspire greater attention to be given to the sport and it possibly explains why the sport, in Ghana, became the so-called “Passion of the Nation.” No wonder the government’s promise to enhance amateur boxing, the foundation to professionalism, largely turned out to be a classic case of lip service. Noticeably minuscule overtures of support were made by the government to the G.A.B.A during the First Republic.¹⁸²

Such a situation, apparently, has continued through the eras of subsequent governments to the present period where government attention has focused more on football than boxing. As reported in 2008 by a document from the G.A.B.A., amateur boxing in Ghana, regardless of its potentials, and the good image and reputation of its champions in the past, “has descended to its lowest ebbs and it is important that it is put back unto the pinnacle where it once belong [sic].”¹⁸³

Still seen as a sport for social mobility, it, from the 1960, however, continued, regardless of lack of support from governments, to attract youngsters from deprived areas, particularly in Accra, where the participation was high. The citadel of boxing in Accra, Bukom, continued to maintain that sport, which formed and represented an integral part of its Ga-Mashie rooted cultural and political history. With the G.A.B.A. unable to provide adequate funding for the overhauling of amateur boxing and providing facilities for clubs, many clubs were left to their own survival devices. As it turned out over

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 568.

¹⁸² Ohene Karikari, personal interview, *op.cit.*

¹⁸³ “Ghana Amateur Boxing Association,” (typescript), *op.cit.*, p. 1.

the years significant government intervention only came when international engagements like Olympics and Commonwealth Games were about to be staged. The trend where, mostly, relief from successive governments comes in anticipation of impending international competitive assignments, has prevailed and manifested into the present period of the first decade of the twenty-first century. In addition, over the years, most initiatives and necessities like refresher courses for coaches and inter-club competitions have had to come from the G.A.B.A., and supported largely through its own devices.¹⁸⁴

In spite of a seeming facility-anaemic domestic scene, the country, through determined boxers, exhibited some highly talented amateur and professional boxing after the Olympics in Rome. From 1960 to the present, it has produced international-level professional champions and laureates at amateur competitions. The Black Bombers, coached by Roy Ankrah, in 1962, won four Silver and three Bronze medals at the All-Africa Games at Cairo, Egypt. At the Perth Commonwealth Games of 1962, it showed class by winning two Gold and four Silver medals and made Ghana proud when Ghana was recognised and given the honour as “the best boxing nation in the Commonwealth.”¹⁸⁵ Incidentally, the growing popularity of boxing in Ghana and the country’s burgeoning fame on the international scene as a determined independent nation state in Africa, which, apart from its Pan Africanist orientations, had boxing potentials, attracted Muhammad Ali who in May 1964 paid the country and its government a visit.¹⁸⁶ Ali was given a mighty

¹⁸⁴ Ohene Karikari, personal interview, *op. cit.*

¹⁸⁵ K.T. Vieta, *op. cit.*, p. 575.

¹⁸⁶ Gerald Early, “Muhammad Ali as Third World Hero,” *Ideas*, Vol. 9, No. 1, 2002, p. 12.

welcome by the masses, received by Kwame Nkrumah, and given tremendous coverage by the media.¹⁸⁷ Indubitably, his person and charisma, international fame, exhibition fights, which he put up in Accra and Kumasi, and public appearances, which attracted a lot of popular attention, did sharpen popular interest in boxing and honed the aspirations of local boxers, especially among the up and coming amateurs and established professionals in Accra.

Later in October of 1964, Ghana at the Tokyo Olympics only got a Bronze medal through Eddie Blay. However, in Kingston, during the 1966 Commonwealth Games, Ghana, impressively won three Gold and two Silver medals.

Evidently, it was the tenacity of amateur boxers in the country, and not the availability of standard equipment, strong government support and proper organisation, that primarily produced these skilful medal-winning boxers. Like other impoverished boxers, these laureates were mainly determined to use skills and brawn to get fame and international recognition and eventually as a profession, employ this “culture of bruising” to make money for personal and social improvement. The amateur boxing scene continued to attract more boxers, particularly in Accra.

Although regional associations have weakly continued to exist, they, for lack of funds and equipment, have over the years not been vibrant in the organisation of regional competitions and attraction of more clubs. School based boxing also waned, and presently, it literally does not exist. This is even evident in tertiary institutions, like the University of Cape Coast, where

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

although there are bachelor and postgraduate degree programmes in Health and Physical Education and Recreation, boxing is considered in theory. The lack of equipment has not allowed its practical side to be taught to the students.

Accra's assumed pre-eminence as the hotbed of boxing from the 1960s was enhanced by the presence in Accra of most of the big companies and corporate firms, many of which the regional association and clubs could rely on for sponsorship for championships and the development. That advantage besides the historical rootedness of Accra in boxing, explains why over the years many non-Ga boxers from other regions have been moving to Accra, which, in spite of the so-called decentralisation and re-organisation exercise of 1959, has remained as the citadel of the sport.

Regardless of the existence of various clubs in Accra, earlier exploits of the Black Bombers, and the prevailing notion that the sport gives opportunities, the country's fortune on the international competitive scene, after 1966, started to wane as the Black Bombers have not been able to sustain their early appetite for laurels. In 1972, the Olympic squad, which featured Roy Ankrah as coach, Alhassan Braimah as assistant coach, boxers like light middleweight Ricky Bannor, welterweight Flash Emma, and middleweight Prince Amartay, won a Bronze medal from the division of the latter. Since then the Black Bombers have not made great marks at the international level except on the continent.

The image of Ghanaian boxing, from the 1970s onwards, has, however, been kept in shape mainly at the professional level due to the

individualised nature of boxing at that level and the huge prize money involved which a boxer and private promoter could easily make if good title fights were arranged and victory achieved. Most glories that came to Ghanaian boxing, from the mid 1970s to the first decade of the twenty-first century, have come from professional exploits and not amateur feats.

Although in 1976, Colonel I.K. Acheampong, Head of State of Ghana and Chairman of the Supreme Military Council (S.M.C.), issued Sport Decree SMCD 54, to among other tasks restructure and re-organise amateur and professional boxing, it appears that the decree, which is still prevailing, has not succeeded in revamping amateur boxing in the country. Rather as underscored, it is professional boxing, considering its very nature as a commercial and individualistic venture, pursued by many Ghanaian professionals locally and abroad, which has yielded laurels for the boxers and Ghana. The person who first claimed a professional world title was D.K. Poison in 1975, and his shot at the world title competition, after numerous unsuccessful attempts, was made possible by executive influence provided by I.K. Acheampong, who loved sports.¹⁸⁸

The SMCD 54, which established a National Sports Council, mandated the Council to (a) Promote and encourage the organisation and development of, and mass participation in amateur and professional sports in Ghana, and (b) co-ordinate and integrate all efforts to raise the standards of performance in

¹⁸⁸ K.T. Vieta, *op.cit.*, p. 582.

amateur and professional sports in Ghana.¹⁸⁹ The Council was also to promote District and Regional sports associations, help academic institutions and security services to organise sports, encourage and moderate research into matters relating to sports and raise funding through avenues like loans from government, gifts and funds, to perform its function of overseeing amateur and professional sports in Ghana.¹⁹⁰ On boxing, the Decree, dissolved the Sports Council of Ghana Decree, 1969 (NLCD 330) and the Ghana Boxing Board of Control Decree, 1969 (NLCD 362). Property, liabilities and employees of the two bodies were to be brought under the National Sports Council under the Ministry of Sports.¹⁹¹ District and Regional Amateur and Professional boxing associations were to be built. Under the Sport Regulation, 1976 – L.I. 1088 section of the Decree, amateur boxing was to be under the Ghana Amateur Boxing Association and a body called the Ghana Boxing Authority or “the Authority,” (the G.B.A.) with the status of a national professional association, subjected to Sports Decree of 1976 SMCD 54 was to be in-charge of professional boxing.

“The Authority” following its mandate has been in control of professional boxing and, through tasks such as making and applying rules and regulations, liaising Ghanaian boxing with the African Boxing Union and other world boxing bodies maintaining records of promoters, managers and other officials, sanctioning promotions involving Ghanaian boxers, issuing

¹⁸⁹ See document titled, *Sport Decree, 1976 – Supreme Military Council – SMCD 54*, by Colonel I.K. Acheampong, Chairman of S.M.C. Date of Gazette Notification, 20th August 1976, Tema: Ghana Publishing Corporation, Part I to Part III.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.* Part VII.

¹⁹¹ *Ibid.* Part VIII, No. 44.

ratings, has sought to enhance professionalism. The Authority is also tasked to manage selected boxers, and arrange for training facilities, namely gymnasias and equipment.

Although, decreed to be enhanced, the growth of amateur boxing since the mid 1970s has continued to be sluggish. The G.A.B.A. has attributed this stalling to a number of factors, which include “inadequate funding and poor allocation of resources, inadequate and rundown equipment and infrastructure facilities, weak collaboration with stakeholders, lack of coaches and other boxing officials, ineffective and inefficient communication system.”¹⁹² Furthermore, there has been the problem of “lack of club development and promotion tournaments at regional, district and grassroots level, inadequate and ineffective education training programme for boxers, referees and judges, lack of strategic plan to guide the development of amateur boxing, conflicts and a weak financial base.”¹⁹³ Since the mid 1970s the G.A.B.A. and the Authority has survived various governments and the G.A.B.A., which prepares the way for professionalism, has continued to face many challenges including inadequate government subventions and resourcing, winning medals in competitions and tournaments, developing the sport in regions and districts, developing effective national infrastructure and premature transition of boxers to professionalism.¹⁹⁴ The premature transition, which is primarily a product of the “customary” weakness of amateur boxing, at the same time weakens the

¹⁹² Ohene Karikari, *op. cit.* The problems raised by the interviewee were confirmed by Patrick Anyidoho, 43 years old, who is the Secretary-General to the Professional Boxing Association in Ghana in a personal interview on February 6, 2009, at the Sports Council, Ohene Djan Sports Stadium, Accra.

¹⁹³ Ohene Karikari, personal interview, *ibid.*, and Patrick Anyidoho, *ibid.*

¹⁹⁴ Ofori Asare, c. 48 years old, Assistant Coach of Ghana’s Black Bombers, personal conversation, Baseline Stationary Enterprise, Zongo Lane, Accra, February 20, 2009.

base of amateurism, as boxers considering the opportunities and financial rewards leave the “boring drudgery of amateurism” for professionalism.¹⁹⁵ That development, since the creation of the Authority, has also aided the area of professional boxing to see some progress in terms producing a number of international boxing champions for Ghana.¹⁹⁶

Conditioned by their non-regal backgrounds such champions, most of whom have been indigenes of Ga-Mashie or have had boxing relations with Ga-Mashie, have demonstrated great skills and determination in their discipline. Interestingly Bukom, unchallenged as “the Mecca of Ghanaian boxing,” has generated most of these champions. The line of venerable champions who have emanated directly from Accra, particularly Bukom, or indirectly gained the boons of Bukom by training in Bukom or receiving training from a “Bukomite” coach included Floyd Klutei Robertson. Robertson was originally a footballer. However, it was the popularity of boxing among his people and the fame involved that attracted him. He became the Commonwealth featherweight champion in 1960. In 1964, he engaged in Ghana’s first World Championship fight, which was promoted in Accra by one of the top boxing pundits in the country – Justice D.F. Annan, who served as a legal adviser to the Board of Ghana Boxing Promotion Council,¹⁹⁷ and originally hailed from Bukom¹⁹⁸ in Asere in Ga-Mashie.¹⁹⁹ However, because

¹⁹⁵ Godwin Nii Dzani Kotey, personal interview, *op. cit.*

¹⁹⁶ Rashidi Williams, personal interview, *op. cit.*

¹⁹⁷ Nana Ato Dadzie and Kwamena Ahwoi, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

of bad officiating, Robertson failed to capture the W.B.C. featherweight title in the contest with Sugar Ramos.²⁰⁰

About a decade after the defeat of Robertson, D.K. Poison, whose career started in Ghana, before going professional in 1966 which took him to Australia and the U.S.A, became the W.B.C. featherweight champion on September 21, 1975, when at the Forum, Los Angeles, in front of some 10,000 spectators, he boxed out the champion, a Mexican called Rueben Olivares. D.K. Poison, whose father was from Asere Jorshie (Djornshie) in Ga-Mashie, added his accomplishment as world champion to the boxing fame of the Ga especially the people from Ga-Mashie.²⁰¹ Strengthening the notion of the legend of Ga-Mashie domination and superiority in boxing, it inspired many youth in Ga-Mashie to emulate their heroes. The prevailing culture of boxing, seen as an integral part of the cultural history of the Ga, the opportunities it can bequeath and the need to maintain a Ga-(Mashie) primacy in the culture, inspired, and inspire, many good boxers to emerge from Ga-Mashie.

Indubitably, it was this boxing milieu of Ga-Mashie, filled with a rich pugilistic culture and national and international acclaimed records of historic and contemporary heroic accomplishments, including those of Roy Ankrah and D.K. Poison, which nurtured and inspired Azumah Nelson, to box and strive to become the second Ghanaian to capture, in December 1984, a W.B.C. championship title. Azumah Nelson has also inspired other boxers to become world champions. They include Nana Yaw Konadu, Ike "Bazooka" Quartey,

²⁰⁰ The interested reader can see K.T. Vieta, *op.cit.*, pp. 576-579, for some insight into the personality and career of Floyd Klutei Robertson.

²⁰¹ The interested reader can see *Ibid.* pp. 580-585, for some insight into the personality and career of David Kotei Poison.

who defeated Espana Crisanto of Peru on June 4, 1994 to become the W.B.A. World welterweight champion, and Alfred “Cobra” Kotey who on July 30, 1994, defeated Puerto Rican Rafael Del Valle to become the W.B.O. bantamweight champion. In that same spirit of victory, Alex “Ali” Baba became the W.B.C. International flyweight champion in 1996, and during the first decade of the twenty-first century Joseph “King Kong” Agbeko captured the W.B.F. and the I.B.F. bantamweight titles respectively.

The dominance of the Ga, especially the Ga-Mashie in Ghanaian boxing is prevalent, and whilst acknowledging the massive contributions that the numerous enthusiasts have given it, it is apparent that the history of that culture, largely, derives from the Ga-Mashie pugilistic culture and a colonial experiment and success at transplanting a Western cultural construction in the country. Still developing and yielding talents, the sport of boxing still requires more support from government to enhance effective organisation and potency. It has made Ghana a respected boxing nation on the international scene and produced “men of glory” who, being important actors in the cultural development agenda of Ghana, have contributed in diverse ways to social growth.

The life of Azumah Nelson, who dominated the W.B.C. featherweight and super-featherweight professional levels for about a decade and used his excellent boxing career to move his person from a state of social obscurity to international fame, and whose victories, excellent sportsmanship and international acclaim, contributed in morticing the name of Ghana into international awareness, testifies to the social importance of boxing in Ghana.

That life, and career, form a big puzzle in the history of Ghanaian boxing, and popular culture as a whole.

The next chapter examines the origins, and formative years – childhood days, adolescence, life as an amateur boxer, and transition into professionalism – of this boxing legend.

CHAPTER FOUR

ORIGINS? MI TABONNYOBI. MI GA-MASHINYOBI. I AM THE SON OF MY PEOPLE.

Non est ad astra mollis e terris via (“the road from the earth to the stars is not easy”).

Lucius Annaeus Seneca (Seneca the Younger), Roman Philosopher

Circa 3 B.C. – A.D. 65

Introduction

Indubitably, the name of Ghana evokes greatness in the international scene of boxing. Its sports personalities of glory have contributed in diverse ways to the socio-economic growth of their communities. Their imputs include the funding of infrastructural and local amenities, sponsoring the formal education pursuits of needy but brilliant students, and creating employment by establishing business and service providing firms. Their performances, which attract popular support, also engineer national unity and patriotism, which are necessary for social order and peaceful coexistence. Commonly, most of them, particularly the boxers, have tended to emerge from relatively financially deficient families, shantytowns, and slum quarters of urbanised geographical spaces.

Within the context of the history of pugilism in post-colonial Ghana, Azumah Nelson stands as one of the great boxers of all time. He dominated the international featherweight and super-featherweight professional divisions for more than a decade and his life and career form a major facet in the history of Ghana’s boxing and popular culture. Even though he was peripherally and distantly linked through his paternal blood lineage to a regal ancestral

household within Ga-Mashie, he in reality and practically did not grow up as an aristocrat. His days as a youth and his social background were decidedly non-regal.

As a toddler and adolescent he grew in harsh economic conditions, which stifled and hindered him in his academic pursuit. This ultimately compelled him to make a career out of his hobby – boxing, with the expectation of making his financial ends meet. After spending about nineteen years of his life in the art, sport and career of boxing, as a professional, that pursuit eventually transformed his social status and paved the way for him to realise his economic ambitions. Financially liberated, boxing made him a national hero in Ghana and an international boxing legend. His iconic persona and the saga of his life and career are inspiring. As a social person, he has made physical contributions aimed to better the social growth and advancement of socially deprived elements. His life is a picture of determination and his career the epitome of success. Today he is called by a number of aliases, but three popular ones which are used by his fans, friends, and colleagues in the world of boxing are “Champ,” “Zoom Zoom,” and “The Professor.”¹

Two major human characteristics about the man, which became apparent to the author of this work in the course of interviewing him, were humility and love for and pride of his ethnic and humble familial background. This exhibition of consciousness about his origins influenced the shaping of

¹ His noted aliases are: “Champ” “Mighty Warrior,” “Terrible Terror,” “Zoom Zoom,” “Barimah,” “Lion of Africa,” and “The Professor.”

the caption of this chapter. Henceforth, this boxing legend will be referred to, interchangeably, as “Champ” or “Azumah Nelson.”

Modestly dressed in black cotton tee-shirt and faded blue jeans trousers with a pair of black leather moccasins, and sitting in a sofa in his plush residence at New Achimota, Accra, within the vicinity popularly known as “Azumah Nelson,” Champ said to the researcher, “before I say anything about my career, I want you to know that I come from a humble background and I am proud of that background.” Moreover, he added that:

I cannot forget my roots. In fact, without my roots, I would not be where I have reached today [where I am recognised as a boxing legend of international fame]. My roots toughened me and gave me direction to grow. It is the beginning of my life and career.²

He gave a seraphic smile and, switching from English to Ga, then said that: “*Mi Tabonnyobi. Mi Ga-Mashinyobi.*” He added, explaining in English what he had said in Ga, that: “I am a child of Tabon and Ga-Mashie. I am the son of my people.”³ These pronouncements were revealing because they showed that the man knew his roots and was proud of them.

You know, when Champ emerged strongly on the international boxing scene in the 1980s, many people thought that he was from the Northern part of the country. I believe that they were misled by the sound of his name Azumah, which sounded like the Northern household name Asuma. They did not know that Champ is from Ga-Mashie, with [a tinge of Afro]-Brazilian ancestry in him.⁴

By the above assertion of Champ, he in a fashion of linguistic brevity, revealed his knowledge and pride about his Afro-Brazilian ancestry and Ga-

² Azumah “The Professor” Nelson, alias Samuel Azumah Nelson, (hereafter Azumah Nelson), 51 years old, personal interview, at his residence in New Achimota, Accra, October 5, 2009.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Alhaji Tawfiqh, 53 years old, a friend of Samuel Azumah Nelson, and a boxing promoter and business man in Accra. Personal conversation, in his shop at Zongo Lane, Accra, February 20, 2009.

Mashie roots. These ethnic identities are also not forgotten by other people who had and have them. Other people in Ga-Mashie who felt they had these roots have been proud to assert them vocally. For example Madam Christiana Lartey of “Brazil House” [or “Mahama Nassu House” formerly called “Warri House”⁵], which was one of the first structures whose genesis started with one of the ancestors of Tabon, called Mahama Nassu, proudly asserted that identity. “I am a daughter of Tabon,” she stated, at her residence in that historical edifice situated near Brazil Street and located on a section of the seafront of Otublohum, where the colonial Accra Port used to be.⁶ This matron, who formally bears the official standard and flag of the Tabon Mantse and people during indigenous durbars and functions in Ga-Mashie, further added that: “My ancestors came from Brazil. They came to Accra, [demographically] mixed, [culturally] integrated and became members of Ga-Mashie. I am [a] Tabon and a daughter of Ga-Mashie.”⁷ In fact, for a long period in time many Tabon have fostered this knowledge about a Brazilian ancestry. Although the Tabon are Ga-Mashie *manbii*, it is interesting to note that their maintenance of the pride in having an interesting ancestry which also connects to an Afro-Brazilian diasporic origin is a socio-cultural product, which has been engineered by their dedication to the upholding of their identity, culture, and history. For that matter they believe that some of their blood relations, who are descendants of the liberated enslaved Africans of

⁵ See “Old Brazil House rehabilitated,” *Ghanaweb.com*. Source: *G.N.A.*, General News, November 16, 2007, <http://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/NewsArchive/artikel.php?ID=134286> (Information was retrieved on December 20, 2010).

⁶ Christiana Lartey, c. 49 years old, the Standard Bearer of Tabon Community, personal interview, at “Brazil House” [Mahama Nassu House], Otublohum, in Accra, on September 9, 2009.

⁷ *Ibid.*

Brazil who did not repatriate to Africa,⁸ are currently in Brazil. The Tabon do not want to lose their history and forfeit that Afro-Brazilian extension of their ancestral family tree. While they remain, within the context of Ghanaian sociology, legal Ga-Mashie citizens and nationals of Ghana, they do not dismiss their Afro-Brazilian genealogy. To them, regardless of their being “Ghanaian,” the concept and enterprise of preservation of such a genealogy and knowledge are not nostalgic and romantic gestures of linking them to a remote Afro-Brazilian past and ancestry. They are, for the Tabon, necessary conceptions and steps, of conscious socio-cultural consideration, directed by an imperativeness and strong sense of history. That socio-cultural awareness is geared at maintaining among them a pro-history and cultural consciousness of and about their relationship with the historical developments of slavery and Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade, which had led to the creation of an African Diaspora and a cultural Black Atlantic⁹ in that part of the Western Hemisphere. With such a conception, many know that their ancestors through their slave labour, cultural ingenuity and human resource contributed to the socio-economic and cultural development of Brazil, in particular, and the Diaspora in the Western Hemisphere as a whole.

Although the present population speaks no Portuguese at all, by asserting a Brazilian ancestry, they have and continue to project the memory

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ See Paul Gilroy, *The Black Atlantic: Modernity and Double Consciousness*, Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1993. Although, influenced by the Gilroyian concept as a product of historical conjunction of cultures, which is also “the stereophonic, bilingual, or bifocal cultural forms originated by, but no longer the exclusive property of, blacks dispersed within the structures of feeling, producing, communicating, and remembering” (p. 3), Black Atlantic, used in the context of this study, means not only such black-originated products. It also implies the geo-cultural locations around the world, particularly in the Western Hemisphere, for example Brazil, where such forms were spawned through a process of cultural mutation and restless (dis)continuity, through the slavery-inspired conjunction of African cultural motifs and ideas with non-African forms.

of the trace of their historical past and acknowledge their contribution and place in that past, so that the Tabon community and posterity would not be severed from that credit and history.¹⁰ That memory, as such notables like Champ and Christiana Lartey exhibited, has been and is alive among other Tabon who, while overtly appearing culturally distinctly Ga and nationally uniquely Ghanaian, have psychologically maintained and preserved their historical awareness of an Afro-Brazilian past.

In 1961 Josifath Fortunato Antonio, the son of the then *mantse* of Tabon, Nii Azumah III, showed his knowledge about the living consciousness and pride of the Tabon about that cherished historical Brazilian ancestral connection of the Tabon community. Speaking to the Brazilian Ambassador Raimundo Souza Danta, who visited the Tabon, he said that:

It is indeed true that none of these present [Tabon citizens of Accra] has visited Brazil, but this does not matter; we [Tabon citizenry] continue (even though we have culturally become and geographically been designated as Ga and Ghanaians) to regard Brazil as our homeland . . .¹¹

Forty-eight years down the line, Champ also referred to that descent as he spoke about his ethnic identity. The revelation and his assertion of this interesting root and the premium he put on it as the cradle of his being and nurturing pot of his identity, adulthood, and career, inspired the captioning of this chapter as “Origins? *Mi Tabonnyobi. Mi Ga-Mashinyobi. I Am The Son Of My People*”.

This title, at once, projects the central theme of this section, which mainly examines this boxing legend’s family background and childhood years.

¹⁰ Christiana Lartey, personal interview, *op.cit.*

¹¹ See annotated poster titled “Nii Azumah III and Nii Azumah IV,” Private collection in Brazil House, Accra. (Information was obtained on September 9, 2009). N.B. Josifath Fortunato Antonio succeeded his father Azumah III as Azumah IV.

On that trajectory, this section reviews his formative years and life as he took decisions as a teenager and pursued a career in boxing, within certain prevailing compelling socio-political influences and enhancing cultural forces, inside the context of his roots in the Ga-Mashie ethnicity and socio-cultural environment.

Azumah Nelson: Birth and Childhood Days

Champ's childhood and youth were eventful. Like any other boy growing up in the urbanised space of Central Accra, he engaged in a variety of youthful pastimes and events. His formative years, from the late 1950s to the first half of the 1970s, gave no signal of a future different from many other Ga children in Ussher Town and Jamestown: fishing, petty trading, small-scale indigenous craft industries like blacksmithing, wood carving, canoe making, and boxing. These two communities, which prided themselves as citadels of Ghana boxing, existed not without woes like over-population, which affected the few available social amenities. During the 1960s the economy of the area was affected by the relocation of one major source of employment and capital for some of the indigenes, especially the youth. This was the wharf, which was relocated to Tema. The area had contained a wharf, which served the maritime trade of Gold Coast. Even when a deep-water port was constructed and opened in Takoradi *circa* 1928, the wharf in Accra still provided significant maritime commercial services to the country, and remained as one of the principal ports, which linked the territory to the international economy.

The transformation of Accra into a colonial capital inspired a flight to new suburbs by some of the wealthier inhabitants of the two centres –

“downtown Accra.” Incidentally, “downtown Accra,” in common with the old mercantile maritime nerve centres and port cities like Lagos, Douala, and Mombasa, survived as an overcrowded, vibrant hothouse of indigenous culture and political intrigue. As the verve of Ga urban culture continued and indigenous Jamestown and Ussher Town strove to preserve local spatial, social, and institutional integrity and remain the focus of Ga political action and social life in the ever-sprawling city, Ga-Mashie remained an African “town” in character. Nevertheless, the port remained a source of local income as it provided employment for some of the indigenes of Ga-Mashie to work in various capacities such as canoemen (canoeists), stevedores, and porters. That source of income and economic sustenance remained intact until 1962, when the vibrant mercantile activities at the harbour were relocated to a new harbour, which was completed in Tema, by Nkrumah’s C.P.P. government. Tema then sapped the commercial boons which the “old” harbour had given to the indigenes of Ga-Mashie. That relocation negatively affected the livelihood of many people in the two *nshonnamajii* of Ga-Mashie. Reasonably, it was, in economic sense, a major organic contributory factor to the soar in unemployment rates and economic hardships which prevailed during the childhood days of the Champ in Ga-Mashie.

His childhood days and pubescent years were spent in those two areas of Accra where many indigenous Ga families and individual non-Ga families and persons, who were products of rural urban migration, predominantly engaged in artisanal fishing, carrying, for a fee, the luggage of travellers and goods of shoppers and traders at market places, petty trading, hawking, and small-scale artisanship. These two localities were places where many of the

youth were either unemployed or engaged in small-scale vocational crafts. Such crafts included hairdressing, cooking and selling various foods by the roadside, foods like the Ga favourite *komi ke kena ke shito* (kenkey¹² and fried fish with fresh and fried chilli pepper and tomato sauce), *yo ke gari* (beans, fried ripe plantain and gari), *fufu*, *banku* and rice and stew. Others engaged in tailoring, dressmaking, and amateur boxing. The existence of a small number of salary-receiving civil servants, of the Ghanaian state, among the adult population, whose salaries catered for themselves and families, the concurrent prevalence of such small-scale economic ventures, lack of proper and adequate social infrastructure, particularly good schools to educate children and youth, made those localities places where financial poverty was rife.

Within such environs, where illiteracy and unemployment were high and financial poverty was endemic nearly everyone, including adults, the youth and children, had to develop different ways to survive and make ends-meet for themselves and family. Therefore, it was common for boys and girls from the ages of six and seven to start hawking, in their neighbourhoods, different items such as fruits, vegetables, salt and fish. These were commonly carried on wooden and aluminium trays placed on their heads. Because of such responsibilities and distractions, many children, particularly the hawkers, hardly had or could pursue smooth academic lives beyond the frontiers of the basic stage. Hence, compelled by such harsh conditions and unfavourable

¹² Kenkey, also called Dokunu or Komi, is a staple dish for the Ga, Fante, and Ewe ethnic groups in Ghana. It is made from ground corn (maize). The making of the dish involves letting the maize ferment before cooking. Hence, preparation takes a few days in order to let the dough ferment. After fermentation, the dough is partially cooked. Balls are made out of portions, which are wrapped in banana or plantain leaves or cornhusk, and steamed. There are two main types of kenkey. These are *Ga* kenkey, which is cooked in cornhusk, and *Fante* kenkey, which is cooked in banana or plantain leaves.

socio-economic arrangements, most of such persons along the way often would stop schooling. The truncation of their training often would lead them to laze about or join their fathers and mothers to pursue a life in the professions of their parents. Such professions included fishing and petty trading in their communities, roadsides, local markets, and other locations of urban Accra. Thus, for many children, particularly boys from the age of six and to sixteen, truancy and mastering of various techniques of survival on the streets defined part of their formative years within those territories. Such hardships, ensconced in deplorable and unfavourable social-economic conditions, and the lack of decent accommodation and schools in such localities did not only engineer and foment a mentality and culture of survival among the youth. They compelled majority of the deprived youngsters to pay little or no attention to schooling. For some, even if they desired to enrol or pay attention to the “ideal” of getting some training in the few existing sub-standard schools, they could not. Why? Their parents and families simply did not have the adequate financial resources to send them to those institutions. Champ was a product of such social conditions and those slum areas of the Central Accra environment. Like most other financially deprived children who commonly affiliated with truancy to pursue extra curricula activities to survive and make petty money through various means such as petty pilfering, hawking and fishing, Champ also manifested many of such behaviours in his childhood days.

The future careers for most of the youth in these environments, which were deprived in terms of good social infrastructures and the provision of quality Western formal literate education, were largely predictable. Because

the indigenous system permitted fathers and mothers to, through home instructions, bequeath to their sons and daughters respectively, fundamental knowledge and skills in their vocations and professions, most young people in those localities became natural apprentices to their parent-masters. By taking their wards to their tailor, seamstress or blacksmith shops, the market to sell, the gym to box, the seashore to buy fish, mend nets or pull fish-filled nets to the beach, parents initiated them into such vocations. Therefore, most of the children and youth in this zone, deprived of and unoccupied by formal Western schooling, directed by tradition and/or compelled by financial necessities, at an early age engaged in the trade of their parents to contribute to the provision of financial nourishment to their families and to acquire a vocation to secure their future. Such situations encouraged them to gravitate easily to the prevailing careers and economic pursuits of their parents. Thus, within such a social-cultural matrix, it was not difficult to identify or predict what kind of job a child would end up doing in the future. Boxing, however, was and had been the main or a major attraction for many adolescent and youthful males because of the historical connections it had with the people and the social position it held as a functional sport, – a sport which brought fame and financial reward to those who excelled in it. As a traditional attraction, the sport and business of boxing naturally drew Champ into it at an early period in his formative years.

At an early age, from about six to seven, I entertained the [romantic] notion of becoming one great boxer in my community and beyond. This is because apart from seeing the poise of up-and-coming amateurs, who would jog to the gyms to train, which was of immense attraction to me, I used to hear my elders discussing the accomplishments of local boxers and international ones and the money they made and the fame they

had in abroad. That also captured and honed my interest for boxing. I however, fantasised with that notion.¹³

Champ, during his childhood, adolescent and pubescent days, was neither a charismatic extrovert nor a particular introvert. Using that position and quality of balance, he knew when to display both sides to his advantage among his peers. The early formal education (schooling) of Champ was not so smooth. A harsh financial constriction for his nucleus family, which was headed by his polyamorous father who used his inadequate resources to meet the financial needs of other consorts in their respective abodes, was an impeding factor to the smooth progress of his basic education. His father and mother simply did not have adequate funds to sponsor all his formal literate education, and maintain and sustain a smooth academic pursuit for him in that system. Struggling against financial poverty, he was easily distracted and navigated away from his basic academic persuasions. He was induced by the unfavourable economic circumstances to think and undertake actions that were geared towards objectives which were economically emancipating. In that direction, throughout his formative days as a youngster, he inescapably found himself most of the time trying and using different enterprises to make ends meet for himself and his family, especially the nuclear one.

He was born on September 19, 1958, in the Korle Bu Teaching Hospital in Accra¹⁴ and started his toddler days in the *blohun* (vicinity or sub-

¹³ Azumah Nelson, personal conversation in his four-wheel drive car as he drove to his Central Accra Restaurant. October 5, 2009.

¹⁴ Azumah Nelson, 53 years old, personal interview at Foodies Restaurant, Osu R.E. Accra, February 10, 2011. During the interview with Champ he disclosed that he was not really sure about the exact place of his birth. Consequently, he called his mother to enquire. His mother told him that she decided to give birth to him at that leading hospital in the country and paid money for that because he was her first child and so she wanted to honour him and give him the best health care in that famous hospital.

quarter) of Adedemkpo, situated near Bukom, in Ussher Accra. He was formally named Samuel Azumah Nelson and brought up as a member of the indigenous Ga *We shia* (family household). His parents were not academics and members of the white-collar working middle-class. Within the *akutsei* divisions of Ga-Mashie, Champ's father, Emmanuel Teilo Nelson, is linked to Asere. Teilo Nelson developed as a young man in the Otublohum and Asere areas. His Tabon origin historically connects him to Otublohum. However, it was the domiciling of his father in Asere, where he made a living like other Tabon who dispersed from Otublohum to other parts of Ga-Mashie and Accra, which integrated Teilo Nelson into the socio-cultural sphere of cosmopolitan Asere. Living in Asere exposed him to boxing demonstrations and its widespread culture within Bukom. As the father of Champ, he was a professional tailor and, for his adult life, engaged in small-scale tailoring of making and sewing garments and dresses and repairing torn ones. He at an early age, in his teens, perceived how difficult it was for the common people in the indigenous Ga setting in Central Accra to be enrolled in schools to receive education in the context of Western formal literacy and numeracy. Being a victim of that order, he wanted to become a boxer, because he saw it as a way of making quick economic advancement. However, his father who was a tailor did not accept his son's decision to be a boxer. Confronted by opposition from his father, Teilo Nelson, who trained under his father, therefore chose tailoring, a profession, which was in his family. Many of his forebears had indulged in it since his ancestors came from Brazil to settle in Accra, Their first base was at Otublohum where overtime some, because of the need for *lebensraum* and intermarriages with families from other *akutsei*,

moved out and created settlements in other Ga-Mashie quarters and eventually other parts of the ever-sprawling Accra.

A Brief History of the Paternal and Maternal Ancestry of Azumah Nelson

The paternal ancestors' of Champ were repatriates from Brazil who settled in parts of Central Accra, in the first half of the nineteenth century. These "returnees," belonged to caucuses of descendants of enslaved Africans who physically returned to settle on the West African coastland after they obtained their freedom from slavery in Brazil. According to Boadi-Siaw, most of them did not necessarily repatriate to their original homes and ethnic people in most cases. What mattered to them was their return to their indigenous Africa, where they found or envisaged finding greater economic survival and, particularly before the mid 1850s, easily avoiding being re-enslaved.¹⁵

This phenomenon of repatriation of African Diasporans from Brazil animated and created Afro-Brazilian political, economic and demographical communities in different geographic and cultural spatial enclaves on the coast of West Africa. These communities, which were created largely by the repatriate elements (*retornados*), which must have included *Africanos*¹⁶ and *Emancipados*,¹⁷ primarily manifested societies along the Bight of Benin, particularly in the major slave-trading port of Ouidah (Whydah).¹⁸ Some ex-

¹⁵ S.Y. Boadi Siaw, "Afro-Brazilian Returnees in Ghana," typescript, Department of History, University of Cape Coast, n.d. p. 1.

¹⁶ They were first generation Afro-Brazilians. They were referred to as *Africanos* in Brazil.

¹⁷ It can be contextualised to mean African captives who were rescued, particularly by British authorities, from Brazilian slave ships during the period from 1831 and 1856, when the importation and exportation of slaves to Brazil, had become illegal, because of a diplomatic arrangement between English and Brazilian authorities. Within the context of this work, it is used in reference to any freeperson(s) or emancipated persons who returned to Africa from Brazil on their own volition from the 1820s.

¹⁸ See Jerry Michael Turner, "Les Brésiliens: The Impact of former Brazilian Slaves upon Dahomey," Ph.D. thesis, Boston University, 1975. See also Robin Law, "The Evolution of the Brazilian Community in Ouidah," in Kristin Mann and Edna G. Bay (eds.), *Rethinking the*

slaves who had re-emigrated from Brazil even as early as the eighteenth century included individuals like Frukú, alias Dom Jeronimo.¹⁹ Other eminent ones who came in the nineteenth century were Joaquim d'Almeida who died in 1857 and Sabino Vieyra.²⁰

The large-scale repatriation of ex-slaves from Brazil, however, began only in the aftermath of the “great” Bahia slave revolt of 1835. This opened the period when many, because of their actual or suspected links with the insurrection, were considered *personae non gratae* in Brazil by the colonial authorities and were deported. In addition, that period of forceful extradition triggered, among other African Brazilian persons, a chain of subsequent deportations which were done voluntarily. Such voluntary ones were undertaken by persons who on attaining their freedom willingly departed from Brazil and together with the former category contributed to the creation of returnee communities in not only Ouidah, but also Lagos, where they became known as *Aguda*,²¹ and in Gold Coast, where they settled within Ga-Mashie in Accra and created the Tabon community.

African Diaspora: The making of a Black Atlantic World in the Bight of Benin and Brazil, Oxon: Frank Cass, 2001, pp. 22-41.

¹⁹ According to Alberto da Costa e Silva, Frukú was the son of King Agaja (1708-32) of Dahomey. He was sold into slavery and sent to Brazil by King Tegbesu (1733-74) along with several others of Agaja's line. He lived in Brazil for about twenty-four years, until he was recalled by his childhood friend, Tegbesu's successor, Kpengla (1774-89). Upon the death of Kpengla, Frukú, made a bid to the throne, but Agonglo secured the appointment and ruled until 1797. It is not clear what happened to Frukú. See Alberto da Costa e Silva, “Portraits of African Royalty in Brazil,” in Paul Lovejoy (ed.), *Identity in the Shadow of Slavery*, 2nd edition, London and New York: Continuum International, 2000, 2009, p. 130.

²⁰ Robin Law, “The Evolution of the Brazilian Community in Ouidah,” *op.cit.*, p. 26.

²¹ The returnee elements adopted the name *Aguda*, which Brazilian traders who were already in that area were known. It came from the name of the Portuguese fort Sao Joao da Ajuda situated in Ouidah, to which those traders were mostly associated. Because of the cultural affinities between the two groups, they naturally struck some cultural, mercantile and political alliances, which ultimately led the returnees to assume the popular name *Aguda*, which their relations, who stayed in Togo, Benin and Nigeria, came to be known.

These men and women after working very hard in Brazil returned to Gold Coast and other places to rebuild their lives in freedom in their ancestral home. They were masters of handicraft techniques especially in jewellery. In Accra, they set the pace as fine tailors, architects, experienced farmers and knowledgeable in irrigation.²² According to Boadi Siaw, those who voluntarily returned did so because they were and had been influenced by the natural concept of Pan Africanism and a craving to reunite with the land of their forebears. Others also wanted to put their professional and vocational skills and abilities to profitable use in a friendlier environment where their efforts would be appreciated. Some returned to share their newly found faith, i.e. Christianity with their “relatives” in continental Africa. In addition, others left Brazil to avoid the overt hostility, racism and prejudice promoted by many white Brazilians, especially after the Bahia slave revolt, which was the biggest of a series of slave revolts that had hit and shaken Brazil’s Bahia region since 1807, against people of African descent in Brazil.²³ It was these forces and compelling conditions within a hostile environment in Brazil that had led groups of such immigrants, which included the paternal ancestors of Champ, to start arriving in Gold Coast from 1829²⁴ to create a Brazilian community, which was integrated into the Ga-Mashie social fabric. This community, which Christaller said consisted of (Afro-Brazilian) Moslem slaves, who also returned to Dutch Accra from about 1835-40, (to join the early one), became known as Tabon. He explained that the word *Tabon* originates from the Portuguese *radix está bem, bom, bõ*, which translates as “it stands well” or “is

²² See annotated poster titled, “Tabon People a sign in Freedom,” Private collection in Brazil House, Otublohum, Accra. (Information was obtained on September 9, 2009).

²³ S.Y. Boadi Siaw, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

well". This, in the estimation of Christaller, was a reply to the saluting question *Como esta*, which, meaning *how does it stand*, i.e. *how are you*, was used by the returnees. Because of its common usage among the people it became the name of that country (Brazil) and consequently was also used (generally by speakers of Ga and Twi) for those people who had come from that country.²⁵ Thus, an individual of that group was referred to, in the Twi language, as *Tabonni*, and the group was referred as *Tabonfo*. The common use of the word *esta bom*, must have influenced the Ga-Mashie citizenry, many of whom could not pronounce the phrase, to use a short form of it – *Ta bon*, as a comfortable to pronounce form for the newcomers.²⁶ Another explanation given to the origin of the nomenclature *Tabon* is that the returnees in Gold Coast being unable to speak the indigenous languages became "impatient, uneasy or irritated" when they were not understood by their hosts and so had the quick inclination to the use of the answer "Ta Bom," "Ta Bom," (It is alright! It is alright!), to every question they were asked. Consequently, they became known as *Tabom* (corrupted as *Tabon*).²⁷ Either version seems plausible.

The *Tabon* community, which has been absorbed almost completely into Ga society within the context of political organisation, social configuration, and linguistic and religious constructions, possess members

²⁵ J.G. Christaller, *Dictionary of the Asante and Fante Language called Tshi (Twi)*, 2nd edition, Basel: Basel Evangelical Society, 1933, p. 489.

²⁶ According to Christaller, it was also used extensively to designate West Indian Christian immigrants who came to Akuapem [to evangelise to the indigenes] in 1843. See J.G. Christaller, *Ibid*.

²⁷ A.M. Amos and E. Ayesu, "History of the *Tabon*," *Transactions of the Historical Society of Ghana* (hereafter *T.H.S.G.*), Legon: University of Ghana, 2002, p. 41.

who, although knitted together through a sense of historical identity and common bonds, are scattered in different parts of present day Accra.

On arrival, the ancestors of the Tabon had to quickly adapt to the Ga society, integrate into the polity, and accept most of the socio-cultural constructions and provisions like cuisine, language, and general way of life of Ga-Mashie, to ensure their survival and protection against alienation. They, through integration, became *bona fide* members of Ga-Mashie, which therefore conferred on them, within the context of colonial and postcolonial social arrangement, the national identities of Gold Coasters and Ghanaians respectively. Although few are Lusophonic today, they still remember and make nostalgic references to their Afro-Brazilian ancestry. However, they proudly assert and proclaim a Ga-Mashie ethnic identity and see Ga-Mashie as the main bedrock of their socio-cultural and political roots within the nation state of Ghana. It was in light of that understanding that Champ revealing that he was a Tabon also added that he was a Ga and therefore a *bi* “son” of his people.

It is estimated that the first of Afro-Brazilian returnees, comprising about seven families, possibly of Hausa-Muslim origin, arrived aboard the *Salisbury*, in Accra in 1829.²⁸ This group was received and given a place by Kwaku Ankrah who, not being the established *mantse*,²⁹ was the prominent and influential political figure and town “chief”³⁰ of Otublohum *akutso*. He

²⁸ S.Y. Boadi Siaw, *op.cit.*, p. 8.

²⁹ See Furley Collection (hereafter F.C. Legon) of translations, Balme Library, University of Ghana, Legon, Dutch Diaries and Correspondence, N75, N76, and N77 *passim*.

³⁰ Within the Ga state and society in early colonial Accra, there existed some economically affluent men considered as “big men” who, belonging to some powerful Accra families were at the centre and head of extensive networks of clients and dependents. These men who, after the second quarter of the nineteenth century, comprised members of literate Euro-African

was also a powerful economic figure since he was a chief broker in the coastal trade with the Dutch in Accra. He must have conceived the notion and awareness that the free returnees who were of African descent were returning to their natural home and to their motherland. Possibly influenced by a Pan African spirit, he found it acceptable to settle them and consequently gave them land to build homes. He also incorporated some into his *weku* or family group, (pl. *wekui*) and *shia* (household).

The leadership of Ga-Mashie, following an old custom and habit of hospitality, must have found it easy to accept those returnees. It must also have accepted them for political expediency. The Ga-Mashie *akutsie* from the last quarter of the seventeenth century cultivated the habit of incorporating “strangers” or “guests”³¹ (*gboi*, singular – *gbo*) into their social and demographical milieu. In fact, the Ga-Mashie, retreating to their coastal settlement after 1677 as clusters of rushed refugees, as a way of reconstruction, readily incorporated *gboi* into their shattered social, demographical and political order. From Field’s anthropological and historical work on the Ga, we are informed that it had been a habit of Ga towns to allow any friendly band of outsiders to attach itself to the town and receive all its

elites and unlettered indigenous Ga merchants, had acquired mercantile fortunes, which placed them high on the indigenous hierarchy of trade and by extension local politics in Accra during the nineteenth century. Having established or become members of influential lineages at the centre of Ga-Mashie *akusei* political power, these “big men,” while not succeeding to the public office of *mantse*, became known popularly as “chiefs.” This English word was used as the Anglicised pointer to the Ga concepts of *niatse* (property owner [wealthy person]), *sikatse* (owner of money [rich man]) and *oblempon* (honorary stool holder). The title chief, as a pointer to those Ga terms, represented a part of a highly multi layered vocabulary of civic and political virtue. As used for Kwaku Ankra[h] in this work, it refers to that term that was conferred by the community on an enterprising member whose excellent achievement at material amassment had provided him significant following and moral authority, an authority which could readily be, and was commonly eagerly transformed into political power, which at times could even put such a person a step ahead of a real *mantse*.

³¹ In another context, *gboi* and *gbo* are used to mean guests and guest respectively. For some situationalisation see M.E. Kropp Dakubu, “Creating unity: The context of speaking prose and poetry in Ga,” *Anthropos*, 82, 1987.

benefits and protections in return for military help.³² Furthermore, the customary hospitality to “strangers” by the Ga was revealed and commended by William Smith who visited Accra in 1726. He noted that the Ga were “the most courteous and civil to strangers of any on the Gold Coast,” even though the Ga polity internally had problems with formatting cordial relations between English and Dutch Accra.³³

The subsequent growth of Ga-Mashie naturally came to be done and did proceed through the demographical reconstruction of its polity via the traditional incorporation of free immigrants and slaves; a procedure, which was also enhanced by the enlargement of the population on the coast, as a result of the expansion and commercialisation of the urban economy on the coast, with the presence of the European trading powers. Thus, Ga-Mashie, comprising akutsei, became a complex of territorial and political rather than purely kinship-based entities.

Following the logic of the historic tradition of Ga-Mashie of incorporating useful *gboi* and the utilitarian ramifications and imperatives of that custom to Ga-Mashie, this study estimates that it was in such a spirit and pursuit of population building, demographic reconstruction and ensuring political security that the Ga-Mashie leadership accepted the returnees. In addition, the indigenous headship must have perceived the returnees as people with certain knowledge and skills who could be put to productive use in the local society. The returnees did not only have certain vocational and professional skills like joinery, good farming expertise, carpentry, masonry,

³² M.J. Field, *Religion and Medicine of the Ga People*, London: Oxford University Press, 1937, p. 2.

³³ See William Smith, *A New Voyage to Guinea*, London: Frank Cass, 1744, p. 135.

and tailoring, which could benefit the Ga-Mashie society, but, through their history of revolts in Brazil, they were known to be able and courageous fighters with high martial skills, which were qualities they could put to the service of Ga-Mashie.

The Ga aphorism *Ablekuma aba kuma wo*, which translates “May strangers be added onto us” summarizes that ideological framework of urban expansion, demographical reconstruction and socio-economic growth through the nurturing and cultivation of useful human resource, which underpinned this historical process of incorporating *gboi*, and by extension the Tabon, into Ga-Mashie polity.

It was largely through the personal patronage of the most powerful and influential political personality of Otublohum, called *makelaar* [Kwaku] Ankra[h] that the returnees were incorporated into Ga Mashi[e] through Otublohum.³⁴ Kwaku Ankrah, who by the late 1820s was an ally of the Dutch and served as their *makelaar* (chief broker in trade) was the most powerful figure in Otublohum, even more powerful than the established *mantse*.³⁵ Through his mercantile dexterity Ankrah, before the arrival of his Afro-Brazilian mentees, had managed to found an *oblempon* (rich man’s) stool, which remained a powerful source of alternative political authority within Otublohum.³⁶ Before he died *circa* 1840, this leading slave trader in Accra,

³⁴ F.C. Legon, F.C. N77, Journal, 13 August, 1836, and Lans to Ancra, dd. Elmina, 19 August, 1836. See also A. Addo-Aryee Brown, “Historical Account of Mohammedanism in the Gold Coast,” *Gold Coast Review*, 3, 1927.

³⁵ See F.C. Dutch Diaries and Correspondence, N75, N76, and N77.

³⁶ The founders and holders of *oblempon* stools, often private successful middlemen in the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, were well equipped to utilize their retainers, slaves, and other foreign elements as armed aides and militias to defend and enhance their positions in the community as independent entrepreneurs and political officials. With such martial backing they could exercise degrees of political power over people in their communities.

who raided for slaves,³⁷ and aware of the martial background and skills of the returnees seems to have recruited and employed some as assistants on his slave raids and trade.³⁸ Other returnee elements were included into other *wekui*.

Having been incorporated into *wekui*, the returnees felt at home and started to adapt to local life. When Bahia suffered a major slave revolt in 1835, another group of two hundred persons, comprising Catholics and Muslims, left the region of Bahia and, in 1836, joined those returnees who were already in Accra. They must have been victims of the unbearable hostilities from the colonial government in Brazil and the deportation exercise that followed the revolt. Another group also arrived in Accra in 1836. This group, which first berthed in Lagos, came under the leadership of a Moslem called Mahma Sokoto. It is possible that some must have stayed in Lagos and contributed to the growth of the Aguda community and culture.

The Dutch protectors and allies of Ankrah were not happy with Ankrah's unilateral decision, which had led to the settlement of the second wave of returnees. In 1836 Christian Ernst Lans, who from *circa* 16 March, 1834 to *circa* December 2, 1836 was the Colonial Commander of the Dutch possessions in Gold Coast, condemned Ankra[h]'s action and lamented for reasons still unknown that: "these people [returnees] ...are in truth not the best

³⁷ For example, it is known that in 1829, Ankra[h], appointed by his friend Ga *Manste* Taki Kome, led an army to Krepí, an Ewe-speaking region east of the River Volta, and engineered that campaign as a slave-raiding exercise. He returned to Accra in April 1830 with an immense number of prisoners who were presented to chiefs and elders who helped the expedition. (See C.C. Reindorf, *History of the Gold Coast and Asante*, Basel, 1895, p. 254, 257).

³⁸ A.M. Amos and E. Ayesu, *op. cit.* p. 41. It appears that this recruitment by Ankra[h], which took place before he died in 1840, encouraged some of the returnees to stay in the trade for a long time, and therefore anchored themselves in it, and spread their tentacles wide, so that, in 1864, it was reported that some Tabon controlled a flourishing trade in slaves from Krepí. Such slaves, it was noted, were readily bought as farm workers. (See *African Times*, London, November 23, 1864).

bunch of people... I shall speak very seriously to the headman [Ankra[h] about his actions." Because the returnees had already been settled in Dutch Accra, Lans, possibly alarmed by their record in Brazil as rebellious and instigators of revolts, required from them to swear, probably as a precautionary measure, on their Bible and Koran, fidelity to the King of The Netherlands. This was to serve also as a condition to their receiving land deemed good for agriculture. The returnees whose patron Ankra[h] himself was an ally of the Dutch complied and they officially came under the protection of the Dutch.³⁹ This pacification must have made it easier for another group to return to Dutch Accra. It is also reported that another family, the Costa family arrived later, either alone or as part of another group in 1838, and was accepted.

The Otublohum *mantse* in collaboration with Ga Manste, Tackie Kome, also gave parcels of land to them to farm in such areas of present day Tudu, Asylum Down, Train Station [Kantamanto Market], and sites around the Accra Brewery.⁴⁰ The mortising of the Brazilian or Tabon community in the Ga polity, which started from *circa* 1829, did not only represent a major and significant modification to Accra's increasingly diverse town quarters, but led to demographical and cultural development. While retaining a distinct identity based largely on their adherence to Islam, they became recognised as very much a part of the Ga community. Soon after their arrival a number of the Tabon, having forged commercial links with other fellow returnees in the

³⁹ A.M. Amos and E. Ayesu, *op. cit.*, p. 40.

⁴⁰ M.A. Schaumloeffel, *Tabom: The Afro-Brazilian Community In Ghana*, Bilingual Edition, Sulamita Smaletz Glaser and M.A. Schaumloeffel, (trans.), Bridgetown: Lulu.com, 2007, pp. 27-28, as cited by S.Y. Boadi Siaw, *op.cit.*, p. 8.

ports of the Slave Coast,⁴¹ emerged as wealthy entrepreneurs. They also put their vocational skills to use within the socio-economic spaces of Ga-Mashie. They also helped to propagate, spread, and consolidate certain cultural practices and constructions within the Ga-Mashie polity. This included the Islamic religion and culture since most of them were Moslems, originally from the Sudanic savannah.

Another cultural imprint that they stamped in Ga-Mashie was a popular musical motif or genre called *Agbe* drumming and singing. *Agbe* whose lyrics were rendered mostly in Yoruba, because of the Yoruba background of some of the early returnees from Bahia, has become an important component of the music tradition of Ga-Mashie. Exhibited at various functions such as funerals, durbars and other celebrative and festive occasions, it has served, through its songs and performances, as an instructive and entertainment musical tool within the folklore of Ga-Mashie.⁴²

These Tabon ancestors of Champ established homes and added greatly to the architectural designs and vocational culture of Ga-Mashie. They built many houses made from stone and concrete, to contrast the then prevalent indigenous daub and wattle and thatched houses. They introduced new architectural plans and established joinery, carpentry, and tailoring shops in the area.

One of the leading families – the Nelson Family, left a deep Tabon cultural mark in Ga-Mashie. It was that family that founded the first “Scissors

⁴¹ The Slave Coast is the name of the coastal areas of present Togo, Benin (formerly Dahomey) and western Nigeria, which is a fertile region of coastal Western Africa along the Bight of Benin. In the precolonial period it was one of the most densely populated parts of the African continent. It became one of the most important export centres for the Atlantic slave trade from the early sixteenth century to the nineteenth century.

⁴² Christiana Lartey, personal interview, *op cit.*

House,” in 1854, in the vicinity of Swalaba, where the art and skill of tailoring, particularly Western clothes and fashion designs, was pursued and taught. The building, which is still standing today and occupied by tailors, was a great centre for training master tailors,⁴³ many of whom came from the Nelson Family and other Tabon and non-Tabon families.

As part of the integration process for the returnees, the Tabon community was incorporated into the political system of Ga-Mashie and a chieftaincy office was conferred on and within the group. The group, introduced to such a regal chief (*mantse*)-centred political and governance system, naturally adopted the structure of the political organisation of Ga-Mashie. The community and its politics came to accommodate officials like the *mantse*, queen mother (female counterpart of the *mantse* in the indigenous Ga political set up) and committee of elders. The Tabon also accommodated the *Otsiami* or the spokesperson of the *mantse*, a leader of the young people, and a war captain or *asafoatse*. The Tabon adopted the type of clothing, symbols of office and other paraphernalia of the Ga chiefs. In addition, the Tabon accepted the *Ga Homowo* festival as its main religious ceremony. The ceremony, which is observed annually, is an agricultural festival, which celebrates harvesting, symbolically “hoots at hunger,” and gives thanks to and invokes blessings from the Supreme Deity and kind spiritual beings for the celebrants.

The most significant historical phenomenon, which, manifesting within the context of the ongoing political configuration of Ga-Mashie society,

⁴³ See annotated poster titled “The First Seven Families and the first Scissors House,” Private collection in Brazil House, Otublohum, Accra. (Information was obtained on September 9, 2009).

enhanced the process of the Tabon's integration into the indigenous polity, after they had landed on the political and social landscape of Ga-Mashie, was the conferring of title and office of mantse on Kangidi Asuma[n], who was the leader of the premier group of émigrés. A worthy point of note is that the mantsehip or the office of mantse was, and remains, a *sei* (wooden stool). It is generally acknowledged by the Ga as a major item in the variety of politico-ritual regalia, which the Ga borrowed from the Akan. Kangidi Asuma[n] was given that indigenous symbol of political authority – a *sei*.

Within the context of the Ga-Mashie, as among the Akan, the stool, by tradition, becomes the property of the founder of a lineage or quarter. Consequently, it is to be retained after his death as a sacred object embodying the collective spirit of the institution. Although such a mantse stool would serve functions related to the entire quarter, it would be deemed as belonging to the patrilineage (*we*) established by its original owner.⁴⁴

The *sei* that was given to Kangidi Asuma[n] elevated him to the position of sub (divisional)-chief under the mantse of Otublohum *Akutso*. This leader, it appears soon changed his name to Azuma[h] Nelson and, having become the mantse of Tabon, adopted the stool name Nii (Chief) Azumah I. He is therefore the progenitor of the Azuma[h] (Asuma) Nelson family, which consequently came to accommodate as its property the *sei*.

Part of the paternal lineage of Champ connects to an ancestral *weku shia* (family dwelling) and *agbonna* (compound house), now in ruins, around

⁴⁴ For an insight into this phenomenon see M.E. Kropp Dakubu, *One Voice: The Linguistic Culture of an Accra Lineage*, Leiden: African Studies Centre, University of Leiden, 1981, pp. 16-17.

the neighbourhood of Faase (lit. behind the stream).⁴⁵ It is from that lineage, which connects to an Azumah Nelson *adeboo shia* (ancestral house), that the Tabon community has received chiefs who have continued to hold the stool name Azumah.

The regal history of Tabon shows that Nii Azumah I was mantse from 1836 to 1865.⁴⁶ His son Joao [John] Antonio "Alasha" Nelson, who took the title Nii Azumah II, succeeded him from 1865 to 1900. Being a friend of Ga Mantse Takie (Tackie) Tawiah I, he is said to have consolidated Tabon integration into Ga-Mashie.⁴⁷ The third mantse of Tabon was George Aruna Nelson, the brother of Nii Azumah II. He took the title Nii Arunah and ruled from 1900 to 1926.⁴⁸ Nii Azumah III (1926 to 1961), Nii Azumah IV (1961 to 1981) and Nii Azumah V (1998 to date) followed him.⁴⁹ By the time of Nii Azumah III the community of Tabon had become a strong integral part of Ga-Mashie polity. It had a respectable political representation in the indigenous political structure of authority of Ga-Mashie to the extent that the British colonial government recognised its Mantse as one of the twenty-three indigenous ethnic headmen in Accra.⁵⁰

Interestingly, the Tabon community, which evolved sometime around 1829, has produced a number of personalities who have contributed meaningfully to Ghana's socio-economic and political growth. They, descending from some of the pioneering families, including the Nelson,

⁴⁵ This is an implication that there was, perhaps, at a certain period, a body of water or a stream at the place.

⁴⁶ A.M. Amos and E. Ayesu, *op. cit.* 2002, p. 48

⁴⁷ See annotated poster titled, "The Tabon Mantses," Private collection in Brazil House, Otublohum, Accra. (Information was obtained on September 9, 2009).

⁴⁸ A.M. Amos and E. Ayesu, *op. cit.* p. 48-49.

⁴⁹ M.A. Schaumloeffel, *op.cit.*, p. 41 as cited in S.Y. Boadi Siaw, "Afro-Brazilian Returnees in Ghana," *op. cit.* p. 4-5.

⁵⁰ A.M. Amos and E. Ayesu, *op. cit.* p. 49.

Morton, Perigrino, Ribeiro and Maslino families, have over the years stayed in Accra in various enclaves of the city such as Otublohum, Adabraka, Otukpai (Atukpae or Atukpai), Faase, Jamestown or settled beyond the borders of Accra in other parts of the country as the search of work and opportunity has dictated. Such actors who have contributed meaningfully in different and significant degrees to development processes of the country, during the colonial and postcolonial periods, have manifested in capacities such as politicians, legal brains, educationists, entrepreneurs, military officers, reverend ministers, physicians and sports personalities. The long list include personalities such as Jones Nelson, the first Director-General of the Accra Metropolitan Council in the early twentieth century, William Lutterodt, who became General Manager of Accra Post Office, and Her Lordship Mrs. Georgina Theodora Wood (nee Lutterodt),⁵¹ who presently is the Chief Justice of Ghana. Others are Manyo E. A. Plange and Henry Plange who distinguished themselves in the British colonial armed forces. Manyo Plange was active in the Ashanti (Asante) Expedition *circa* 1895/1896 and Aro War in 1901 and was decorated by the British for his gallantry. Henry Plange, who trained first as a lawyer and was called to the Bar at Lincoln's Inn in 1902, later joined the colonial armed forces to become the highest-ranking African in the Gold Coast Hausa Force.⁵²

George Nelson also put up the Swalaba-based tailoring establishment called Scissors House. Incidentally, that establishment trained many members

⁵¹ She was nominated for the position of Chief Justice of Ghana in May 2007. On June 1, 2007, the Parliament of Ghana, by consensus, approved her nomination as the new Chief Justice of Ghana. This made her the first woman in the history of Ghana to head the Judiciary and made her the highest ranked female in Ghana's political history. She assumed office on 15 June 2007.

⁵² S.Y. Boadi Siaw, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

of the Tabon community, particularly the Nelsons, to excel in that profession. Acclaimed to have made not only the “best suits in Ghana” but was also an honoured tailor of Kwame Nkrumah,⁵³ Dan Morton, a Tabon, was the founder of another tailoring establishment called Dan Morton’s, in Accra. It specialised in the making European-style suits and other clothes. Dan Morton was trained by George Aruna Nelson, the renowned tailor from the Nelson family.⁵⁴

Furthermore, Thomas B.F. Francisco Ribeiro became Registrar of Jamestown Tribunal, Accra, in the 1930s.⁵⁵ Miguel Augustus Francisco Ribeiro was appointed the first ambassador of independent Ghana to U.S.A. and, later, Chancellor of University of Cape Coast.⁵⁶ Cyril E. Fiscian was also a professor of psychology at the University of Ghana, Legon and founding chairperson of the University’s Department of Psychology. Dr. Aruna Morton became a distinguished medical doctor in the country and for some time the private physician of Kwame Nkrumah. Other members whose names have made headlines in national politics and social life include those that have made marks in the arena of Ghana’s progressive affairs of state. Kankam Da Costa, a onetime student leader of the early 1970s became Deputy Minister of Defense in the latter years of that decade. In the realm of sports administration Sam Aruna Nelson excelled as a sports administrator of the Sports Council of Ghana and eventually became a deputy Minister for Youth and Sports from

⁵³ See the poster titled “Dan Morton: The Chairman of the Tabon Community,” Private collection. Brazil House, Otublohum, Accra. (Information was obtained on September 9, 2009). It was reported that the trainer of Dan Morton, was himself initiated into tailoring by Henri Azumah Kwaku Nelson. See the same poster.

⁵⁴ S.Y. Boadi Siaw, *op.cit.*, p. 11-12.

⁵⁵ A.M. Amos and E. Ayesu, *op.cit.*, p. 54.

⁵⁶ S.Y. Boadi Siaw, *op.cit.*, p. 11.

1984 to 1991.⁵⁷ Moreover, Kasula da Costa was an excellent player in the Ghanaian national soccer team in the middle of the 1990s.

The historical evolution of Tabon in Ga-Mashie (*circa*1829), heralded by the settling of Afro-Brazilian families, introduction of pioneer personalities with names like Adama, Aliptara, Aruna, Kangidi, Asuman [Azuma, Asumah or Azumah], Claudio, Ferkue, Costa, Zuzer, Mama Nassu, Mattier, Supiana, Oshaw Zaqueu, Titingi, Jose Vieira,⁵⁸ and concomitant sociological development of intermarriages between their descendants and indigenes, leading to the production of people who assert an ancestry from the two groups, were key phenomena of which Champ (Samuel Azumah Nelson) was a genetic outgrowth and a social product.

After abandoning his dream to box as a professional, Emmanuel Tielo charted a career in tailoring. Champ's father who emanated from the tailoring-inclined Nelson family, a family whose proclivity to and fame in tailoring had been greatly inspired by Nii Aruna I, married a Ga woman who was a fishmonger by the name Comfort Atwee Quarcoo.⁵⁹ Her father and mother were from the indigenous *nshonamajii* of Teshie and Osu respectively. Although this woman was not from Ga-Mashie she ultimately, because of her husband, took residence and made a family in Ga-Mashie. Comfort Atwee Quarcoo, who became the mother of Champ, was the daughter of a fisherman and was born and bred in a customary *agbonna*. Owing to straitened financial circumstances (her father had many dependents and had just little for the sustenance of his family) she could not go to school. She, however, received

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

⁵⁸ See A.M. Amos and E. Ayesu, *op. cit.*, p. 57, for a list of the original Tabon names.

⁵⁹ See, *Zoom Zoom – The Professor: The career of Azumah Nelson*, directed by Sam A. Kissie, [D.V.D.], Sankofa Pictures, Geodrii, and Azumah Nelson Foundation, 2010.

the indigenous instructions, which most females in the local *agbonna* customarily received, about the fundamentals of how to become ideal and economically resourceful women, capable of taking proper care and nurturing their children, husbands and family. Such instructions, which also included fundamentals in culinary skills and home management, received from older women and mothers in the *agbonna*, additionally exposed her to basic arithmetics for trade. Accra, as a major West African trading entrepot, had an urban commercial economy, which remarkably featured the active participation of women in different commercial and trading ventures, particularly in hawking and petty trading of various items in small stalls, kiosks, shops and in the market places. Indigenously, many women within the local setting of Ga-Mashie, taking advantage of the prevailing monetized economy of urban Accra actively featured in most of its flourishing markets. Such women animated such markets, which were rife with commercial transactions, by selling different items including agricultural produce, fish and a wide range of cooked food.

As a maiden, Comfort Atwee Quarcoo gravitated to petty trading. She naturally moved towards the occupation of her mother, an occupation, which was common to most women within the indigenous economy of Ga-Mashie. This occupation was the buying, drying, salting, smoking and selling of fish obtained from fishermen at the *nshonna* (beaches) around Ga-Mashie. Her marriage to Emmanuel Tielo Nelson produced children, of which Champ was the first. The other five children that came out of their marriage, a marriage which probably had dissolved by the time Champ was in his twenties, are Mahma Nelson, Joseph “Sagacious” Nelson, Abieana Nelson, Louisa Nelson,

and Likya Nelson. Out of the children, Mahma, the second born who had been an immediate playmate of Champ, died at an early age. Recalling the effects of the incident, Champ solemnly noted that: "It was a terribly shocking incident to the family. As it made me sad, even at that early stage in my boyhood, the loss frightened me and also made me to be reflective about life. It made me to wonder about life; how one day you have it and the other, it is gone."⁶⁰ According to him the shock made him very quiet for sometime.

Now if I think about it, I believe that it was one incident, which contributed to growing in me the mind[fulness] of struggling to respect people and also not talking too much [boastful]. . . . This possibly influenced my quiet demeanour. Looking back, it [must have subconsciously], apart from the virtue of love, which Jesus Christ taught humanity, gave me the philosophy, which has abided with me that we [people] do not live forever and [so] we must struggle to be at peace with one another. And that we must be good, because our period here on earth is short and unpredictable. . . . My mother, a very strong woman, and the family however were able to move on in life, after that painful loss of Mahma, who had been a funny and adorable child for the family.⁶¹

The cares of large family, bringing up her children in an agbonna where she moved to stay in the vicinity of Adedemkpo, near the environs of Amamomo, and housekeeping were combined very well with her trading activities usually at one popular market in Accra called Salaga Market.⁶²

⁶⁰ Azumah Nelson, personal interview, at his residence in New Achimota, Accra, October 5, 2009.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Named after a historic commercial town – Salaga – in the northern part of Ghana, this popular market in Accra emerged in the early 1880s, through the colonial influence of the British. An accelerated redirection of interior trade away from the northern savannahs and towards the coast followed the British defeat of Asante and consolidation of colonial rule in 1874. (Consult, for example, R. Szereszewski, *Structural changes in the economy of Ghana 1891-1911*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1965, p. 7). An aftereffect of the war was that the British became zealous to push the vibrant trade of the northern commercial terminal of Salaga away from Kumase, which was the commercial and political nerve centre of Asante, and redirect it towards Accra. They engineered that through an eagerness which was a contributory factor for growth of that market in Accra. The importance of the northern trade reflected in the emergence of a new name for that expanding market place in Accra: Salaga Market.

Domiciled and sharing with some of her extended maternal family relatives within a common agbonna compound, which was around the vicinity popularly known as Accra Timber Market, which derived its name from the conspicuous lumberjack activities and vibrant wood milling industry that prevailed there, she also catered for wards of some of her extended relatives. The Champ spent most of his toddler days in Adedemkpo and played in its adjoining neighbourhoods of Amamomo and Timber Market.

Adopting a duo-locality residential pattern, Comfort, while keeping her place in Adedemkpo, lived intermittently with her husband at the relatively commercially vibrant suburb of Mamprobi. Attracted by its seemingly commercial strength, Tielo moved to Mamprobi and stayed in a small house, on a piece of land, which he had inherited from his father. The search for “greener economic pasture” compelled him to stay there in that uncomfortable abode, which could pass for a shack from a Brazilian *favela*. Contrasting Mamprobi with his old environs, Tielo must have perceived the former, which contained some luxurious apartments of the affluent and a dynamic social spectrum of rich, middle class, and working class with a high purchasing power, an economically strategic place for his trade. He must have seen that locality as being capable of providing him with a new, bigger and expensive fashion conscious clientele, including senior managers, public servants and office workers.

Comfort Atwee Quarcoo and her children stayed at Mamprobi, but her fishmongering activities sustained her double locality residential pattern. From time to time her business sent her going to reside in the Ga-Mashie Jamestown and Ussher Town, where she bought and prepared her fish for sale. Such

movements, which kept her and her children in touch with relatives at Adedemkpo and Timber Market, often left them staying, without Tielo, for extended periods in a compound house popularly called Cassava House in Timber Market. The short periods which were spent by the family at Mamprobi and the long ones spent at Timber Market suggest that Champ's formative years, from state of toddlerhood through adolescence, puberty and youth, were mostly spent in the shanty environs of Timber Market.

“Necessity is the Mother of Invention”: Azumah Nelson's Adolescence and his Gravitation to Participate in Boxing

Champ grew under the watchful eyes of his mother who had a gift for bringing up children. She was cheerful and had a moderate temper. She never hesitated to maintain discipline on her children. Thrifty and methodical, she was able to work hard to support her family and was able to pass some of the qualities she possessed such as courage, fortitude and selfless devotion, which she displayed at home and in the market to her children. Mostly under the care of his mother, Champ, who did not spend a lot of time with his father who for the most part was in a different part of the city working, therefore saw his hardworking mother as the main provider for his siblings. His father was mostly engaged in his work and so Champ did not really have a lot of the normal day to day coaching that fathers often gave to sons. Time spent with the father manifested mainly during short weekends, times when his mother would move to stay with her husband, and holidays. On such occasional get-togethers, he mostly did spend time with his father in the tailoring shop and performing some chores for him and running errands, informally learnt and picked up some of the basics of the tailoring art such as threading sewing

needles, stitching and knitting. "I did not become a tailor but I learnt some few basic tricks of the trade. I can thread a needle and do some cutting today, but I cannot call myself a tailor. I know [think] that God ordained that I would be a boxer."⁶³

Champ, who attests that he has had a natural knowledge of God, even when he was a child, believes that Divine Providence (God) engineered his path into boxing and his success as a boxer. He affirms that his upbringing was one, which the Christian God Jehovah had predestined to be difficult so that it would ultimately pave way to his success in sports and fame in life.

However, it can be reasoned that the socio-economic conditions of the environment within which he predominantly grew, which had been disheartening and disenchanting, must have made him to have little confidence in the strength of humans as capable, without divine intervention, of changing that deplorable situation. That, in other words, must have inclined him not to expect any earthly messiah, or entertain the thought of relying on human power, devoid of the hand of Providence to bring positive changes in the life of individuals and societies. The idea that a supernatural force, i.e. God's power and assistance, is necessary for the engineering of a positive change to the socio-economic plight of his people, family and himself, therefore, reigned supreme in his psyche as he, from his boyhood days of socio-economic hardship, reflected on the issue of societal and personal improvement. Additionally, his father, who was a devout Christian and Anglican⁶⁴ but usually worshipped with an independent African Christian sect where he

⁶³ Azumah Nelson, personal interview, *op.cit.*

⁶⁴ Azumah Nelson, 51 years old, personal interview, at his office in his restaurant at Accra Central, Accra, October 5, 2009.

operated as a member and lay preacher, often took his son, whenever they were together, to church, particularly the latter. Through that, Champ cultivated a strong love for Christianity, a love, which he is still keeping and honouring. This Church, which had a strong penchant and faith in miracles and believed that faith, miracles and divine interventions were imperatives for the prosperity of individuals and groups, must have made an early contribution in inculcating into the psyche of Champ, his honoured belief that God has a purpose for the life of everyone and with His help every positive desire of humans could be achieved.

His early relationship with socio-economic hardship in his family and community and familiarisation with certain Christian ideas, reasonably influenced him, from his boyhood days, to psychologically and emotionally nurture a strong faith in God and “His” son Jesus Christ, and deem them as keys to success and positive change in all spheres of life, “including mine,” he recalled.⁶⁵ This strong belief in God as his ever-present and ultimate helper, according to him, always guided him, gave him confidence, a sense of physical and spiritual security, which in fact equipped him, during his active years as a boxer, with the psychological fortitude not only to fight and fight well but also be focused in his career. In other words, such required securities, which came from a belief, apart from physical training, aided him to chalk the unquestionable successes in his career. Champ consequently disclosed that:

I always went into the ring with God and I knew that God was always with me. He has been with me throughout my life. I knew that His words to me regarding my life were true. His promises to me have been unfolding one after the other before my eyes. He had told me when was a child that He would make

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

me a great and famous person. When I started boxing, He told me, and you know I can hear His voice when He talks to me, that He would make me a great world champion. I told my friends about it. They laughed, but He was true to his promise. I always went to the ring with confidence and faith and these produced my successes and victories.⁶⁶

He added that:

Whenever I lost a match I knew that it had been allowed by God. I am no longer a boxer because the part of my life which God gave me to use to box is over. He has fulfilled his promise. I have become famous and economically liberated.⁶⁷

From the perspective of this study, it is impossible to verify the authenticity of such claims of clairaudience to the voice of the Divine and test the potency of the messages therein as agency to the successes of Champ and his remarkable boxing career. However, it is reasonable to suggest that the strong belief in Providence obviously was an important tool for Champ in his career life and its extensions. That, coupled with physical training and tact, it is sound to suggest strengthened him mentally and gave him confidence, an important tool for success in everything that people do, to achieve victories in fights, face defeats with strength and, to realise a successful career as a boxer.

Having shared his growing up days between the generally harsh environs of Adedemkpo, Timber Market and Mamprobi, Champ's earliest memories are as scattered and as innocuous as any child's. His earliest recollections include seeing his father making shirts for customers, Champ and siblings, and he (Champ) following his mum to the *nshonna* to buy fish and the market to sell them.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

From the age of about nine to approximately fifteen Champ was enrolled in school. At the basic level he attended a local primary school near the Djufor Djaanor (Tuesday Market) near Mamprobi, and later enrolled at the Mamprobi Sempe No. 2 Middle School. He had a strong liking for schooling. However, financial difficulties at home made him, being the first child in that family, to think of and embark on doing other tasks that could bring him and his family money for sustenance. So it was quite an early stage that, by virtue of the fact that he was and saw himself as the first child, he developed the idea that he had a responsibility to find ways to support his parents, particularly his mother and to take care of his younger siblings. That notion was going to remain with him for the rest of his boyhood, his youth, and his adulthood, and it was further going to nurture in him the idea of endeavouring to extend help to other people who were in need.

His father's business was not flourishing and his mother had a lot of dependents to feed, and so she was not able to readily provide all the required financial support and basic things that Champ needed for his schooling. These difficulties and the realisation of them by Champ naturally compelled Champ to sharpen his human instincts related to survival abilities and industriousness, when he was still young and in school. He developed a nimble, inquisitive mind and a serious attitude towards activities that he saw as financially rewarding and pro-survival. He started to perform menial jobs, in the morning or afternoon, like most children in his community to generate money to send home.

Most children from this deprived region often worked, mainly on the beach to support their families. When fish was in season, most of the children went to the beach to help the fishermen

cart their catch home. This could be in the morning, before going to school, or during the afternoon, when they had returned from school. The children would create a kind of “balloon” with a cloth, which was commonly used to hold some of the fish they carried for the fishermen. Some also carried baskets of fish. When we were kids we, including Champ, also engaged in this lifestyle. We added the few fish we that were able to get to the ones which fishermen gave us and sold them for money. In the case where this assignment was completed in the morning some of the children went to collect newspapers to sell before going to school.⁶⁸

Champ, like other truants and fish-searching boys, hustled and toiled at the *nshonna* to have fish. In order to be rewarded with fish by the fishermen, many boys performed some of the common chores on the beach, such as running errands for the fishermen or helping them haul their catch to shore. Champ also did some of these tasks to get fish to sell to supplement his mother’s income.

The concretisation of the notion of becoming a boxer, an idea, which he had mentally romanced as a kid, strongly started to take shape in his mind as he saw it as a potential source of funds for himself and family. The strong cultivation of that idea and ultimate decision by Champ to give it a physical manifestation by taking conscious steps to enter the sport emanated from or engineered by two main sources.

The Ga-Mashie environment within which he found himself growing was one. Rife with boxing manifestations – a demonstrative art which also endured as a career or professional persuasion for many of its participants, some of whom had made financial gains from it, that environment easily nurtured in the minds of its youth, who commonly saw boxing around them,

⁶⁸ Frank Kwaku Dua Bannerman, alias Franko Nero, 47 years old, a friend of Azumah Nelson since his childhood days, personal interview at Timber Market, Accra, March 14, 2009.

the idea that boxing was a financially rewarding profession. The psyche of Champ was naturally subjected to this same influence. Therefore, with widespread knowledge about such an economic implication of that sport, many inspired youth, within that locale easily gravitate to it and Champ was no exception.

The other source was an incident, which he experienced when his father took him, about the age of nine, to see a boxing match. The visit to the show, at once, strongly inspired him to wish to be a boxer in order to beat a boxer who had mercilessly beaten another boxer in that match he saw. He disclosed that:

The desire to be a boxer, which was aroused in me at the show, never left me and it stayed with me afterwards. . . . I watched this boxer, seemingly older in age, beat another who I conceived a much younger boxer in that match at Bukom. Being young, I thought the sweat on the face of the “younger” boxer was tears and as I perceived that feature on his face, I thought an injustice had been done. I felt that the “older” boxer, unknowingly, they were in the same weight division, had bullied the other boxer. I could not take that. I was sad and angry. I had always been against cheating and injustice and all my friends knew that. I immediately asked my father to take me to the ring to fight that older boxer [to avenge the younger one]. My father declined and said that that was not the way to go about the circumstances and show my disapproval of that fight. He then took me home because I started to cry and that was embarrassing to him.⁶⁹

Nevertheless that incident kept within Champ the desire to become a boxer and to one day fight that “boy bully.” Regretably, however, he did not meet that “older villain” in any boxing encounter. Regardless of that miss, he kept that idea of boxing in his psyche. As he progressed in age, through those

⁶⁹ Azumah Nelson, personal interview, *op.cit.*

times of unabated economic hardship for his family, he did not stop pestering his father to help him to box by giving him to a coach.

Although he was psychologically unhappy about the poverty he endured and perceived around him, and wondered how to escape from that economic quagmire, “he managed to maintain through those youthful times, a life which on the outside reflected happiness and light heartedness.”⁷⁰ Even if at times he found himself experiencing spells of melancholy and contemplativeness, he managed to grow up as a lively, healthy and funloving boy.⁷¹

He took after his father’s looks and inherited from his mother her jovial and sociable disposition. He attracted notice from those around him by his orderly habits of helping his mother with errands, doing menial jobs, going to school yet playing truant to do some jobs to bring in money, all of which he always succeeded doing quite well. Thus, he succeeded in attracting a handful of friends to himself and he became the actual leader of his circle of peers because of his congenial character, and the sincere, simple way he treated his peers, whom he was always ready to help at school and in his neighbourhood of Timber Market. “He was a tireless leader in most male children games and pastimes.”⁷² From the reminiscences of childhood friends and relatives, we know that he had a very keen sense of fair play and loathed cheating. He was so averse to cheating that he was always ready to use his fist on anyone, outside or within his circle, who wanted to cheat anyone in the group in a game or out of anything that they had to share.

⁷⁰ Frank Kwaku Dua Bannerman (Franko Nero), personal interview, *op.cit.*

⁷¹ *Ibid.*

⁷² *Ibid.*

From the age of ten to sixteen, he also had a reputation of being a good footballer and street fighter who was good at wrestling and the use of the fist. School was pleasant enough when he attended, even though he did not always attend school due to the lack of some basic needs and his pursuing other extra curricular economic-inclined activities. However, his best memories are reserved for free times spent, when he was not working for his mother or at school, with his father at Mamprobi and with beloved childhood friends at home.

Evidently, Champ, through his ring and professional boxing engagements, has made new friends on the local and international scenes. However, the main caucus of boyhood companions who, bearing names with interesting aliases, grew up with him, but ultimately pursued different careers, included Oblitey Kommey alias O.B., and Teddy Ayithey also known as Las Teddy. The others were Nii Amu Livingstone alias Danny Livingstone, Lee Palmer Amu Quarshie, and Frank Kwaku Dua Bannerman alias Franko Nero. Las Teddy and Champ led this group. Although the members of the crew belonged to different families and some attended different schools in Central Accra, for example “Franko Nero” attended Ayalolo Seven Middle School at Amamomo, they pooled their skills together for the benefit of the group. Some members of this close-knit group mastered the art of collecting scraps of aluminium, such as automobile parts, cooking pots and roofing sheets from trash receptacles and garbage bins at mechanic shops, homes and neighbourhoods, and reworked and recycled them into aluminium plates. They normally sold the scrap and plates to certain artisans who transformed them into other finished products. For example, the plates were turned into buckets,

pans and basins, which were sold to people to use to store water and for other domestic uses.

The collection of iron and aluminium scrap, and its associated recycling and the selling enterprises were pursued by the youth to make money. Furthermore, they were initiated as leisure pursuits to overcome boredom which, as a natural phenomenon, affected the members when they remained home and did not go to school.

Significantly, such economic enterprises generated money for Champ and his friends, which comprised an inner group of confidants. This group, therefore, had the business acumen at that early period in their lives to generate pocket-money, which they used to buy food and snacks. At times they also used part of such funds to patronise some cinemas in Central Accra, like the popular Palladium to watch movies in the afternoons, when they were playing truant or were not performing tasks on the beach for rewards.

The labours of Champ to make ends meet also revealed a delinquent side of his hustling. Nevertheless, he was aware that that deviance, a product of youthful exuberance, was not good and in line with his Christian beliefs, which he had inherited from his father. His father and church had instructed him that stealing was negative. Furthermore, it was wrong for a person to take what did not belong to him or her, without first asking their owners for them.

Strangely, however, he came to believe, without knowing the source of that belief that some things like food could be taken without permission from their owners, only if the taker prayed and asked for forgiveness and protection from God. He obviously knew the guilt he would endure or endured any time his young self took without asking and therefore must have contrived that

excuse. By invoking a God-centred justification, he manufactured his own ideological “anaesthesia” to numb any psychological and emotional pains of guilt and remorse that such acts, if he committed them, could inflict on his young self. He was aware that hunger would at times compel or give him the natural urge to pluck fruits from a tree, which belonged to someone, to satisfy his hunger and save his life. Therefore, his philosophy of “you can take without asking but pray to God for permission, forgiveness and protection” covered and was applicable only to food items. He, at that formative period of his life believed that a necessity like food could be taken, without the consent of the owner, if it would save a life and alleviate the physical suffering associated with hunger.

Consequently, in the absence of other activities, Champ and his friends, following their wild youthful instincts and considering it fun and adventurous, occasionally would pilfer fruits and fish to eat to satisfy their hunger and sell the surplus to have money to buy food the next time they needed it. Champ, recalling his boyhood days with nostalgia in a chat with the Ghanaian T.V. celebrity and comedian Kweku Sintim-Misa, disclosed that he always prayed to receive God’s forgiveness and protection so that they, as mini-master hustlers, would not get caught and be punished by the owners of their main item of attraction, which was coconut.⁷³ Found growing in his neighbourhood and on some sites along nearby beaches coconut attracted Champ and his friends. The group knew that coconut was a delicacy for some migrant Ibo traders from Nigeria who sold items like second-hand clothes and

⁷³ Azumah Nelson, T.V. interview with Kweku Sintim-Misa, *Thank God it is Friday with K.S.M. Host. Kweku Sintim-Misa. Metro T.V., Accra, c. 2008/2009.*

palm oil in some Accra markets like Salaga Market and Komkompe. Although they sold their coconut to any member of the city's public who needed coconut, they also found a ready market with the unsuspecting traders who used the endosperm (copra) as a preferred condiment to their favorite *gari*, a couscous-like food made from cassava or manioc. The money made from such transactions in coconut was used to meet different needs such as clothing and feeding. If some could be spared, "some of us [the friends] would "pocket" our share and confidently stroll through the city thinking we are rich."⁷⁴ Champ disclosed that: "We were not the only youth who were doing this. There were other kids in our neighbourhood who were compelled by [dire] financial difficulties to engage in such ventures and other activities to make some few cedis to buy food and some basic items in the city."⁷⁵ According to Champ's childhood friend Kweku Dua Bannerman, the ghetto life that they experienced was so hard that they and other children simply needed to think of new ways to get food and generate money to buy some needed items. Bannerman disclosed that during those periods of hardship "some of us (ghetto boys), using clubs, [stone-throwing homemade] catapults, and [homespun] traps, hunted down rodents and lizards . . . ,"⁷⁶ and "birds including vultures."⁷⁷ This hunt for rodents, particularly a wild ratlike animal called *gbela* in Ga, as revealed by Bannerman was commonly undertaken by many ghetto boys as both a sport and to satisfy a basic culinary need. They would grill their game and eat it as an afternoon meal. Contrariwise, lizard and

⁷⁴ Frank Kwaku Dua Bannerman (Franko Nero), personal interview, *op.cit.*

⁷⁵ Azumah Nelson, personal interview, *op.cit.*

⁷⁶ Azumah Nelson, personal interview, *op.cit.* Incidentally, this hunting adventure was also revealed by Azumah Nelson in an interview, sometime c. 2008/2009, on the T.V. programme *Thank God it is Friday with K.S.M.* Host. Kweku Sintim-Misa. Metro T.V., Accra.

⁷⁷ Frank Kwaku Dua Bannerman (Franko Nero), personal interview, *op.cit.*

vulture were hunted for financial reasons. The cadavers were sold in markets to buyers who used parts of the animals in the preparation of magical objects and merchandise like amulets and talismans, which they sold to their clients who went to them for spiritual protection and solution to their problems.⁷⁸

Most of the children after making surplus money from their businesses often played and enjoyed the brisk and unpredictable but often interesting segments of city life. “We, the hustling youth, often would “hang” around popular centres like Opera Square, which used to be the main bus terminal for the government owned Omnibus Services Authority in Accra, and play, devise new plans to make money, and watch movies.”⁷⁹

Incidentally, the bus terminal is now defunct and this location is now a car park/market extension. The location acquired the name Opera Square because it used to be near the location of a very well-liked cinema house with the name Opera, which was one of the several trendy cinemas in other parts of Accra.⁸⁰

Like other hustling kids, it became a common pastime, after spending such afternoons around popular centres in the city, for Champ and his friends to, now and then, use their spare money to pay to watch, enjoy and have fun with popular and new movies at cinemas like Palladium and Opera.⁸¹

As a teenager, Champ was not a ‘ladies man.’ “He was not promiscuous and did not court the friendship of girls and, unlike some of us

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰ The elite of society had their own cinemas and these included the four Rs cinemas - Rex, Royal, Roxy and Regal, which were Lebanese business establishments. The Temani Brothers built the Cinema Palace, which pioneered the showing of daytime programmes, which started around 12.15 pm. Then the Opera Cinema came on board to compete with Cinema Palace.

⁸¹ Frank Kwaku Dua Bannerman (Franko Nero) personal interview, *op. cit.*

(some of his friends), was not interested in having a girl friend.”⁸² When it comes to courting the friendship of girls, Champ was always reluctant and bashful. Although he was naturally shy of the younger members of the opposite sex, he felt comfortable with his reserved disposition towards girls. In addition to his bashfulness, he consciously distanced himself from “girls” because he knew that he did not have enough time to spare and financial resources to pursue amorous romantic ventures with a girlfriend or girlfriends.⁸³ Time and money to spend on amorous escapades were scarce and he, fundamentally, was more interested in and orientated towards the idea of spending the little he made from his hustles on himself and to assist his mother and siblings.

The time that he otherwise would have spent in such adventures, he spent with his friends, who did not only play, but entrepreneurially, mixed play with work and planned ideas to make money. He, however, continued to play football and became “a good keeper of the goal posts.”⁸⁴ He had stints with the pastime and business of hiring out bicycles to boys in his neighbourhood for money. He took such bicycles from their owners, normally older men who had bicycles for such renting enterprises, and made money for them out of which he received a commission.

All these childhood and teenage days’ activities, which were primarily inclined towards and in pursuit of survival, were products of the circumstances of socio-economic poverty within which he found himself growing to manhood. They primarily contributed to instilling in him a stronger

⁸² *Ibid.*

⁸³ Azumah Nelson, personal interview, *op.cit.*

⁸⁴ Frank Kwaku Dua Bannerman (Franko Nero) personal interview, *op. cit.*

desire and notion to find an occupation which would relieve him from the hardships he experienced around him.

The tough streets and environs of Central Accra became the arena for him, and his friends, to scheme and find ways to survive. Thus, from about the age of ten to eighteen while he remained practically under the care of his mother and maintained bonds with siblings, he sought friendship and protection from his gang on the streets where it was tough, dangerous, and competitive because of the existence of other turf-controlling groups. Through those years his gang developed a reputation as skilled and respected street fighters in their Timber Market turf and its environs like Swalaba, Adedemkpo, and Bukom. Champ, had earned a reputation as a famous street fighter and a dreaded member of his crew in the eyes of many teenagers in his neighbourhood. A point of interest at this juncture is that behind this life of virtual streetism and hustling, he had started, around the age of fourteen, to pursue a life as an amateur boxer in the background. This life would come to light subsequently in this discussion. By the time he was about sixteen going to the age of seventeen he had totally abandoned the idea of going to school. Comparable to most other boxing-attracted-youth of his age, who were stricken with economic woes and poor academic performances, Champ saw the ring and gloves as the way forward. Hence, as he garnered the energy and mental fortitude to pursue his boxing career, he became convinced, or convinced himself, that certificates were not the stuff that boxing legends, a class within which he wanted to be, were made of.

Having abandoned school with a stuttering knowledge of spoken English and some rudimentary arithmetic, his knowledge of the former

became useful to him during his professional days when he used it in a more pidginised and fractured manner to articulate his views at pre and post match press conferences, in interviews and in conversations with international and local non-Ga speakers.

Presently exhibiting a fairly good and working command of spoken and written English, Champ used his days as a professional and international champion to improve on his knowledge of English. Through a conscious effort on his part, he took private studies and received professional instructions from teachers which sharpened his academic abilities in literacy and numeracy.

As noted, the environment, which culturally accommodated boxing and was dotted with gyms, had an influence on Champ as it contributed by inspiring him to take steps to domesticate his fighting skills within boxing as a sport and career. From that environment he learnt to appreciate the premium and respect, which his community, culturally, accorded renowned Ga-Mashie boxers. Furthermore, it was from that same milieu that he gained his primary understanding of the Ghanaian penchant for hero worshipping and lionizing of some of the nation's famous boxers.

Although his inconsistency in attendance to school and truancy diminished his reading ability, his rudimentary formal education and natural inquisitive mind enabled him to appreciate media projected sports and boxing news of many inspiring accomplishments of past and existing boxing personalities.

From popular iconography and pictures of famous boxers in newspapers to public commentary and discussions on sports and boxing information obtained from the print and electronic media, he came to

understand the tremendous fame, national praise and popular positions which boxing icons received and occupied in Ghana and on the international scene. As he naturally craved these rewards, the glorious pictures and portraits of international, and particularly national and local boxing greats from Ga-Mashie, posing with their coveted laurels, which abounded on posters and billboards in local gyms in his neighbourhoods and other entertainment venues in Accra, further inspired him and strengthen his resolve to chart a life as an occupational boxer.

In that situation he, about the age of fifteen and sixteen, became an electrician apprentice with the Ghana Prison Service in Central Accra. Having taken that step as a provisional measure to acquire a secondary vocational skill and make extra cash, he had little time to laze around. From that time, his daily life was ordered by a busy schedule, which conditioned him to, normally go to work in the morning as an apprentice, run errands for his superordinates, do minor repairs and electrical services, and return home around two or three o'clock in the afternoon. He then would help his mother with her fish acquisition, processing and distribution activities. After such activities, he, from about four or five o'clock, would start to exercise his body through such manoeuvres like jogging, sprinting, push-ups and rudimentary shadow boxing on the beach. Emulating the regimen of exercises of the amateur and professional boxers he commonly saw in his neighbourhood, he did those exercises with the intention of toughening himself physically to acquire the stamina and muscular arrangement needed to become the great boxer he hoped to be in future. He was creative in that respect. Using an axe, he also undertook the exercise and task of hewing and chopping firewood. He

received fees and food for that enterprise, as the wood was used mainly as fuel to cook assorted food, particularly the popular Ga kenkey, which some women sold in his neighbourhoods. This exercise, which proved to be economically rewarding, supported his other economic ventures. In spite of all these efforts and hustling to better his life and that of his family, he still remained a victim and subject of the economic and social hardships, which he had witnessed prevailing unabatedly in Accra since his days as a toddler.

Central Accra urban society, in his view as a teenager, displayed a marked inequity between social classes. Rapid urbanization had brought people to the city at a rate that outpaced the growth of the job market and the urban services that they needed to survive comfortably. Most of such immigrants were, therefore, compelled to find places to squat in the popular shantytowns of Ga-Mashie, which exacerbated the problem of homelessness, particularly among children and young teens whose families could not support them.

There were many families from different ethnic groups residing in Jamestown and Ussher Town, who had come to live there because they wanted jobs in Accra. Most of them were poor and had no proper housing and their children had to live virtually on the street. Access to education, medical care, and services such as water supply, sewerage, and electricity was difficult for such people. A substantial gap therefore existed between the rich and poor in the capital but from my experiences the urban problems, poverty and lack of access to clean water, electricity, health care, and schooling was more acute in the environs of Jamestown and Ussher Town.⁸⁵

Although the centre of Accra contained major banks, large department stores, Cocoa Marketing Board headquarters and an area, which is concentrated with government administration sectors and ministries, Champ,

⁸⁵ Azumah Nelson, personal interview, *op. cit.*

as he had witnessed in his boyhood days, continued to see the poverty around him. From his childhood days to the pubescent ages of sixteen and seventeen, he perceived and appreciated that most people still lived in the centres of social deprivation and discontent and shanty vicinities, which had grown up around the edges of the city, near the *nshonna* of Jamestown and Ussher Town. Like most homes in his Timber Market, homes in the shantytowns were crowded and cramped. Except a few colonial storey structures of stone and cement concrete and those that belonged to colonial African elite (*Owula*) of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, many homes were huts built of mud and compound houses made from any materials that their owners could find. Many of the structures had portions made of sticks, palm fronds woven into screens, sheets of plywood and corrugated iron, concrete breezeblocks and discarded packing cases obtained from warehouses and from the Tema harbour. The shantytowns of Jamestown and Ussher Town existed like mazes with muddy lanes and narrow streets called *longo longo* where goats, chickens, and dogs rummaged for scraps. Champ in his teenage days used to make a comparison between what he saw around him in his immediate environment and something different he saw in other parts of the expanding urban spaces of Accra, where plush residential areas existed.⁸⁶

Having the chance to stroll, hawk or move at times with his friends to other parts of the ever sprawling administrative and economic capital city, particularly to the northern and western parts, he saw areas, which evidently must have accommodated high-income and wealthy families. Such areas were filled with structures such as two storey houses and some elegant colonial

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

houses, set on stilts, with wide verandahs, which were normally surrounded by tree-filled gardens and bougainvillea-covered walls. Many of the middle range houses (mainly occupied by government workers) were corrugated roof concrete bungalows, surrounded by scrubby grass and hedged by trees. He also kept images of concrete international schools and private schools, where the children of “rich” people, civil servants and expatriates attended school in comfort, and blocks of flats which the government had put up to house the expanding population of civil servants in Accra.

These mental images, which he had carried with him right up to the pubescent age, must have naturally encouraged him to look seriously at boxing as a career with which he could accumulate financial wealth to transform his unpleasant material circumstances and provide comfortable life for himself, family and friends.

The mental representations he carried about the squalid conditions, which he and relatives had endured since childhood in the shanty quarters of Ga-Mashie, which manifested dusty roads, hemmed within stinking open sewage gutters, which contoured and radiated within Central Accra’s environs, and open-fronted shacks and stands selling everything from cooked food, used clothes (popularly known in Ghana as *ofos* or *obroni wawu*), electrical goods, or newspapers, revealed to him a situation of acute economic deficiency. His reflection about his childhood days often showed him painful scenes of his toddler days. Scenes of his mother wearing a huge straw hat, selling fish in the market and sweating in the heat of the sun with him either strapped to her back or playing next to her wares, and of other labouring women who, with their crying babies, habitually sat at roadsides and in crampy unhygienic sections of

markets like Salaga and Makola⁸⁷ selling assorted fruits, foodstuff, and fish, were common.

He reflected about his childhood days in a community where most children slept very little and woke up around three o'clock in the morning to engage in a number of ventures like helping their fisherfolks to earn some money, selling newspapers and then going to school, mostly late and normally too tired to easily assimilate what was taught in the classroom.

Such reflections were disturbing and often made him have spells of melancholy. However, as he struggled with such psychological pressures, his burgeoning relationship and occupation with boxing and exercises helped to relieve him. They availed a psychological escape route for him to become lively.

Between the ages of sixteen and eighteen, he accommodated the activity of boxing and its attendant exercises as an occupation with a cathartic effect. It served the immediate need of purifying his thoughts and, serving as a temporary distraction, diverted his stressful thoughts and freed him from the painful depression, induced by the mental and visual pictures of prevailing poverty in his locality.

Secondly, that Ga-Mashie cultural heritage and Western colonial legacy, which existed as a popular socio-economic activity within his community, had become the preferred tool which he hoped to employ in the improvement of his social stature and, by extension, other needy people. By

⁸⁷ This is the biggest market in Accra and one of the vibrant commercial spots in Ghana's capital city. The British built it *circa* 1922. However, it has seen destruction and rebuilding over the years. For example, suspected as a place where essential commodities had been hoarded, it was destroyed by soldiers during the regime of the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (A.F.R.C.), which took political power in 1979.

this period, when he had abandoned school, he did not consider tailoring as a profession for which he was “cut out.” Apparently, his father pursued it but the economic rewards could not bring remarkable economic liberation to his family. Champ did not think of it as a profession that could help him acquire enough wealth to catapult him from the deplorable socio-economic quagmire he continued to endure. A diversion from the tailoring tradition in his family to chart a path, ultimately aimed for professionalism in the “art of bruising” – boxing, had become a clear necessity to him.

Familiar with the glorious stories of past international and local champions like Roy Ankrah, Floyd Klutei Robertson, Attuquaye (Atukwei) Clottey, Muhammed Ali, and Joe Frazier, Champ was aware that such a path, if well constructed and followed, could be socio-economically rewarding and personally satisfying. Like most boxing-oriented youth around him, he psychologically held the impression that boxing could improve social positions and recognition, and accentuate the Ga-Mashie symbolism of masculinity, a strong body capable of fighting, which epitomised the major cherished character of the culturally venerated *Tabilo* (warrior). “I thought that if I excelled in that career, I shall be able to take my parents and siblings to a better location in Accra where they could access better social amenities and live a decent life.”⁸⁸

He first had to seriously sharpen his skills at the amateur level. By the ages of sixteen to seventeen he was an amateur, with a strong mental commitment to the sport, and was certain of a future as a professional. About two years before the age of sixteen, because of his impression that he was a

⁸⁸ Azumah Nelson, personal interview, *op. cit.*

strong street fighter, Champ believed that he could beat almost any one of his size and age. “Yes, he was good at using his fist and could also wrestle. He beat most of his opponents in street engagements.”⁸⁹ Consequently, Champ divulged that:

My craving to be a boxer, after the boxing match incident which involved the “boy bully,” continued and that did send me to watch the training sessions of boxers at gyms in Jamestown and Ussher Town. However, an incident, which happened one day helped to provide the opportunity for me to make rapid strides toward getting a real encounter in a boxing ring.⁹⁰

That opportunity was going to test his untrained and natural pugilistic skills and tactics, which meant that he would not have the chance to employ his street-acquired techniques of combining wild punches and wrestling, like the Greek *pankration*, against the opponent.

It happened one day. He met one young boxer, who was probably just getting to the age of ten years, and his trainer who had come to the immediate environs around “my house at Timber Market to pick up a pair of boxing boots from a cobbler.”⁹¹ As Champ saw the pride and joy exhibited by the young boxer when he took the boots and the show of care and respect from the coach to him, coupled with the apparent existence of camaraderie between the couple, Champ, wishing it were him, became jealous. He mustered courage and went to the two persons. According to him he, in a sarcastic manner asked, the coach that:

Is this boy a boxer too? . . . That was an indirect challenge to the boy as it subtly insinuated and suggested that such a boy could not be a boxer. The coach looked at me and asked me why I asked such a question. I responded that such a boy could

⁸⁹ Frank Kwaku Dua Bannerman (Franko Nero), 47 years old, childhood friend of Azumah Nelson, personal interview at Timber Market, Accra, September 9, 2009.

⁹⁰ Azumah Nelson, personal interview, *op.cit.*

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

not be a boxer. I then declared that: "I can beat this boy in the ring" The coach then, annoyed [by my audacity] and possibly thinking that I was arrogant, decided to give me the opportunity to engage his protégé in a boxing encounter. I believe that he knew I would be beaten and wanted to use that to teach me a lesson so that I would know that boxing was not just about the exhibition of [brute] strength and force, but fundamentally the [harmonious] blend of physical strength, [deployment of] tact, strategy and mental discipline.⁹²

The coach's decision to give that engagement brought smiles to the face of the young challenger. Together with his friends, who supported him, Champ followed the pair to a boxing training arena at Agbado to box. He was mesmerised by the young boxer with his nimble footed shuffling and dexterous combination of quick ducks and precise punches. "Employing such techniques of the craft he beat me. I just could not believe it."⁹³ It was then that he became very much interested in the secrets of the art and felt that it was not just a matter of brute force but that right coaching, the use of tactics, skill, and mental and emotional discipline were necessary for fighting.

I therefore affirmed my interest to learn that [noble art of] self-defence. I went to my father, spoke to him about the incident and mentioned to him that I wanted to learn the art. He consented and gave me his blessing for me to learn the art. From that time, his support remained intact and through the early days of my career and period when I made great strides in my career, I considered him as my number one supporter until he died.⁹⁴

Eventually, when he became an amateur his tailor father was the one who, showing his love, usually sewed his boxing trunks and labelled them with inscriptions like "Mighty Warrior" and "Terrible Terror," which, as

⁹² *Ibid.*

⁹³ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

nicknames for Azumah Nelson, were embossed at the front of such homemade trunks.⁹⁵

Facing taunts from his friends and the pains of defeat, he mentally and audibly vowed to avenge his defeat. He also wished that the trainer would take him on as a protégé. He asked the trainer to take him as a trainee but his arrogance, which he had earlier displayed ignorantly, cost him. The trainer did not agree to take him up. Determined to make a come back, possibly to impress the trainer to take him as a protégé, he started to train secretly and continued to frequently visit zones of boxing trainings to watch and learn the moves and styles of trainees and trainers. At home and on the beach, he secretly rehearsed such copied assets. “Because I did not have a girlfriend, smoke and drink alcohol, I had the time and energy to train and to hone my skills.”⁹⁶ He kept going back to the training enclaves in Bukom where he, wanting to receive formal training, made numerous efforts to be admitted into the different boxing gyms there.

As Champ attended school intermittently, continued to work by selling sugar cane, mangoes and plantain to bring money to support his family, and made sometime to be with his friends, he also found space in his free times to visit gyms. This persuasion and attitude earned him a reputation as a “mini gym-lizard” and notable “peeping tom” at many of the gyms of boxing clubs in Accra, particularly in Bukom, Swalaba and Agbado.

His persistent visits as a “gym lizard” and determination eventually paid off as he managed to convince the coach, whom he had earlier angered

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

with his arrogance, that he was truly interested in boxing and wanted to take it seriously. It was during this time when he was probably about fourteen or fifteen that he was accepted by that one boxing trainer who had a Liberian or Sierra Leonean background. His name was Obele Wale Thom and was a popular figure in Jamestown and Ussher Town localities, for he had started to cultivate a name for himself as a burgeoning coach in the Agbado area. He, without premises for a gym, was like an itinerant coach. He had had a stint with the craft as a boxer in Accra. Once out of active participation he turned into a self-styled trainer and became a known social commentator on the sport and easily talked to people, especially youngsters and boxing enthusiasts, as a free consultant on the sport in the local Ussher Town and its adjoining vicinities.

Champ's friends, who saw less of him because of his secret trainings, realised that he had greatly developed a fierce fighting spirit and true love for the craft of boxing, and advised and encouraged him to learn from Obele Wale Thom, regardless of his reputation as a self-styled trainer. In any case, he had nothing to lose since none of the so-called renowned trainers had accepted him as a trainee. Champ, during this period of search and affiliation to Obele Wale Thom, struck acquaintance and also maintained an informal mentor-protégé relationship with another boxing coach by the name Atuquaye Clottey, who would eventually play an important role in Champ's further development as a boxer.

Obele Wale Thom had for himself other disciples namely Speed Addy, the young boxer who defeated Champ earlier in his first real boxing engagement, Ogah, who also had familial connections to Nigeria, and Tee Tei.

Champ joined that camp and through a shared compulsive interest in boxing he and the other trainees became friends. Because it did not have a permanent gym and existed as an *ad hoc* and informal construction of trainees, the group trained and sparred at unrestricted spots on the beach at Ussher Town and at another spot at Agbado. When Champ became an electrician-apprentice, he combined apprenticeship with the boxing lessons, which he had with his three mates. Furthermore, as a way of popularising his boxer persona, developing his skills and record as an amateur, and making extra money to support himself and family, he also partook and excelled in some local boxing tournaments, especially those which were organised by some local boxing enthusiasts such as Nii Ajenkwa, Kojo Sardine, and Kofi Badu at the Blue Lagoon Hotel in the community of Sakaman near Odorkor, Accra.

In Search of a National Bóxing Laurel: From the Prisons Service Boxing Team to the Black Bombers – c. 1974 to 1978

As Champ went about his labours of taking his boxing lessons and fighting, he struggled to represent Greater Accra in boxing at National Sports Festivals. But on that trajectory, it became difficult for him to find a team which was ready to engage him in national tournaments and that frustrated him. “All the participating teams, like the Greater Accra Police and Armed Forces, rejected me because I was small,” he lamented.⁹⁷ For example in 1974, he was dropped from the Greater Accra team because the authorities said he was too small in size to fight in such a tough tournament. Determined and frustrated, Champ approached one Mr. Alhassan and other officials who were

⁹⁷ “Azumah – A Real King of the Ring,” *Graphic Sports* (hereafter *G.S.*), Accra, March 3-9, 1992, p. 4.

in-charge of Prisons Service Sports, to request that they include him in the service's team.

Unfortunately he met the same response: "you are too small and too young." After persistent begging and support from Joseph Adama Mensah, who was the captain of the team, Champ who was a youthful flyweight, was asked to prove himself worthy of joining the team in a contest. He beat Peter Mensah, a better known favourite of the team and, later, through a T.K.O., added as his next victim Ben Carl Lokko, who was a soldier and a national star who bragged that Champ was too tiny. He won a Gold medal for the team at the festival.⁹⁸

After that breakthrough, he became recognised as a service sportsman for about four years. Within that period he, in 1977, moved to the bantamweight division and, as a result of weight growth, proceeded to the featherweight division the following year.⁹⁹

When Champ was about eighteen, his ideas to enter professionalism had further become sharper, and one historical development within the boxing tradition of Ghana contributed to that. Champ, who had been training with the three friends and trainer, was highly motivated when D.K. Poison in 1975 became a world champion. "D.K.", who stayed for sometime in Australia and U.S.A., returned to Ghana in the early 1970s to train hard with other boxers in Ga-Mashie and ultimately snatched a world title through that effort. From about 1973 and 1974 D.K. practiced at Agbado with a highly respected coach of the time, Attuquaye Clotey, who, after having a stint in Kumasi, had

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

moved to Ga-Mashie to establish the boxing club called Akotoku Academy. His trainee D.K., because of his fine skills and record of victories, was a well known boxer in the boxing fraternity in Accra, especially in the Agbado and Mudor areas of Ga-Mashie. His record revealed a boxer who snatched the national featherweight title in 1969, became twelfth contender to the Commonwealth title, and snatched the African Boxing Union (A.B.U.) title in 1974. When he returned to Ghana to train for the world title, he became a great inspiration to most young boxers in Ga-Mashie, especially Champ.

Whilst training at Akotoku Academy, D.K. used to spar occasionally with some up and coming boxers. Champ, who was then budding as an amateur boxer, had the opportunity to spar with him from time to time at boxing centres like the Community Centre boxing gym. Through such an association the amateur took the opportunity to learn, from the professional, some advance moves, and to boost his level of confidence and sharpen his focus on boxing.

D.K. who with the help of the Ghana government, and support from top government officials like Lt.Col M.P. Simpe-Asante, who was the Commissioner of Sports, and top boxing officials like J.E.S. de-Graft Hayford and Justice D.F. Annan, managed to get Attuquaye (Atukwei) Clottey, a former national welterweight champion, as coach, was able to have an international engagement in 1975. Under the management aegis of the Ghana Boxing Promotion Syndicate [Council] (the G.B.P.S.), which was a consortium of boxing gurus put together,¹⁰⁰ under the chairmanship of D.F.

¹⁰⁰ Ebo Quansah, "Sports Have Served the Nation Well," National Commission of Culture, Cultural News, March 6, 2007, <http://www.ghanaculture.gov.gh/index1.php?linkid=65&archiveid=1114&page=1&adate=06/03/2007> (Information was retrieved 06/03/2007)

Annan, by the S.M.C., D.K. fought the W.B.C. featherweight champion on the morning of September 21. He defeated Ruben Olivares and became the first Ghanaian boxer to win a world title. Instantly, he became a national hero. The Head of State, I.K. Acheampong, was very happy with his accomplishment. The donation of a Teshie-Nungua Estates house, in Accra, to D.K., by the Acheampong government was an indication of the nation's appreciation of the pride he brought to it by being its first world champion.¹⁰¹ Generally, the people and government of Ghana hailed the accomplishment, but more especially, the feat made the boxing enthusiasts of Ga-Mashie very proud. Surely, all the up and coming boxers in Ghana and Ga-Mashie for that matter, including Champ, were naturally going to be inspired by the feat of D.K.

Attuquaye Clottey, one of the busiest boxers in his generation who actually “sold” the name of Ghana in his adopted base in Australia¹⁰² and upon retirement came back to Ghana, was the one who guided D.K. to become the first Ghanaian world-boxing champion. For accomplishing that feat, Attuquaye Clottey’s status as a national boxing hero enlarged and he, quickly, became a much sought after coach in Ga-Mashie and Ghana as a whole. His academy became very popular and drew many students.

Inspired by the victory Champ, who had been abreast with the commentary proceedings of that encounter which made D.K. a champion, became very determined to excel in boxing and was motivated to follow the

ed on January 16, 2011).

¹⁰¹ See article “A Hero’s Anguish,” *Modernghana.com*, Sports News, Source: *Daily Graphic* (hereafter *D.G.*), August 20, 2002, online posting, <http://www.modernghana.com/sports/25158/2/a-heros-anguish.html> (Information was retrieved on August 27, 2010).

¹⁰² See “Ken Bediako’s Sports Hall of Fame,” September 30, 2008, online document on <http://www.kenbediako.com/blog1.php/2008/09/30/ken-bediako-s-sports-hall-of-fame>. (Information was retrieved on August 27, 2010).

example of D.K. Meanwhile, Champ kept his association with his coach Obale Wale Thom, but he left and strongly immersed himself in Akotoku Academy, which, in line with popular view at the time, was considered as one of the best gyms in Accra, and the country as a whole. Other gyms that were respected in Accra at that time included Indigo Boxing Gym, run by Awudu Kongoro, in Lagos Town, now Accra New Town, Royal Castle Club in Kokomlemle, and Attoh Quarshie Boxing Gym in Jamestown.

By joining the Akotoku gym he hoped that he would learn a lot and make significant strides in his chosen career. Still an amateur, he received instructions from Attuquaye Clottey and within a short time had become one of the best boxing students of that gym. Inter-gym competitions saw him performing admirably and, in Bukom and its neighbouring environs, where he sparred and competed, his impressive winnings made him to appear as a student with a promising future.

Circa 1978, when he was about twenty years old, he had managed at that time, to make an appearance within the country's national amateur boxing team. In that capacity, he started to blaze an impressive track in local and international engagements. He had taken a lot of inspiration from D.K.,¹⁰³ who kept the title until he lost it on November 6, 1976 to Utah-born challenger Danny "Little Red" Lopez in a gruelling fifteen round fight, which took place in front of a crowd of about 122,000 spectators at the Accra Sports Stadium in Ghana.

¹⁰³ K.T. Vieta, *The Flagbearers of Ghana: Profiles of One Hundred distinguished Ghanaians*. Accra: EMC Publications, 1990, p. 564.

This loss disappointed many Ghanaian fans and, for Champ, it was devastating. His icon had been beaten and dishonoured. However, the loss, which had taken a boxing laurel of glory from Ghana, was in itself inspirational for Champ. Champ wished he could win it back for the country, and as he wished for that glory he determined that if he had any opportunity to break through to the professional scene he would work hard to reinstate that glory. This he successfully did in 1984.

Whilst Champ trained at the Academy and sparred with other boxers at Bukom, he, spent most of his time of residence at Cassava House with his mother, siblings and other relatives. Intermittently, he also spent some time at Mamprobi. He also maintained his job with the Prisons Service. Although the financial reward from that job was insufficient, his association with the service was beneficial in another way. It provided a ready platform for him to have sparring sessions, thereby sharpening his skill, with some boxers of that agency as well as others from national security agencies like the army and police. Such engagements often took place at one beachfront training venue in Accra - the Army Volunteer Force gym, where many of such officers frequented to train. It was in proximity to the Old Polo grounds, presently domiciling Kwame Nkrumah Musoleum, where Nkrumah, on March 5, 1957, made his historic, "At long last Ghana is Free Forever. . . ." declaration of independence.

There he developed on his skills, some of which he had extracted from the Academy. He also carved a reputation for himself as a pound for pound boxer, and that attracted to him friends, admirers and acquaintances – junior and senior officers, from the agencies. From this period, he, through the

uneasy dynamics and contours of amateurship, charted a path in his chosen discipline, which eventually would pave the way for a distinguished future career of professionalism and produce a boxing legend in him.

His days as a budding amateur, who was respected within Bukom and the circle of the *crème de la crème* of featherweights in Akotoku Academy, were to be spiced with some interesting events which aided his progression to professionalism. It was his strong reputation as good fighter, and connection with the Prisons Service, for which he was a boxing ambassador, as well as his link to the well-known Academy, which had been one source from where a significant number of human resource and talent for the national boxing team had been selected, that catapulted him into the ranks of the Black Bombers.

His record was 50-2 as an amateur and he clinched a Commonwealth championship as a featherweight. This gradual, yet steady, progress fulfilled for him one of the dreams of most of the boxing youngsters in Ga-Mashie – travelling abroad for international exposure and social prestige. As an amateur fighter and member of the national team, under coaches like Attuquaye Clottey and Armstrong Agbana, he had the opportunity to embark on national assignments, which took him to places like Algeria, Canada, and New York.

As he travelled to these localities, he could not help but compare the seemingly technological advancement and economic affluence that he perceived in those places with the situation that existed in his Ga-Mashie. Such a comparison which revealed the huge disparity that existed between the economic situations of the two localities shocked him. His Ga-Mashie was sadly economically deficient. This knowledge and shock, however, “urged me on or inspired me to focus and work hard to ultimately engage in the glittering

rings of professionalism in such countries to accumulate wealth to effect a positive change in his life.”¹⁰⁴ Nevertheless, he, within such international locales, naturally kept a calm demeanour as he helplessly reflected on the obvious socio-economic gap that existed between those places and his indigenous Ghana, and especially his poverty stricken people and environments of Jamestown and Ussher Town.

Conditioned by my poor background, I was impressed and amazed by the high level of infrastructure and opportunities which existed in such places. The gyms and facilities for their sport persons and boxers were advance and strongly in place. Thinking about where I was coming from, I however became shocked at the huge difference. Saddened by what I perceived, my mind naturally followed my strong determination to improve my lot through professional boxing. Through such exposures, it dawned on me strongly, or, should I say, my ever-present desire to help people, particularly the underprivileged, if I someday became economically liberated, increased.¹⁰⁵

Moreover,

I gradually conceived and shaped the thought that I would in future establish an institution or put in place a mechanism, i.e. open outfits to provide jobs to people and an institution to train underprivileged but talented youth to acquire formal education and also improve on their sporting talents.¹⁰⁶

In his Christain-inclined and humanistic state of mind, he built the philosophy that he had to love people and use part of the material blessings that he receive from “God” to the beneficial use of others. According to him, he thought that:

God loved us and that is why He sacrificed His son as atonement for our sins. I thought that if that son died for us then who are we, or who am I dying for? I realised that it was important for me to [metaphorically] die for, that is help,

¹⁰⁴ Azumah Nelson, personal interview, *op.cit.*

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*

others. I thought that if I became economically affluent someday I would “die” for others.¹⁰⁷

Often making him depressed, this feeling of empathy for needy people stayed with him during his days with the Black Bombers. “You could even see it on my face,” he recalled.

I remember that on one international assignment, during my amateur days, my contemplative appearance had been noticed by other contestants. Whilst we were all having lunch in a big cafeteria, one competitor jovially commented on my grim face which had been devoid of a smile throughout the period we stayed together. He brought out money and told the assembly that he would give me that money if he saw smile. It was a joke. I smiled and everyone in the hall laughed . . .¹⁰⁸

He took the money and added it to his living allowances and purchased some gifts for his family and friends back home.

I always made sure to get some gifts for my relatives in Accra. To me, such little acts of generosity were fulfilling. . . . On one occasion, I did not get anything for myself but I got some things for other people in Ghana. The coach, I think it was Agbana, noticed it and asked me the reason. I told him I did not need anything. I told him that I was happy because I had been able to get gifts to send home to my relatives. Unfortunately, on that occasion my baggage containing those items got missing in transit.¹⁰⁹

It was in 1978 that he fought, as featherweight representative for Ghana at the All Africa Games in Algeria (1978 Jeux Africains Alger). The games which took place in Algiers lasted from July 13 to July 28. Champ defeated Modest Napunyi from Kenya by points and snatched a Gold medal for Ghana. This victory brought a lot of joy to his family, friends and his neighbourhood.

We [his community, friends and relatives] stayed up all night and jubilated because of his accomplishment. He had brought

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

happiness to his people and had again revived that Ga-Mashie spirit of boxing accomplishment which had seemingly faded after D.K. was beaten.¹¹⁰

Champ, who at this time was better known by the accolade "Terrible Terror," had become a hero with an international boxing reputation. This amateur feat was psychologically gratifying but not financially rewarding.

The amateur level did not pay well. My Algerian achievement only gave me some money to buy some shoes and gloves for my self and a few gifts for my parents, siblings and friends. I was glad, however, that I had successfully accomplished an international assignment, which could brighten my chances of getting a professional deal.¹¹¹

In addition to his personal fulfilments, he also had managed, through boxing to go *Abrokyiri* or overseas¹¹² to bring international laurel to the glorification of himself, family, Ga-Mashie and the country as a whole. He had fulfilled the indigenous task and dream of most Ga-Mashie youth of standing fast and bringing fame to Ga-Mashie.

My accomplishment and its related and immediate benefits however inspired me to train more and to strive for bigger trophies within the amateur division. . . . Going prof[essional] was in sight, but I must say that it is not something that just comes on a silver platter. Although I craved it, I knew that it was not an area that I could just jump into.¹¹³

In order to join the professional class one needs a promoter to promote him.

I did not have it [promoter] and so I decided to fight well and be disciplined, at the amateur level, since I knew and trusted that those principles, with the help of God, would

¹¹⁰ Frank Kwaku Dua Bannerman (Franko Nero), personal interview, *op. cit.*

¹¹¹ Azumah Nelson, personal interview, *op. cit.*

¹¹² The Ga word *Abrokyiri* can also be construed as abroad, particularly Europe and the U.S.A. Within the colonial period, it was largely used to designate England or the United Kingdom as a whole.

¹¹³ Azumah Nelson, personal interview, *op. cit.*

get me to be noticed by a promoter who would push me to make a mark in the professional arena.¹¹⁴

The trophy he won in Algeria, which was inspirational, was presented to the National Sports Council and Champ went back to work as a casual with the Prisons Service. Combining work and serious training he was again, through the instrumentality of Attuquaye Clottey, selected to join the Black Bombers¹¹⁵ to participate in the Commonwealth games, which took place from August 3 to August 12, at Edmonton, Alberta, in Canada. Again, with determination and a display of sheer energy and skills, he brought glory to the country at that international level. He knocked out Siaso Poto from Samoa in round two, and defeated Guy Boutin from Canada and John Sichula from Zambia by points. In the featherweight category he managed to take the top trophy – Gold. He was followed by John Sichula who took Silver, and then by Guy Boutin and, the English, Maurice O'Brien who took Bronze. The Gold medal which he took was the only Gold medal obtained, by Ghana at the games.

Interestingly, the year of 1978 was benevolent to his amateur career, as he made impressively progressive strides and improved his record of winnings. His work with the Prisons Service, which acquainted him with the security service and some leading officers in the Ghanaian security agencies, like Colonel John Sharpe,¹¹⁶ of the army, and subsequently Amarkai

¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵ Others boxers who were selected were Kid Sulaimana (48kg), Peter Mensah (51kg), Anthony Abacheng (54kg), Akwei Addo (60kg), Baba Sumaila (63,5kg), Moro Tahiru (67kg), Muhammad Coffie (71kg), Kpakpo Allotey (75kg), and Joseph Adama Mensah (81kg).

¹¹⁶ This boxing enthusiast contributed to Ghanaian boxing during the 1980s. With a rich experience in boxing he in 1987 became a member of an 11-member planning and administrative committee, set up for the reconstituted G.A.B.A. Chaired by Mr. S.V. Akyianu, acting Chief Fire Officer of the National Fire Service, it was inaugurated on January 8, 1988.

Amarteifio, a lawyer in the army¹¹⁷ who were interested and active in the promotion of Ghanaian amateur and professional boxing and boxing in the armed forces, provided him another opportunity to exhibit his talent at a different international contest. Shortly after Commonwealth Games in Canada, Nigeria, in 1978, became the venue for another international sports competition. The city of Lagos was to host the World Championship for military boxing, and Ghana was invited to participate. As a sportsperson Champ was asked and selected by the local organisers, even though he was not a soldier, to undertake the military assignment of representing Ghana in the area of boxing in that competition. The boxing discipline was going to attract many fierce fighters and in the category of featherweight the fierce and boastful Tony Santana of the U.S.A., was expected to participate. Realising and being aware of Champ's capabilities in the featherweight category, the organising body division decided to select him to the festival to contend celebrities like Santana. Although he was not a soldier, he was selected and deemed qualified because he worked with the Prison Service, which was and is considered, in Ghana, as a branch of the security services, which include sections like the army, police, air force and navy. Two other Ghanaian combatants namely Joseph Adama Mensah and Mama Muhammad were also selected to join Champ. Together with a contingent of military persons, the

(See "Ringcraft: Good Year for Ghana Boxing," *People's Daily Graphic* (hereafter *P.D.G.*), December 30, 1987, p. 7).

¹¹⁷ Amarkai Amarteifio, 67 years old, personal interview at his office, Ayawaso Chambers, Osu R.E., Accra. December 15, 2010. Amarteifio was once the Secretary for Youth and Sports in the Provisional National Defense Council government (hereafter P.N.D.C.) in Ghana. He is a boxing enthusiast, personal friend of Azumah Nelson, Barrister-at-Law, and a Diplomat (The Consul General of Sweden, and the Dean of the Honorary Consular Corps of Ghana).

trio went to Lagos, Nigeria. Ultimately the trio won an impressive three Gold medals for Ghana at the Championship.

During the competition Champ had a series of tension-filled fights and contended Santana whom he beat by points to diffuse the Santana myth and to take the top trophy in the featherweight division. He had succeeded in not disappointing those military minds who sent him there, and his exploits in Nigeria remained noted not only within the military but in his Ga-Mashie as well.

Although he was solidly famous in Ga-Mashie and known by the likes of boxing commentators and sport journalist in the country, Champ's fame and popularity as an amateur champion, compared to what he came to acquire from December 1979 as a professional, was minimal within the national frame or context. He was a national hero but not a much-celebrated one, possibly because the masses, contending certain internal socio-economic and political pressures at that period, were immediately not very much in tune with the amateur accomplishments of sport personalities like him.

The country was under a military-controlled government called the Supreme Military Council II (S.M.C. II), which as a *junta* had evolved from its predecessor - the Supreme Military Council I (S.M.C. I), on July 5, 1978. Under the leadership of General Frederick W.K. Akuffo, who supplanted General I.K. Acheampong, the country clearly reeled under a period of economic hardship. There was a general shortage of consumables, and absence of drugs and other essential medical supplies in hospitals. Popular perception of the government was not very kind and popular opinion, particularly animated by discontented workers, was for the government to return the

country to civilian rule. There were industrial strikes in parts of the country, particularly in the cities, where it was clear that workers were dissatisfied with the economic policies of the government. Such strikes and demonstrations of dissatisfaction heightened political tension in the country. Taking advantage of the economic problems and shortage of consumables, some corrupt businesspersons and traders started to hoard and sell goods at exorbitant prices. This unfair, but common, practice at the time generally came to be called *Kalabule*.¹¹⁸

These social problems and wave of popular discontent, which could not be overlooked, attracted local and international attention. Within the country people naturally had become very much interested in knowing how such problems were going to be resolved by the nation. Reasonably such a situation largely attracted the general and wider attention of the masses. In such an environment it was natural that the masses, interested in knowing how the clear socio-economic problems facing them would be resolved, will rather pay less attention to knowing and following, with enthusiasm, the successes of an amateur boxer in Algiers and Edmonton.

Although the accomplishment invited and intensified his popularity within the indigenous folks at Bukom, Adedemkpo and Timber Market, the referenced crucial socio-economic and political conditions of national magnitude and concern must have contributed to directing much popular attention from him, making him to stay virtually unpopular in Ghana. In other

¹¹⁸ This term is of West African origin. It is popularly used in Ghana to connote the illegal buying and selling of controlled goods. It can also refer to organised and premeditated con-artistry and/or unconcealed trickery made for personal economic gain.

words that situation was why Champ's accomplishments and personality went virtually uncelebrated and unnoticed within the nation context.

Champ's exploits with the security agency and the Black Bombers and his tale of victory at the amateur level, which showed a prospective good future for his career and Ghana boxing, attracted the recognition of a high profiled Ghanaian - Flight Lieutenant Jerry John Rawlings. Rawlings became the Head of State of the country on June 4, 1979. Rawlings, who was a young officer pilot of the Ghana Air Force, had come to be the Head of State of the Republic through a military *coup d'état*, which he and other accomplices like Majors Boakye Djan, Mensah Poku, Mensah Gbedemah and other junior rank members the armed forces, designated as "revolution." The putschists claimed that it was a "revolution" to clean the country of the scourge of corruption, which had been perpetuated by an elitist group of insensitive army officers and their civilian auxiliaries. This military *junta*, which became known as Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (A.F.R.C.) came to power through the mutiny which occurred on June 4, 1979 and overthrew the S.M.C. II.

The A.F.R.C. wielded political authority for some time and having promised the masses that it was committed to the idea of ensuring that there was a reduction in economic difficulties on citizens it reduced prices of goods by using soldiers to ensure that goods, held by *Kalabule*, were sold at controlled prices.

The putsch and its radical actions were generally welcome by the masses, particularly the workers and students in the urban centres, who were dissatisfied with the perceived or actual corruption of the deposed government. Through what it termed "house-cleaning exercise," the *junta* tried

several senior military officers before special military courts and those found guilty of corruption were sentenced to serve prison terms or execution by fusillading (firing squad). The “masses” watched and cheered the *junta* on as it summarily liquidated all of Ghana’s previous military rulers, whom it considered the bastions of corruption. The A.F.R.C. helped the people to “take their pound of flesh.” As a result of these “house cleaning” and “repair the society” exercises, popular resentment, went down for some time and people generally started to look into the future with energised hopes.

After staying in office for about three months, the stratocracy later handed political power to the democratically elected and civil constitution-backed government under Hilla Limann and his Peoples National Party (P.N.P.). Having inherited a weak national economy from the A.F.R.C., the P.N.P. was at once faced with lingering economic problems. Consequently, President Limann attempted to steer the country through those difficult economic straits, weathering, in that attempt to bring some positive economic transformations, strident and occasionally unfair criticism from nearly all quarters.

Assured of better days ahead, and living with the hope that socio-economic conditions would improve under a civilian government which came to power, the masses, after the seemingly messianic anti-corruption exercise of the A.F.R.C., must have found it relatively easy to make the time and leisure to think about sports. They could follow and appreciate news about boxing accomplishments.

The A.F.R.C.-inspired transformation in the political configuration of the country and the P.N.P.-led quasi-changes in the economy and socio-

political situation of the people definitely brought the minds of people/masses back to other extra economic and political activities like sports. Notably, Champ's accomplishments, gradually but strikingly, started to emerge to the notice, appreciation and recognition of the wider popular, within that environment of seeming national socio-economic and political alterations.

As a point of interest, Champ and other boxers of the national team, who trained with some of the military personnel in Accra, met Rawlings. Rawlings valued sports and engagingly pursued disciplines like horse riding, shooting, scuba diving, soccer, martial arts and boxing. Before he staged the coup in 1979, Rawlings had in fact been the officer in charge of the Air Force Boxing Team.¹¹⁹ "Because of my connections with the military, there were occasions that I had the chance to meet Rawlings at training sessions."¹²⁰ As it turned out Rawlings's own interest in sports including boxing, prepared him to appreciate the sporting side of Champ. His interest in the sportsmanship of Champ grew from thenceforth.

Champ recounted that for some time he (Rawlings) personally took strong interest in the national team and gave some managerial support to it. He recalled selfless acts of generosity from Rawlings to the national team. "Rawlings, using money from his pocket, at a period provided meals for the team, and there were times that he in our company, when we were camped, helped to clean our rooms."¹²¹ Because there was a shared sportsmanship between Champ and the soldier, Rawlings who was also impressed with

¹¹⁹ Nana Ato Dadzie and Kwamena Ahwoi, *Justice Daniel Francis Annan: In the Service of Democracy*, Accra: Institute for Democratic Governance and Sub-Saharan Publishers, 2010, p. 4.

¹²⁰ Azumah Nelson, personal interview, *op.cit.*

¹²¹ *Ibid.* See Zoom Zoom – *The Professor: The career of Azumah Nelson*, D.V.D., *op.cit.*

Champ's fighting abilities tipped him that he would be a recognisable force in the world of professional boxing.¹²² The acquaintance that was struck *circa* 1978/1979 between Rawlings and Champ would avail positive results for the boxer in the near future.

Champ kept a handful of civilian friends at home and his boxing prowess also brought him the recognition and acquaintance of some top pundits and administrators of Ghana boxing. Among his network of key experts was Justice D.K. Annan who "between 1977 and 1978, was the Chairman of the G.B.A.",¹²³ and whose special love for and perception of "boxing as an expression of confidence and valour, which were typical Ga[-Mashie] traits" led him to assist Ga-Mashie boxers by building "boxing rings in the Ga-Mashie area and adopting the Attoh Quarshie Boxing Club . . . and provided material and equipment."¹²⁴

Additionally, Champ maintained friendship with other military officers, especially boxing enthusiasts, who continued to encourage him to remain focused on his sport. This, as underscored, included Amarkai Amarteifio who, around the time that Rawlings was responsible for his section's boxing team, was a Major and the officer in charge of the Ghana Armed Forces Boxing Team,¹²⁵ and Sports.¹²⁶ Meanwhile Champ, who had demonstrated through his victories, particularly his victory at the military games, that he could be a prized asset to Ghana army's boxing pursuits, was being advised by some of his army officers to join the army. While Champ

¹²² Azumah Nelson, personal interview, *op. cit.*

¹²³ Nana Ato Dadzie and Kwamena Ahwoi, *op.cit.*

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

must have entertained the idea that if professionalism did not come early, he would have to secure his future in the army, he also considered that a quick diversion into fulltime soldiering would completely end his aspirations and any chance of pursuing a strong professional boxing career.

As he battled this temptation, his acquaintance – Rawlings, continued to acknowledge his prowess in the ring and maintained that with more dedication it would not be long before Champ would become a renowned professional.

Such assurances and my ultimate dream of becoming a world champion, a dream which I had carried with me since my childhood days, made me to discard the idea of abandoning my vision of becoming an occupational boxer.¹²⁷

The two acquaintants were destined to take different paths of life. Champ's path was in the area of boxing and Rawlings's military-oriented one was to take him into national politics. While they faced their destinies, Rawlings planned another mutiny and, on December 31, 1981, with a handful of "hot-headed, youthful, idealistic"¹²⁸ military and civilian collaborators overthrew the government of Hilla Limann.

So, Rawlings organised another coup and succeeded. But within what general national socio-economic scene or prevailing situation did this take place? Well the socio-economic conditions in Ghana from 1979 to 1981, when the *coup d'état* ended the P.N.P. regime, had remained bleak. The Limann administration had to weather unpopularity as the shortage of essential products became endemic. The prices of goods increased by more than 100 percent and black market prices were commonly ten times the officially set

¹²⁷ Azumah Nelson, personal interview, *op.cit.*

¹²⁸ Nana Ato Dadzie and Kwamena Ahwoi, *op.cit.*, p. 1.

prices. The national currency – the cedi – was worth only one-fifteenth of its 1970 value. The depression was most obvious in urban areas where malnutrition and petty crime existed because of unemployment.

The government indirectly acknowledged the depreciation of the national currency in November 1980 by raising the minimum daily wage from four to twelve cedis. Yet, with the price of a loaf of bread ranging up to twenty-five cedis, even the minimum wage was inadequate to cover basic nutritional requirements. The International Monetary Fund (I.M.F.) had been gradually but decisively urging a slow devaluation of the cedi to eighteen percent of its present value, but the government, wary that preceding devaluing of the cedi had quickly been trailed by coups, was justifiably unenthusiastic to accept the instruction of I.M.F. Devaluation was, in any case, only one of the measures demanded by the I.M.F. as a requirement for endorsing a three-year stabilization plan that would involve an emergency standby loan of hundred million in special drawing rights, followed by additional relief loans. The country was also expected to increase domestic interest rates, “liberalize” consumer prices for all but the most essential commodities, curtail public expenditure on social services, and increase the price paid to cocoa farmers for their crops. The decline of the overall cocoa crop, compounded by the smuggling of a substantial portion of the crop into neighbouring CFA Franc zone territories,¹²⁹ adversely affected the base of the country's export economy. The collapse of world cocoa prices, which had

¹²⁹CFA Franc is the currency of eight independent nation states in West Africa. The countries are Benin, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea-Bissau, Mali, Niger, Sénégal, and Togo. The acronym C.F.A. stands for *Communauté financière d'Afrique* or Financial Community of Africa. The currency is issued by the *Banque Centrale des États de l'Afrique de l'Ouest*, (Central Bank of the West African States), located in Dakar, Sénégal, for the members of the West African Economic and Monetary Union.

dropped by more than 70 percent from 1977 and the steady decline of gold production, the second largest exchange earner, to less than two thirds of its 1975 level, played havoc with Ghana's chief sources of foreign exchange. These problems, which were accompanied by deteriorating social infrastructure in various parts of the country, affected the national economy. It was out of such a common matrix that Rawlings's second coup emerged and succeeded.

After taking power, Rawlings suspended the constitution, disbanded Parliament, and banned all political parties. Most Ghanaian masses had looked on him as a national "saviour" ever since, as head of the A.F.R.C., he ruthlessly liquidated several of his corrupt predecessors. This time, Rawlings refrained from violent excesses and even recommended that no harm be done Limann, whose honesty was acknowledged. However, most civilian politicians and party leaders were either arrested outright or ordered to turn themselves in. Their assets and those of their families were immediately frozen. Rawlings announced that "people's tribunals," not subject to review by the regular courts, would be set up to punish past dishonesty and illegal behaviour of ex-government officials, but no wholesale purges ensued, and most of the arrested civilians were gradually released. Rawlings, offering no promise to restore civilian rule, until "the people" had called for that type of regime, established a stratocratic populist-oriented administration called the Provisional National Defense Council (P.N.D.C.). The P.N.D.C. would retain political power and rule the country for about the next eleven years, with Rawlings as the *de jure* Chairman.

Within those years, when Ghana stayed under the collective Executive leadership of the P.N.D.C. Champ emerged as a sensational professional boxer and world (international) champion. Within that period, the Head of State – Rawlings, would meet on several occasions with the boxer, as the latter would happily present to him boxing trophies, which he snatched or defended. The boxing-loving political leader and his government, which in 1983 appointed the sports and boxing “guru” Justice D.F Annan as Special Advisor to the government’s Secretary for Youth and Sports, Major (rtd) Amarkai Amarteifio, and consequently, in 1984, as a full member of the P.N.D.C. and the *de facto* Vice Chairman of the Council, would also take delight in providing national support to the fighter by sending different goodwill and good luck messages to Champ before his bouts. Incidentally, the government would also send the fighter laudatory notes after his fights and at times add government officials to his supporting entourage, when he went out to fight. For example Amarkai Amarteifio was on many occasions by the side of the boxer to give him a psychological boost that the nation was behind him when the boxer fought outside Ghana. He was there when the boxer clinched the featherweight title. D.F. Annan did also travel with the boxer and even jogged and trained with him and gave him pep talk to boost his morale.¹³⁰ Amarteifio disclosed that: “With the three of us – Rawlings, Annan and myself (Amarkai Amarteifio), showing support to him, Azumah Nelson, after he became

¹³⁰ See for example the picture with the annotation: “Justice [D.F.] Annan with Azumah Nelson and Amarkai Amarteifio in Ohio, U.S.A. after training session” in the illustrations of Nana Ato Dadzie and Kwamena Ahwoi, *op.cit.*

champion, had a lot of confidence and primarily considered his fights as important national assignments.”¹³¹

Furthermore, on numerous occasions Rawlings also did have the pleasure of watching his boxer acquaintance and national sporting ambassador defending the flag of Ghana in international boxing engagements. And many times did this political leader and the nation extend congratulatory messages to Champ on his numerous victories.

As a point of interest this acquaintance between the two personalities, which started from the amateur level, has bloomed and currently the two gentlemen still hold great respect for each other.

From 1979, Champ had continued to live at two places – at Mamprobi and Adedemkpo/Timber Market areas. He would take afternoon jogs from Mamprobi to train at Akotoku Academy or Army Volunteer Force gym.

On occasions when I felt I did not want to go back to Mamprobi, I stayed at Timber Market. I was a boxing and sports hero, but economically and financially, I was not. . . . Because of the prevailing economic hardship for me and my family, I continued to undertake menial jobs such as pounding *fufu*¹³² and doing laundry for families for a fee to support myself and family. Clearly my accomplishments had not yet rewarded me financially. . . . I had collected trophies, but they could not take care of my family and me. After having a number of amateur fights, I decided that it would be better to fight for “money and glory,” than for “trophies and glory,” especially since the amount of effort would be about the same.¹³³

¹³¹ Amarkai Amarteifio, 67 years old, personal interview at his office, Ayawaso Chambers, Osu R.E., Accra. December 15, 2010.

¹³² Fufu (also foofoo, fufou), is a staple food of West and Central Africa. It is a thick paste usually made by boiling starchy roots or tubers in water and pounding with a wooden pestle in a mortar until the desired consistency is reached and served and eaten along with soup. In West Africa, fufu is usually made from cassava, yams, and sometimes combined with cocoyam, plantains, or maize. In Ghana, fufu is mostly made from boiled cassava and unripe plantain beaten together, as well as from cocoyam.

¹³³ Azumah Nelson, personal interview, *op.cit.*

He had beaten almost everyone in his weight division and wanted to move on to fight a professional boxer and challenge a champion. Now a striking and athletic young man of twenty-one years old, very well carved in muscle formation and sinewy at the same time, Champ who possessed a height of about 5 feet and 5 inches (about 165.1 centimetres) and a reach of approximately 68 inches (173 centimetres) continued to fight amateur bouts in Accra and looked out for a promoter. He, together with other boxers like Peter Mensah, Kpakpo Allotey and Joseph Adama Mensah, had another engagement with the national team at the World Cup in New York. He competed at the junior-welterweight level. At that competition, which took place from October 11 to 19, 1979, he fought Brian Tink from Australia and defeated him in a knock out (K.O.) at round three. He, however, failed to make it to the final when he lost to Serik Konakbaev (Konakbayev) from Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.). His other colleagues, that is Peter Mensah, Allotey and Adama Mensah, who competed in the 57kg, 81kg and 81kg levels respectively, were also unable to make it to the finals. Unable to make any impressive impact in New York, Champ and his teammates, at the end of their competition returned to Ghana. They were tipped to join the Black Bombers to attend the forthcoming Summer Olympics, which had been slated to take place in Moscow from July 19, 1980 to August 3, 1980.

As a point of interest Champ, compelled by economic pressures, within a national economy which was struggling to be on its feet, and personal ambition, “bailed the boat” of amateurship before the year of 1979 ended, and became professional, before the team of Black Bombers could be constituted and train for Moscow.

Because the economic situation in Ghana was still very weak, amateur boxing received little support from the government which, inundated by other issues seemingly shelved sports. In this year when many Ghanaians realising the harshness of the economy had started to migrate to other West African countries especially Nigeria in search of jobs, many urban centre dwelling employees became redundant.

The general social and economic situations in Accra, by 1979, were not very pleasant and within the slums of Ga-Mashie, Champ felt the privations. Many employers no longer needed the services of casuals, because most employers could not pay them. This contributed to unemployment a situation, which compelled many unemployed in the cities to find alternative sources of income. As a product of the urban space of Accra and its exacerbating socio-economic adversities, Champ, facing the brunt of the economy, became more aggressive in his quest to register his presence in professional boxing, which could lead him to fight outside Ghana with the hope of competing bigger fellows which would give him more money and enable him meet his financial needs. He was a potential champion with an enviable record and it was left for someone – a businessperson – to adopt and promote him in the world of professionalism. Within his pursuit of an amateur career in Ga-Mashie and Accra for that matter, which had seen him in international engagements, Champ acquired a desirable record of fifty-two fights. Fifty were wins and two were losses. That was quite an accomplishment within the context of Ghanaian boxing and more especially within the domain of Accra whose boxing industry was largely animated and invigorated by Ga-Mashie, which particularly produced many good fighters.

Inside the precincts of Ga-Mashie, and particularly the vicinity of Bukom, he had developed the root of his passion for boxing and with fortitude and determination, had nurtured it to have a pleasant record in the amateur sphere. Within the boxing realm of Bukom, the beaches and *longo longo* of Ga-Mashie, street corners of Adedemkpo, Timber Market, and Agbado, where stiff competition existed among boxers who saw boxing as socially and economically rewarding, Champ succeeded in gaining local recognition and becoming an ace amateur fighter. Moreover, he managed to survive the proverbial bloody and demanding battles that characterised the training sessions in the gym and street in those localities, and became a respected amateur boxer in the national team. Out of that ferment of competition and hard work, Champ burst onto the professional scene and inscribed his name at that stage as a great fighter.

His first professional fight was on December 1, 1979. This was few days before the U.S.A. president, Jimmy Carter, altered the arrangement of the 1980 Moscow Summer Olympics, when he, in opposition to the invasion of Afghanistan by Russia on December 27, 1979, announced in his State of the Union message on January 23, 1980, the decision of the U.S.A. to boycott the Olympics. Ultimately, this boycott attracted the support of about sixty-four countries. The U.S.A. impressed on Ghana to join the boycott. Some boxing pundits in Ghana, including Amarkai Amarteifio, did not want Ghana to boycott the games. According to Amarkai Amarteifio, he, for example, wrote an article entitled "Take a Sound Decision" to the *Evening News* for Ghana to

reconsider her decision to boycott the games.¹³⁴ Nevertheless, the country, under the P.N.P., did not send a contingent to the Moscow Games in 1980.¹³⁵ Incidentally the Black Bombers, according to Amarkai Amarteifio, prepared very well for the games and, he was sure that they would have brought some prestigious laurels to Ghana if they had competed at the Moscow Games. Therefore, when the issue of boycott came up, he felt that it would go against the time and resources that had been committed into the preparation of the team.¹³⁶ The Black Bombers, including Joseph Adama Mensah, who had prepared enthusiastically for the games, were disappointed by the boycott. The Black Bombers did not make their journey to Moscow. On the other hand Champ, who had crossed the amateur level, had started his difficult, yet famous, intriguing and excellent journey on the professional path of boxing. His amateur days were over.

Concluding Remarks

Considering his humble background, ability to triumph the sphere of competition of great boxing talents in Bukom and Ghana in general, overcome the barriers of poverty in Ga-Mashie to engineer an excellent professional career to the highest level, Champ, simply put, is a survivor in a place and occupation where most are swallowed completely in mid-career. His successful amateur record ushered him into professional boxing, which revealed the champion in him. In 1980, he became the Ghana featherweight champion and from 1980 to 1983 was the African featherweight champion. From 1981 to 1984, he reigned as the Commonwealth featherweight champion

¹³⁴ Amarkai Amarteifio, 68 years old, interview via telephone, Ghana, February 1, 2011.
¹³⁵ Amarkai Amarteifio, 67 years old, personal interview at his office, Ayawaso Chambers, Osu R.E., Accra. December 15, 2010.
¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

and from 1984 to 1988 he was the W.B.C. featherweight champion. 1988 to 1994 saw him as the W.B.C. super-featherweight (junior-lightweight) champion and he wore that belt again from 1995 to 1997. His professional journey produced another impressive record of 47 fights with 39 victories, out of which 28 were K.Os. The rest were 2 draws and 6 losses. This was truly the record of a legend.

But how did he become that legend in the precarious world of professional boxing? The next chapter looks at his professional career, by exploring his introduction into professionalism, his major fights and victories, his maturity at that level, his failures and difficulties, his secrets of success in the ring, and his retirement.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE MAKING OF THE AZUMAH LEGEND

Do not scorn a weak cub, for he may become a brutal tiger.

Old Mongolian Saying

Introduction

The years 1978 and 1979 were years in which Champ captured some enviable amateur trophies at international sporting engagements. Naturally, for Champ, a career in boxing, like life, was a journey. It demanded and needed progress. His amateur fame and laurels brought him accolades from his admirers in Accra but within himself, he knew that the ultimate destination as a boxer was not where he was as an amateur. He had his eyes on international professional championship. "I wanted to be a professional, champion, and world legend like those that I had idolised before me,"¹ he recalled. Having beaten everyone at his level, as an amateur, he set his eyes on the national championship as a professional boxer with the intention to advance to the international level. While he looked for a manager he registered as a professional in Accra in 1979. He was a young man and a gifted boxer in need of professional guidance, and financial security. He needed an investor to guide him at the right speed into the competitive and lucrative world of professional boxing. Intuitively he felt, and many of his friends felt, that he would ultimately become a star, champion and rich. Excellence at the amateur level gave him some publicity, a sneak preview at and a wee taste of celebrityhood. He liked the vista and the taste and so his crave for stardom and

¹Azumah "The Professor" Nelson, alias Samuel Azumah Nelson (hereafter Azumah Nelson), 51 years old, personal interview at his residence, New Achimota, Accra. October 5, 2009.

its social and financial ramifications grew. Managers and promoters must have heard about his accomplishments as a boxer who became a champion in the boxing arenas of Ga-Mashie, where training sessions in the gym and on the “street,” were battles of the bloodiest and most demanding. They must have also witnessed and/or heard about how he, from the street corners and *longo longo* of Ga-Mashie, where stiff competition existed among boxers, had managed to survive and excel at his weight level. However, finding a manager and promoter did not just happen. Lack of finance to cater for a mentee during that period of economic depression in Ghana, possibly, deterred many promoters from adopting the boxer.

Fortunately for Champ, Samir Captan, a young entrepreneur who owned Sikaprix, a boxing promotions and management group, saw potential and decided to invest in him. In November 1979, Samir assisted the boxer to have his first professional bout on the local scene. Samir Captan was a young man of Lebanese and Ghanaian parentage. His immigrant paternal forebears had settled in Accra, during the colonial period, and established for themselves a reputation as shrewd businessmen. The Captan family owned shopping centres and operated a wide range of businesses including grocery and hardware stores. It also owned cinema houses. This included the famous Opera Cinema, which together with its attached shop buildings, became known as Opera House, which is a celebrated landmark in Accra. Apparently, the Captan family became part of Ghana’s commercial aristocracy. Consequently, Samir Captan was exposed to some of the pleasures of aristocratic life such as driving nice cars, attracting beautiful women, jockeying and spending time at

polo and golf clubs.² Coming from a close-knit business family, he knew the rudiments of commerce. By learning from his older relatives he became a shrewd businessman. Samir is currently the Chief Executive Officer (C.E.O.) of Jupiter Mines Limited, a general merchandise, as well as import, export, and gold and diamond mining company.

Samir was respected in the circles of young Lebanese businessmen in Ghana. He was a tall and good looking person with a hypnotic stare. As a businessman he knew when to gamble with a business idea and when to back out. He had long developed a love for boxing even when he was a restless school going teenager who had a penchant for brawling. After studying the amateur terrain, he became convinced that there abounded, in the country and just outside Opera House – the quarters of Ga-Mashie, a lot of talent and potential world champions, who could bring national glory and financial profits to those who invested in them to become occupational boxers. Samir's Sikaprix managed a number of professionals. It also promoted fights. These activities and orientation plunged Samir into the local circle of managers, promoters and key boxing administrators – the College of Pugilistic Cardinals of Accra, which included Messrs Weglo, D.F. Annan, Amarkai Amarteifio, H.P. Nyamitei, Heyward-Mills, and Allotei Cofie. They also sent him into the heart of Ghana's amateur and professional boxing, where, he has continued to be. He is now serving, since 2009, as the Chairman of the G.B.A.

Azumah Nelson Ventures into Professional Boxing

²The Captan family was also interested in sports and many of the members were enthusiasts of one or more sports like swimming, golf, horseracing, tennis, polo and football. One of the renowned Ghanaian female golfers, Mona Captan is from that family. She is the niece of Samir Captan. Samir Captan was interested in boxing. (Samir Captan, c. 60 years old, is the current Chairman of the Ghana Boxing Authority, personal interview, Opera House office, Opera Square, Accra. March 22, 2010).

Circa 1978/1979, Sikaprix negotiated with Azumah Nelson and agreed to manage his professional career. By providing him with weekly stipends, Samir's group gave the boxer a feeling of financial security and a real hope of riches to come.

After this deal, his managers put him into a gestation period, during which he continued to train and hoped for his first professional championship fight. As the partnership between Samir and the fighter intensified, the young boxer became impatient for his first shot at a professional bout. His training at Akotoku Academy – that Mecca of boxing learning – and different gyms with other “pugs”³ like Razor Akwei Addo and the renowned Clottey Brothers – Judah “Razor” Thunder and Hector continued. The boxer came under Sikaprix with a slide-and-glide boxing technique, which was characterised by a lot of slick movements of torso, and nimble foot-works which his sinewy legs supported and activated. His blinding fighting speed overwhelmed both young and old sparring partners. These movements were accompanied by lightening jabs, which he easily used on the face of opponents and sparring partners. Samir, and his boxing cognoscenti friends who observed the boxer, knew that he surely was going to shine professionally. As Samir continued to keep an eye on his protégé, he also worked feverishly, in the background, to get a quick breakthrough – a professional fight for the boxer who continued to train.

On the trajectory of self-improvement and professional direction, he was soon to fall under the guidance of one of the accomplished trainers in boxing. Samir arranged Sugar Ray Acquaye, alias Dolo Gazzey, who was one of the frontline trainers in big boxing in the country, to assist the boxer. It was

³In boxing terminology “pugs” is the short form for pugilists (boxers).

Acquaye who eventually made Mamprobi the main training site of the boxer, where the trainer, together with a sparring partner and journeyman boxer, Duodu Wellington, who was a soldier and an old boxing friend of Azumah Nelson, helped to polish the boxing style of Azumah Nelson.

However, before that relocation happened he had his professional debut in a national level 126-pound⁴ non-title contest with Billy Kwame. Testing the waters of professionalism he quickly beat his opponent, in that eight rounds of boxing, on points in Accra, on December 1, 1979. He became the toast of some of the familiar training gyms in Jamestown and Ussher Town neighbourhoods, and was especially celebrated by his friends in Timber Market. It was after this victory that Acquaye, as underscored, made Mamprobi the epicentre of their training.

Residing at his father's place, the boxer normally trained at a spot near the Mamprobi Plaza Cinema. It was there that he frequently sparred with Duodu Wellington and other boxers. Friends and admirers from his old neighbourhoods paid him visits and frequented his training sessions to give him morale and support. He also kept in touch with his relatives at Timber Market, by commuting to visit them when he was free from training.

Working behind the scene to inch its protégé to the national featherweight title, Sikaprix managed to secure another match. On February 7, 1980, Azumah Nelson was pitched against Nii Nuer. He kayoed Nuer in round three in Accra. After this victory he fought Henry Saddler, another tough 126-pounder. Fighting in Accra, Azumah Nelson unleashed powerful hooks and

⁴A featherweight boxer weighs in at 126 pounds (57 kg). In the early days of the division, this limit fluctuated. The British have generally always recognized the limit at 126 pounds, but in the U.S.A. the weight limit was at first 114 pounds.

timely “stinging” jabs against Saddler. He combined the above with intermittent heavy punches to the body of Saddler. Using his nimble feet, his fast legs enabled him to avoid many of Saddler’s attacks. Such movements brought fatigue to Saddler. Azumah Nelson then knocked out Saddler in round nine to win Ghana’s regional 126-pound title on March 3, 1980. The victory over Saddler earned Azumah Nelson a national title and a modest financial reward.

The new national champion continued with these “teaching” fights as he went ahead to defeat Henry Okpoti by a knock out (K.O.) in round eight, in defence of his title, in Accra on April 17, 1980. He advanced and, on July 4, 1980, successfully defended his title against David Capo in a win (W) on high points in round ten. Having gone through his teaching fights with success, and defeated all opponents in the national featherweight division, he and his managers decided that he would have to proceed to compete at the continental championship level since that would be a sure starting point for his international professional career. He set his eyes on the continental championship and ultimately the world title. He took his training seriously, and avoided a promiscuous lifestyle. With self-discipline and modesty, he avoided bragging, smoking, drugs and alcohol. He kept an abiding faith in God. The boxer was able to maintain his physical fitness and a strong sense of self-assurance that he would win the title. His trainer depended on the boxer’s self-discipline, great natural ability, physique, excellent reflexes, and confidence, to mould a super-fighter out of him. Through daily workouts of sparring with Wellington and other superior sparring partners, the coach further sharpened and honed the fighter’s skills and efficiency.

The boxer's long-awaited international professional career started on December 13, 1980, with a match against Joe Skipper, a Nigerian national champion. The fifteen rounds contest between the two was over the vacant African Boxing Union featherweight title. The fight that took place in front of a large crowd in Accra was not an easy encounter for the Ghanaian. Skipper proved to be a good contender. He fought as a banger and a real pound-for-pound fighter. The first five rounds nearly proved to be fatal as the Ghanaian surprisingly tarried in his movements and slacked. Skipper took advantage of the situation and landed some solid bangs and jabs to the body and head of Azumah Nelson. With Skipper proving to be a hard nut to crack, during the first five rounds, Azumah Nelson showed signs of fatigue. Nevertheless, his managers could hardly wait for him to produce. This was a chance in a lifetime and the boxer knew it. "Capture the national and continental titles and, man, you will be on your way to the big one. The world championship will then come to you, by the grace of God," he thought. Shouts, like "Azumah, meni ofeo? Yi le!,"⁵ came from the exasperated supporters and the corner-men of the Ghanaian boxer, whose face showed astonishment and embarrassment. Pain was not there.

From round six onwards, he revived his old self, snapped out of his trance and, studying the fighter's movements, stayed not close to Skipper. Was the crowd going to see the "real good stuff" which the trainee of Sugar Ray Acquaye had? Combining lightning speed jabs and fast-paced foot works, he effectively hit his opponent and "danced" around Skipper. Circling with Skipper and distracting him with those mosquito-like jabs, he got the attention

⁵This is Ga. It literally translates as Azumah, what are you doing? Beat him!

of the crowd. A barrage of blows unleashed from Azumah Nelson on the Nigerian fighter in round seven made the crowd to go into a jubilant mood as the round of glory arrived. The round of glory for Azumah Nelson was the eighth, which saw him achieving a victory through a Technical Knockout (T.K.O.).

By that victory, Azumah Nelson became the Africa featherweight champion. Unable to hide his joy, he in a modest way bragged about his boxing superiority during the customary inside-the-ring post-match interaction with a section of the media and boxing enthusiasts. Sikaprix definitely had found a gem. Samir knew that it would not take a long time for the boxer to have an opportunity to fight for a world title. Interestingly, it did not take a long time for the fighter to add another international title to his rich accumulation of prizes. On his quest for the ultimate crown – world title, the African champion did not make himself a homemade titlist who was stuck and fought only in his country. In 1981, he successfully defended his titles and won some teaching bouts both in Ghana and outside Ghana. Unlike some boxers who, for obvious reasons will prefer to fight before home fans, Azumah Nelson did not fight only on home grounds. Demonstrating that he was not afraid to fight, he took his title to other places to defend it. He acquired the British Commonwealth of Nations featherweight title. He rolled through that year with one W., one K.O., and two T.K.Os., over increasingly tougher opposition. His first victim was Bossou Aziza, whom he defeated on February 24 in Lome, Togo, in round ten. After Aziza, he beat Don George on May 2, in a K.O. in round five in Accra, and mauled Miguel Ruiz on August 18 through a T.K.O. in round three in Bakersfield, California. It was after that encounter

with Ruiz that he consequently went ahead and defeated the vastly talented and more experienced Brian “Close” Roberts of Australia to take the vacant Commonwealth featherweight title on September 26, 1981. His victory came through a T.K.O. in round five in Accra. Sikaprix was surely doing well in its enterprise with Azumah Nelson. The technical camp of the boxer, in a spirit of camaraderie, remained solid and kept strong ties with their protégé. The boxer also remained determined to deliver what was required of him and he did not disappoint his managers. Impressed with Azumah Nelson’s performance and seeing a bright future for the Ghanaian, Mickey Fernandez, an Australian boxing great, who was in the corner of Brian Roberts praised the Ghanaian boxer and predicted a great future for his career. Fernandez remarked that: “Brian boxed liked a true champion but Azumah Nelson will be a great world champion one day.”⁶ His prediction would ultimately prove to be correct. The new champion of the Commonwealth featherweight division was also the 25th contender to the W.B.C. world title. He still had a long way to go.

He continued to train and kept his reputation as a man of the people, and in the spirit of kinship, he maintained close ties with his relatives in Adedemkpo. On his free days he went to his old neighbourhoods and conversed with his old friends, walked around the old gyms, and took advice from the old boxing brains there. His comradeship with his childhood friends was still intact and they were usually found either eating and/or sharing jokes together. Some of them who did not pursue a career in boxing by now were into petty trading. Others had gone into the lumberjack work as suppliers and

⁶Ray Wheatley, “Brian Roberts passes,” *Fightnews.com*, Boxing News, September 15, 2010, online posting, <http://www.fightnews.com/Boxing/brian-roberts-passes-60020> (Information was retrieved on September 25, 2010).

retailers. Azumah Nelson, who was affectionately called “Champ,” liked to share jokes with friends and spend time with his mother. He did not hesitate, when he had some spare money, to provide modest financial assistance to friends and siblings. Furthermore, he, in tune with his jovial nature and affable disposition, intermittently, shadowboxed on street corners with some of his old social contacts in his old neighbourhoods. Meanwhile, he also gradually cultivated the habit of watching out for the cool gazes and friendly smiles of a young maiden in the vicinity of Timber Market. Her name was Beatrice Nana Tandoh and she was a product of Accra High School. This maiden who had maintained a long standing friendship with the hustler-boxer and admiration for his heroism was the daughter of a couple who were non-Ga. They were Mr. and Mrs. Tandoh who were traders and into the retailing of general merchandise.⁷ Champ disclosed that “Beatrice’s father was from Kwahu [in the Eastern Region] and I think her mother was an Nzema.”

The boxer managed and had numerous conversations, which included funny ones and serious “let us try to know each other” ones, with this maiden. Although no reference has been made to her in the preceding part of this work, it is interesting to note that she became one of the important friends of the boxer. As a platonic friend and casual social contact of Azumah Nelson, she was one of the local supporters of Champ when he started to bud as a champion amateur boxer and local hero. Although she belonged to a relatively well-to-do family, her liking for the hustler-boxer did not stop her from showing little acts of kindness to the latter. In that capacity, she, in the spirit of

⁷ Azumah Nelson, 53 years old, personal interview at Foodies Restaurant, Osu R.E. Accra, February 10, 2011.

friendship and a budding affection for the hustler-boxer, used to give small gifts of food to the boxer during his amateur days. That friendship, between this homely maiden and the street-tough Champ, continued through 1979, the year which marked the beginning of the professional successes of the boxer. Upon becoming an international hero, the boxer contemplated about having a sound and long lasting amorous relationship with Beatrice. By visiting, seeing, and talking to her, Champ became fond of her and so he planned that he would like to make her his wife in the near future.

I thought that having a wife was the right thing to do. Someone to support me to make a home, assist me to care for our children, and help me to have a peace of mind. Because I wanted to focus on my career, I did not want to be distracted with informal amorous relationships with different women. I had stayed away from having promiscuous “fun” with them and by the time I got the Commonwealth title, I knew that the time was coming for me to settle down with one. Beatrice was the one that I considered.⁸

Regardless of her background, Beatrice overlooked their ethnic and family differences and developed a liking for Azumah Nelson – her Champ and hero. “Nana [Beatrice] was kind and beautiful. She was one important reason why I used to go, from Mamprobi, to the old areas [Timber Market and Adedemkpo areas].”⁹

His victory over Brian Roberts fired him up to go to the step and he needed his managers to facilitate that. Although Sikaprix aimed the next step, it appeared that it was cautious about rushing to that difficult and wanted to slow down its pace in order to get the boxer to mature more and consolidate his position as a Commonwealth titlist. However, such an approach was not

⁸Azumah Nelson, personal interview, *op.cit.*

⁹*Ibid.*

the preferred model for the young anxious boxer. Being confident of excelling in a world championship, he wanted to engage and quickly beat the best there existed on the continent in order to fully launch his person on the world championship level and scene. This was what he saw as his immediate expedition. He started this mission of his by clashing and defeating a tough hard-to-hurt boxing opponent called Kabiru Akindele. Meeting Akindele in Freetown, Sierra Leone on December 4, 1981, he kayoed his opponent in round six and retained the African title. The year 1982, opened a change in the management of the boxer. It ushered in an end of the partnership and relationship between the boxer and Sikaprix. The boxer's restless search for a quick opportunity to put him on the world scene and inch him closer to the world title and the two parties' inability to agree on certain financial issues compelled them to painfully break their business ties. The boxer was now ready to join any group that could strongly promise to quickly draw him closer and ultimately to the world championship.

Another boxing management and promotion group in Ghana, with a strong connection to and backing from some of the international promotion moguls, identified profit and talent in the boxer. They invited him and the boxer accepted the invitation. Perceiving that the group had the potential to give him a better option for higher prizes and quick progress to the world title he joined Ringcraft. Difficult as it was, business professionalism allowed Sikaprix to let go its protégé. Moreover, it seemed that the time had come for the boxer, who had been guided by Sikaprix into professionalism, as a mother will do to a growing child, to be allowed to explore the rough and unpredictable world of professional boxing. That was the time for him to

make mistakes and learn from them. It was a time to spread out his wings and fly. It was a time to say good-bye. Samir and the boxer parted company as businesspersons in an industry. However, throughout the boxer's career and in his retirement, the two men have remained friends and associates in the boxing industry. "Samir has continued to be my friend and adviser on many personal and business issues. We still get on well with one another."¹⁰ "Currently, Samir is the Chairman of the G.B.A., and I am one of his assistants. I occupy the office of Technical Director of the G.B.A. So, we are still close."¹¹

A series of quick deals placed Azumah Nelson under the formal management of the Ringcraft management and promotion syndicate. This group had and could create connections with some influential fight promotion kingpins like Mickey Duff¹² and others, at the top echelons of international professional boxing. One influential key player that Ringcraft knew how to get to and do business with was none but Don King, the renowned Albert Einstein hair look-alike African American fight promoter. This Ghana-based group, which co-opted Azumah Nelson, was well connected, financially strong, daring and new, and fresh and energised on the boxing scene. It was under the

¹⁰Azumah Nelson, personal interview, *op.cit.* Author's note: In fact this researcher had the opportunity to meet Champ and Samir Captan over dinner at Champ's restaurant at Osu in Accra in March 2010. The spirit of friendship between the two was present as they discussed boxing issues, as well as other personal matters.

¹¹Azumah Nelson, 52 years old, personal interview, Foodies Restaurant, Osu, R.E., Accra, March 23, 2010.

¹²He was a British boxer, who became a matchmaker and manager. He was born in 1929 in Krakow, Poland and originally named Monek Prager. His parents fled to England with him in the late 1930s to avoid the Nazis. He became a professional boxer when he was 15 years old and won about 61 fights out of 69 in the ranks of lightweight and welterweight. He retired at the age of 19 and later became a matchmaker in England. From the late 1950s onwards Duff, as a matchmaker, along with manager Jarvis Astaire and promoter Harry Levine became key players in the sport. Duff who is generally known and regarded as one of the most knowledgeable and accomplished men in the history of the sport has promoted a number of world championships and top fighters including British fighters like Jim Watt, Alan Minter, John Conteh, Terry Downes and Howard Winstone. He has worked with different world class titlists including Azumah Nelson.

control of three Ghanaians namely Dr. Oko Kwatekwei, Seth Asah and John Kofi Kermah. Having Oko Kwatekwei, who hailed from Bukom,¹³ as executive secretary,¹⁴ the syndicate of local professional entrepreneurs, had earlier nurtured the idea of establishing, investing in and managing a professional football team and club in Ghana. However, as business persons they also considered other options. They studied the boxing terrain in Ghana and accomplishments of Champ. However, the fertile boxing terrain in Ghana and its financial potentials strongly attracted the investment of the group. In any case it was, and is, relatively cheaper to manage an individual boxer, than a football team of over eleven players and auxiliaries. Moreover, the insight into the business of boxing that Ringcraft must have received through research from some local boxing aficionados like Mr. “the Hawk” Weglo, who was an Accra-based businessperson and boxing enthusiast, further convinced Ringcraft that it would be profitable to invest in boxing. Such local experts knew the huge potential the country had in the terrain of boxing. They were aware that proper management and investment in that area, especially in the right calibre of boxers, could yield satisfactory financial benefits to those who dared to invest. Seeing a promising future for an investment in boxing, the trio decided to do business in that sport. Moreover, advice from the local experts, who were familiar with local rising stars, especially the ambitious Azumah Nelson who had steadily and quickly ascended to the heights of Ghana and

¹³ Amarkai Amarteifio, 67 years old, personal interview at his office, Ayawaso Chambers, Osu R.E., Accra. December 15, 2010. He was once the Secretary for Youth and Sports in the Provisional National Defense Council government (hereafter P.N.D.C.) in Ghana. He is a boxing enthusiast, personal friend of Azumah Nelson, Barrister-at-Law, and a Diplomat (The Consul General of Sweden, and the Dean of the Honorary Consular Corps of Ghana).

¹⁴“Ringcraft: Good Year for Ghana Boxing,” *People’s Daily Graphic* (hereafter *P.D.G.*), December 30, 1987, p. 7.

Africa boxing, inspired the trio to invest in Azumah Nelson. Impressed by his tale-of-the-tape and by his training sessions at Mamprobi, Ringcraft decided to collaborate with the boxer for a successful career and business journey into the future. Promising to use their connections and capital to arrange for international engagements that would quickly get him to battle for the world title, and make him a world titlist, the businesspersons managed to attract the boxer to fall under their management. The boxer became a “partner” of Ringcraft Promotions. They agreed to operate with the codes of good management, mutual respect and satisfaction, and garner their energies for victories to bring them respect and financial rewards and glory to Ghana. The agency committed and pledged itself to the task of orchestrating for the boxer a best-planned career, to ensure adequate training, international exposure, and professional advancement. On his side, the boxer was also committed to the notion of hard work to realise his and Ringcraft’s dreams. He disclosed that:

I was also determined not to let them [Ringcraft] down, because disappointing them would have meant letting myself down. They promised that they were going to give me fights that would provide me with more learning experiences and increase my reputation internationally. I was ready for such encounters, which nonetheless I knew possessed high elements of danger and was going to be tough.¹⁵

He was determined to go ahead and prove himself worthy. He embarked on that journey of conquest with Ringcraft. Having said “bye” to Sikaprix, he said “hello” to Ringcraft and from 1982, “he set out,” as he put it, “with the assistance of Ringcraft and support from fans in Ghana, to conquer the world.”¹⁶

¹⁵ Azumah Nelson, personal interview, *op.cit.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

To adequately prepare for that quest, the partners had to engage in some duelling teaching and build up bouts in order to get the boxer close to the W.B.C. world title. On that trajectory it became imperative for Azumah Nelson to beat available favourable contenders to the title. The closest contender on the continent was Zambia's featherweight hero Charm Chiteule, who was the delight of the Zambian president Kenneth Kaunda. Charm was, by the ratings of the W.B.C. the 9th contender to the W.B.C. world featherweight title.¹⁷

Nurturing cupidity for Azumah Nelson's titlist position on the continent, he easily fell to an enticement which had been crafted by Ringcraft in their determination to unseat him and put its protégé at a higher contender position. The managers knew that if Azumah Nelson beat Charm, he would move up the ratings and get a place closer to the title. They therefore had to get a fight between the two boxers. To lure the Zambian to box Azumah Nelson, who at this period was ranked 13th on the W.B.C. ratings,¹⁸ to the world title, Ringcraft agreed to allow Charm to challenge the Ghanaian boxer, in one fight for his two titles – Africa and Commonwealth. Ringcraft agreed that Charm Chiteule should fight the champion in the former's "backyard" in Zambia. What was more tempting than what had been presented to the Zambian boxer? The trick worked and Charm Chiteule was "charmed" by these overtures from the Ghanaian and his managers.

The Zambian accepted that attractive offer. The champion trained hard under the instruction of his new coach. The new coach was the former

¹⁷"Azuma[h] Moves up on W.B.C. Ratings," *Ghanaian Times* (hereafter *G.T.*), April 19, 1982, p. 7.

¹⁸*Ibid.*