

“Their Flame Flares for but a Little While”: Dencio Cabanela, Pancho Villa, and the Production  
of Prizefighting’s First ‘National Commodity,’ ca. 1918-1930

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## Abstract

“Their Flame Flares for but a Little While”: Dencio Cabanela, Pancho Villa, and the Production of Prizefighting’s First ‘National Commodity,’ ca. 1918-1930

Mathieu Brousseau

This study considers the articulation and exchanges of discourses of race and tropicality, and narratives of American colonial rule, about the bodies of Filipino prizefighters during the 1910s-1930s in a trans-imperial sphere. It tracks these through the Anglophone sporting press, examining their confluence with prizefighting’s ‘indigenous values’ and the new knowledge they produced about Filipino bodies within and for prizefighting’s ‘imagined community.’ Chapter one examines the brief Australian sojourn and tragic demise of Dencio Cabanela, the first Filipino prizefighter to achieve extranational prominence. It considers the personal links, networks, and discourses through which his body was conceived as preternaturally resilient and predictably undisciplined, situating the cause of his demise deep within his body, rather than the trade in which it was engaged. It also contemplates the unwitting role Cabanela played in uniting several components – youth, preternatural imperviousness, and aggressiveness – of a nascent Filipino pugilistic identity. Chapter two centres on the contractual relationship between world’s flyweight champion Pancho Villa and his manager, Frank Churchill, to consider the business of prizefighting, and power and agency therein. It examines how this business shaped expressions of American colonial rule and Philippine nationhood through Villa’s singular exploits, the impact of these exploits on the production of Filipino fighters, and the role of the routine, material practices of Churchill’s Olympic Athletic Club in uniting and consolidating the key elements highlighted in chapter one into a new, commodified identity for Filipino prizefighters, the ‘Filipino-*as*-prizefighter,’ a virtual Philippine ‘raw material’ who could not but fight.

## Acknowledgements

In *On Boxing*, Joyce Carol Oates draws a parallel between writers and prizefighters, noting that the prizefighter, because of the nature of the contest in which they are engaged, “will know [their] limit in a way that the writer,” living “in a kaleidoscopic world of ever-shifting assessments and judgments,” will never know. I entertain no such pretense as Oates has – of likening the craft of writing (history) to prizefighting – but I feel some affinity with the rest of her thought, namely, that writers “are unable to determine whether it is revelation or supreme self-delusion that fuels our most crucial efforts.”

If the present study is something more than self-delusion, if not quite ‘revelation,’ it is thanks, first and foremost, to the steadfast guidance of my thesis supervisor, Dr. Theresa Ventura, who helped consolidate the research questions at the outset, provided a timely lead onto a remarkably useful set of primary sources (without which this study would be significantly weaker), and whose feedback on the drafts helped focus the project immeasurably. I would like to thank her, also, for her patience throughout and for showing great trust in my ability to see this work through by giving me ample time and space with which to navigate.

I must also thank Dr. Rachel Berger and Dr. Allan Lumba, who graciously agreed to bring their expertise to bear as second and third readers. The concerns and questions each raised during the defense suggested fruitful avenues of inquiry and elicited reflections that helped improve this thesis. Thanks are also due to Dr. Andrew Ivaska, for chairing the defense, and to Concordia University’s Graduate Awards Office for a Split Merit scholarship, awarded to me upon admission.

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graduate school and whose uncommon dedication to students past and present shone through, as it had many times before, by generously offering his counsel when I was considering graduate studies. I am also indebted to Dr. Wilson Chacko Jacob, who has reshaped my notions of what history can be and that which it makes possible: I count myself fortunate to have benefited from his insights and empathy during my time as a graduate student.

Finally, I must thank Mr. Howard Grant for entrusting me with his bound volumes of *The Ring* magazine (on more than one occasion) when I informed him of a project that might require them: they have proven invaluable.

Academic debts are one thing, personal debts, quite another. There are some names that belong only to me.

## Dedication

This work is dedicated to the memories of –

Gaudencio Cabanela (October 1900 – 3 July 1921)

Francisco Guilleo (1 August 1901 – 14 July 1925)

Inocencio Moldez (1905 – 20 April 1926)

– each of whose lives was worth far more than a mere lens for history.

## Table of Contents

List of Illustrations.....	viii
Introduction.....	1
Chapter One: “That Little Model of Shape and Muscular Development” – Popular Eugenic Thought and Prizefighting’s Ethos of Sacrifice in the Life and Death of Dencio Cabanela.....	22
The Olympic Athletic Club, Australia, & Prizefighting’s Informal Networks of Exchange.....	24
“His Closeness to Nature Undoubtedly Aided Him Materially”: Dencio Cabanela in Australia .....	31
“Even Those Who Pay for Blood Must Not Speak Openly of a Man Being a ‘Quitter’”: The Metamorphosis and Masculine Legacy of Dencio Cabanela.....	43
Chapter Two: “An Industrious Collector of Revenue” – Pancho Villa, Frank Churchill, and the Business of Prizefighting .....	56
“The Most Glorious Exponent of the Vitality and the Energy of His Race”: Pancho Villa, Citizenship, Capital, and Tutelage .....	59
“An Ideal Arrangement”: The Cultivation of a Philippine ‘Raw Material’ and the Assembly of a Human ‘Export Commodity’ .....	71
“A Cog in the Wheel of a Gigantic Industry”: Prizefighters and Agency .....	87
Conclusion .....	101
Bibliography .....	111
Visual Appendix .....	121

## List of Illustrations

Figure 1 - Cartoon Depicting Outcome of Cabanela vs. Criqui, The Referee, 23 March 1921.....	34
Figure 2 - "Filipinos Are All Battling Fighters," Cartoon by Werner Laufer, New Britain Herald, 18 January 1928. ....	80



## Introduction

In February 1927, *The Ring*, a prizefighting monthly, printed a piece of short fiction, “Haunted Hands: A Tale of Hoodoos and the Supernatural.” Penned by stalwart contributor Daniel M. Daniel, it begins *in medias res* with a fight crowd demanding ‘Terror’ Howton, “the threshing machine from...Kansas,” knock out his opponent, “the catlike Filipino,” Pancho Ramirez. As Ramirez staggers about the ring, his “left eye closed...[h]is lips...cut, his face a mass of bruises,” the crowd’s bloodlust rises and the violent spectacle takes on an explicitly racist dimension, as one fan yells: “Knock that spigotty for a goal.”<sup>1</sup> Ramirez’ battered body, seemingly teetering on the brink of death, is the point around which the plot develops, but not upon which it is centered. The tale instead focuses on Ramirez’ opponent, Howton, and Ramirez’ manager, ‘Hoodoo’ Hawkinson, who are visited by the ghosts of fighters whose lives were claimed by the ring: for Howton, two former opponents; for Hawkinson, three other Filipino fighters he had managed before Ramirez.

Contemporary connoisseurs would have had little trouble deciphering the characters’ pseudonymous identities or recalling the events that had inspired the account: ‘Terror’ Howton was Charles ‘Bud’ Taylor (the ‘Terre Haute Terror’), the Midwestern bantamweight who had been the instrument of two deaths in the ring, including that of Filipino fighter ‘Clever’ Sencio Moldez in 1926. Hawkinson was Frank Churchill, the American fight manager who “specialized in...little brown men” and oversaw the careers of many of the 1920s’ most successful Filipino prizefighters, three of whom – Dencio Cabanela, Pancho Villa, and Moldez – died from injuries

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel M. Daniel, “Haunted Hands: A Tale of Hoodoos and the Supernatural,” *The Ring*, February 1927. ‘Spigotty’, according to *Merriam-Webster*, was a pejorative term synonymous with ‘spic.’ See, “Definition of SPIGOTTY,” accessed December 15, 2022, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/spigotty>.

sustained in, or aggravated by, the ring.<sup>2</sup> Yet the story is not a fictional retelling of Moldez' death – Ramirez survives and has no real-life counterpart (he is, instead, a featureless amalgam of his dead compatriots) – but a keen dissection of 1920s prizefighting. It is a portrait of remunerated violence, intimate and impersonal, in which Daniel, via the ghosts, explores prizefighting's most 'haunting' theme, death in the ring, and a host of others: racial formations, 'masculine' violence, personal and collective responsibility, and labour and business. But Ramirez' presence, Daniel's choice (perhaps unwitting) to depict Ramirez as none and all of his compatriots, and Hawkinson's Filipino apparitions – still bearing, even after death, their grievous injuries, "taunting" and "accusing" Hawkinson as they hover above the ring – suggest yet another dimension: a reckoning with the consequences of the exportation of prizefighting to the Philippines under the American imperial aegis and the 'importation' of some of its most precious commodities, Filipino bodies.<sup>3</sup> The crowd's venomous treatment of Ramirez' racial ambiguity as he is brutally beaten; the intimate, violent mingling of a half-naked Filipino and American in a martial contest suffused with unquestionable and unquestioned masculine imperatives; Howton's personal responsibility and rationalization of his conduct as simply having "done his job"; and Hawkinson's guilt and responsibility for 'his' Filipinos, whose "death agony" he has never forgotten, all hint at the shocks and effects of an imperial history that commodified bodies and produced identities that were separate from state-driven projects of categorization yet, occasionally, intimately wed to their discourses. "Haunted Hands" is a domestic representation of empire without the state, of empire's effects refracted through and transformed by and for the

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<sup>2</sup> "Filipino Tackles Vet Puncher," *Indianapolis Times*, April 28, 1927.

<sup>3</sup> Daniel, "Haunted Hands: A Tale of Hoodoos and the Supernatural." For "geographies of consumption," see, Kristin Hoganson, "Buying into Empire: American Consumption at the Turn of the Twentieth Century," in *Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American State*, ed. Alfred W. McCoy (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 248–59, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.08751>.

closed world of prizefighting: its ghosts are, assuredly, prizefighting's ghosts but, arguably, empire's ghosts, as well.<sup>4</sup>

The empire of "Haunted Hands" is the overseas, colonial empire of the United States, wrought by the Spanish-American War, during which the United States wrested the Philippines from Spain.<sup>5</sup> This thesis takes the formal American empire as a fact of history, as the thematic, if not conceptual, frame for this study.<sup>6</sup> I am concerned, not with what empire is, but with the interactions it allows and the effects it produces, with empire as "something to think with more than think about."<sup>7</sup> In the Philippines, the American state established and maintained its empire through violence: the ouster of the Spanish quickly led to a brutal war between Americans and Filipinos in which the 'reconcentration' of rural populations and torture were commonplace.<sup>8</sup> At war's end, over a quarter-million Filipinos were reckoned dead and rural society, already in a precarious state before the conflict, had been ravaged, with tens of thousands abandoning their

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<sup>4</sup> For domestic representations of empire, see, Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002), 4; 92–120. For 'ghosts of empire' draws from Ann Laura Stoler; see, Ann Laura Stoler, "Intimidations of Empire: Predicaments of the Tactile and Unseen," in *Haunted by Empire: Geographies of Intimacy in North American History*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 1, 4, 9–10, 14–15, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780822387992>.

<sup>5</sup> Paul A. Kramer, *The Blood of Government: Race, Empire, the United States, & the Philippines* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 87–111. I consider American empire to be a formal one, but its effects need not be intentional nor flow from the state.

<sup>6</sup> For succinct discussions of the development of the question of empire and exceptionalism in American historiography, see, Alfred W. McCoy, Francisco A. Scarano, and Courtney Johnson, "On The Tropic of Cancer: Transitions and Transformations in the U.S. Imperial State," in *Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American State*, ed. Alfred W. McCoy (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 3–33, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.08751>; Julian Go, *Patterns of Empire: The British and American Empires, 1688 to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 3–24.

<sup>7</sup> Paul A. Kramer, "Power and Connection: Imperial Histories of the United States in the World," *American Historical Review* 116, no. 5 (December 2011): 1349–50.

<sup>8</sup> See, Kramer, *The Blood of Government*, 91–102, 152–53, 157, 170.

homes to seek refuge in urban centres.<sup>9</sup> Paul Kramer has shown that imperial violence enables and requires historically specific and contingent racial formations.<sup>10</sup> The conflict's declared end in 1902 exorcised neither violence nor racial formations, displacing both onto other stages of Filipino-American interaction, from policing and surveillance, to penal reform, to public hygiene – even to the prize ring.<sup>11</sup> There, wartime notions of Filipino racial ambiguity, suggested by the crowd's venomous treatment of Ramirez, and Filipino 'savagery,' suggested by Daniel's naturalization of Ramirez' abilities and the latter's sylvan origins (he is a "catlike midget" from the "forests of far off Mindanao," whose "catlike swiftness...critics had predicted would prove too much for Howton"), were reconstituted as salient elements of a Filipino pugilistic identity.<sup>12</sup> Unlike their wartime forebears, Filipino pugilists were not 'deceitful' adversaries, but the same features – race and nature – that had explained their use of 'savage,' guerrilla tactics (for which they allegedly possessed a racial affinity) now determined their ring performances; thus laden, Filipino bodies still dictated Filipino conduct.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> For rural conditions in different parts of the Philippines from the late 1800s to the 1940s, especially with regards to land tenure systems, see, Renato Constantino, *The Philippines: A Past Revisited* (Quezon City: Tala Publishing Services, 1975), 155–56; 272–75; 306–7; David R. Sturtevant, *Popular Uprisings in the Philippines, 1840-1940* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1976), 42–43; 49–74; 121–25; 158–60; 175–76; Adrian De Leon, "Sugarcane *Sakadas* : The Corporate Production of the Filipino on a Hawai'i Plantation," *Amerasia Journal* 45, no. 1 (2019): 51–56.

<sup>10</sup> Kramer, *The Blood of Government*, especially, 2-3, 18, 22-3.

<sup>11</sup> For surveillance, penal reform, and hygiene, see, respectively, Alfred W. McCoy, "Policing the Imperial Periphery: Philippine Pacification and the Rise of the U.S. National Security State," in *Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American State*, ed. Alfred W. McCoy (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 106–15, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.08751>; Michael Salman, "'The Prison That Makes Men Free': The Iwahig Penal Colony and the Simulacra of the American State in the Philippines," in *Colonial Crucible: Empire in the Making of the Modern American State*, ed. Alfred W. McCoy (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2009), 116–28, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.08751>; Warwick Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies: American Tropical Medicine, Race, and Hygiene in The Philippines* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006).

<sup>12</sup> Daniel, "Haunted Hands: A Tale of Hoodoos and the Supernatural."

<sup>13</sup> For the racialization of Filipino guerrilla tactics, the 'degenerative' effect of tropical environments, and other reasons proffered for wartime brutality, see, Kramer, *The Blood of Government*, 121–24, 134, 144–50. For difficulties experienced by American soldiers and reporters in 'categorizing' Filipinos, see, *ibid.*, 124-8.

In late-nineteenth century America, however, ‘savage’ tactics could be ‘unmanly’ and the ultimate expression of ‘manliness.’ Gail Bederman has argued that, during this period, Victorian notions of ‘manliness’ as self-restraint – challenged, notably, by the rise of clerical work and its allegedly deleterious effects on male health – were reworked to encompass ‘savagery’ and ‘civilization’ in the white, male body.<sup>14</sup> To some, this body was the fount and vessel of a civilization built upon ‘savagery,’ which white men needed to embrace anew to preserve their bodies (and civilization thereby) from degeneration.<sup>15</sup> This new conception of manliness – prizing virile, sculpted, active bodies and ‘savage’ aggression – and its acceptance by elements of the middle class, is illustrated by the crowd’s reaction to Howton’s faltering resolve as he pities the injured Ramirez. Howton is no heroic exemplar of gentle, restrained manliness, but the object of scorn to a crowd whose “primordial emotions” – emotions in which they could now publicly and unashamedly revel – and ‘masculine,’ “‘killer’ instinct,” fully aroused, “were being cheated.”<sup>16</sup> Indeed, Howton’s very presence in the ring is partly attributable to this new ethos of manliness and male aesthetics: the white, male body had become not only an object to be redeemed, sculpted, and preserved for future generations but, as John Kasson argues, fetishized and commodified through new media technologies and popular entertainments.<sup>17</sup> ‘Ideal’ bodies could be reproduced *ad infinitum* as present and future templates of manliness against which

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<sup>14</sup> Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 15–22. For the role of this new masculine creed in support for and prosecution of the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars, see, Kristin Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998).

<sup>15</sup> Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 181–87.

<sup>16</sup> Daniel, “Haunted Hands: A Tale of Hoodoos and the Supernatural.”

<sup>17</sup> John F. Kasson, *Houdini, Tarzan, and The Perfect Man: The White Male Body and The Challenge of Modernity in America*, Kindle (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2013); Mary K. Coffey, “The American Adonis: A Natural History of the ‘Average American’ (Man), 1921-32,” in *Popular Eugenics: National Efficiency and American Mass Culture in the 1930s*, by Susan Currell and Christina Cogdell (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2006), 185–216.

others might measure themselves and against which darker bodies, through parallel representational practices (anthropological exhibitions, fairs, and circuses) might be forever contrasted.<sup>18</sup>

Representational practices alone, however, would not ensure bodily health, which had become conflated with the health of the body politic: organized sport and physical culture were one means to secure both. As several scholars have shown, the conflation of individual health with that of the nation was not the exclusive province of white middle-class reformers: national elites the world over, including the *ilustrados*, the Philippines' indigenous political elite during the waning years of the Spanish colonial period, endorsed sport as a tool through which national subjects might be moulded and national identity forged.<sup>19</sup> American occupation thwarted the *ilustrados'* project, but the American objective of moulding national subjects was similar, albeit with a different timetable. War's end heralded "calibrated colonialism," which returned some power to Filipino elites by establishing (mutable) benchmarks to which they could aspire; once reached, these would, ostensibly, guarantee their independence. They offered Filipinos "the illusion of [colonial] impermanence" while instituting an "endless colonization of the future."<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> See, Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 31–40; Janet M. Davis, "Moral, Purposeful, and Healthful: The World of Child's Play, Bodybuilding, and Nation-Building at the American Circus," in *Body and Nation: The Global Realm of U.S. Body Politics in The Twentieth Century*, ed. Emily S. Rosenberg and Shanon Fitzpatrick (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 42–61; Paul A. Kramer, "Making Concessions: Race and Empire Revisited at the Philippine Exposition, St. Louis, 1901-1905," *Radical History Review*, no. 73 (1999): 75–114.

<sup>19</sup> See, Kramer, *The Blood of Government*, 37–67; Micah Jeiel R. Perez, "Play and Propaganda: The Sports of the Ilustrados in Nineteenth-Century Europe," *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 68, no. 2 (2020): 241–64, <https://doi.org/10.1353/phs.2020.0019>; Raquel A. G Reyes, *Love, Passion and Patriotism: Sexuality and the Philippine Propaganda Movement, 1882-1892* (Singapore and Seattle: NUS Press, in association with University of Washington Press, 2008), 91–101; Barbara J. Keys, *Globalizing Sport* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2013); Wilson Chacko Jacob, *Working out Egypt: Effendi Masculinity and Subject Formation in Colonial Modernity, 1870-1940* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011); Shanon Fitzpatrick, "Physical Culture's World of Bodies: Transnational Participatory Pastiche and the Body Politics of America's Globalized Mass Culture," in *Body and Nation: The Global Realm of U.S. Body Politics in The Twentieth Century*, ed. Emily S. Rosenberg and Shanon Fitzpatrick, Kindle (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 83–109.

<sup>20</sup> Kramer, *The Blood of Government*, 191–92.

Justification for ‘calibrated colonialism’ was popularly expressed by three narratives – familial, evolutionary, and tutelary-assimilationist – of “inclusionary racism,” each “praising...Filipino capacity...while lamenting present ability”; each encouraged limited but, ostensibly, increasing Filipino political participation while emphasizing American responsibility over their colonial ‘wards,’ whose ‘discipline’ they would inculcate over decades.<sup>21</sup> Amateur athletics, as Gerald Gems has shown, were one tool with which capable but still ‘undisciplined’ Filipinos might be moulded into productive, national citizens, and provided, as Janet Davis has illustrated, a healthy alternative to the ubiquitous cockfight, allegedly the repository for all that remained “animal...inassimilable, and ‘savage’” in Filipinos.<sup>22</sup> Athletics were the softer edge of a larger strategy through which Filipino bodies might be known, moulded, and repurposed, through which a national *esprit de corps* might be cultivated, and through which a virile, ‘martial masculinity,’ whose most visible expression was the training of Philippine Scouts and Philippine Constabularymen under American officers, might be instilled and embodied. Far from merely ‘civilizing’ Filipinos, Philippine Scouts and Constabularymen had literally, over a few years, ‘evolved’ from hunched, ‘savage’ beings to erect exponents of ‘manliness.’<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> See, Kramer, 32–33, 161–73. For other examples of the inculcation of ‘discipline’ in Filipinos and state efforts to make the Filipino body ‘legible,’ see, McCoy, “Policing the Imperial Periphery: Philippine Pacification and the Rise of the U.S. National Security State”; Salman, “‘The Prison That Makes Men Free’: The Iwahig Penal Colony and the Simulacra of the American State in the Philippines”; Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies*; Vicente L. Rafael, *White Love and Other Events in Filipino History* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000), 19–51.

<sup>22</sup> Gerald R. Gems, *The Athletic Crusade: Sport and American Cultural Imperialism* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2006), 46–64; Gerald R. Gems, *Sport and the American Occupation of the Philippines: Bats, Balls, and Bayonets* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2016), 3–8; 111–12; 116; Janet M. Davis, “Cockfight Nationalism: Blood Sport and the Moral Politics of American Empire and Nation Building,” *American Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (2013): 549–74, <https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2013.0035>.

<sup>23</sup> Kramer, *The Blood of Government*, 317–20. For more on the Scouts, see, Christopher Capozzola, “The Secret Soldiers’ Union: Labor and Soldier Politics in the Philippine Scout Mutiny of 1924,” in *Making the Empire Work: Labor and United States Imperialism*, ed. Daniel E. Bender and Jana K. Lipman (New York: NYU Press, 2015), 85–103, <http://muse.jhu.edu/book/42372>. For other examples of the cultivation of Filipino bodies through athletics, see, Gems, *Sport and the American Occupation of the Philippines*, 112, 121.

These loaded narratives, dense fields of knowledge, revaluations of the male body, and the use of sport in the latter's cultivation would converge in – and be united by – prizefighting. Prizefighting, however, does not fit neatly into accounts of sport and the state: although it, too, was laden with 'redemptive' power, it was a liminal sport whose objective was not to display technical mastery, but to thoroughly incapacitate one's opponent. It bore no resemblance to activities encouraged by the colonial administration and was opposed by many Filipino elites.<sup>24</sup> As a sport, it allowed (principally working-class) men of all ethnicities, races, and nations to stake claims to manhood for their groups and for (pugilistic) identities to be consolidated, even created, around them; as entertainment, it sometimes resembled the voyeuristic representational practices that exposed darker bodies to white gazes (for example, in the form of 'battles royal' in the United States, which pitted several black men, sometimes blindfolded, against each other).<sup>25</sup> By the early 1920s, despite still-numerous threats to its survival, prizefighting had entered a new phase: partly due to its legalization in New York state via the Walker Law and to the purported usefulness of its techniques in training American recruits for the Great War, it had gained greater acceptance with the middle class and had become, as would other sports during the decade, a modern business.<sup>26</sup> Prizefighters were no longer independent labourers partaking in a clandestine,

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<sup>24</sup> There is no evidence of any effort by the state to institute amateur boxing in the Philippines. See, Gems, *Sport and the American Occupation of the Philippines*, 57, 148; Celia Bocobo-Olivar, *History of Physical Education in the Philippines* (Quezon City: University of the Philippines Press, 1972), 39–50, 55–57, 66.

<sup>25</sup> The insight is drawn from Theresa Runstedtler, *Jack Johnson, Rebel Sojourner: Boxing in the Shadow of the Global Color Line* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012), 23, <https://www.degruyter.com/isbn/9780520952287>. For prizefighting as 'voyeurism' in the form of 'battles royal,' see, Andrew M. Kaye, *The Pussycat of Prizefighting: Tiger Flowers and the Politics of Black Celebrity* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004), 39–67.

<sup>26</sup> See, Steven A. Riess, "In the Ring and Out: Professional Boxing in New York, 1896-1920," in *Sport in America: New Historical Perspectives*, ed. Donald Spivey (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1985), 95–128; Steven A. Riess, *City Games: The Evolution of American Urban Society and the Rise of Sports* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Mark Dyreson, "The Emergence of Consumer Culture and the Transformation of Physical Culture: American Sport in the 1920s," *Journal of Sport History* 16, no. 3 (Winter 1989): 261–81; Jeffrey T. Sammons, *Beyond the Ring: The Role of Boxing in American Society* (Champaign: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 49–51.



homosocial activity, but common labourers whose freedom was becoming ever more constrained by an increasingly corporate model of recruitment, training, and performance which ensured that they could be produced rapidly, in sufficient quantity, and used with greater frequency.<sup>27</sup>

Howton's inner monologue, as Ramirez staggers about the ring under his assault, illustrates how routine, highly stylized, violent performances could be rationalized as 'simply business' and accepted as such by the public: "Good God, he hadn't killed those boys! He had beaten them in fair and square fights. They had been beaten by others. *He had done only what he had contracted to do, what the public wanted, urged him to do* [emphasis added]."<sup>28</sup> Hawkinson's ghosts, meanwhile, suggest business' role in corrupting prizefighting's alleged redemptive power and a narrative of benign, benevolent colonial responsibility, turning empire into a virtual market for bodies. The ghosts only appear after Ramirez utters something to himself, "perhaps in prayer," after which they plague Hawkinson to the point of almost physically assaulting him, which causes Ramirez to smile and hints at a conscious summoning of vengeful spirits.<sup>29</sup> Hawkinson, the paternal figurehead, appears intimately connected to his fighters by an unearthly bond: when Ramirez is finally knocked down, Hawkinson is also "sent...down as if he himself had been struck," and he remains haunted by the "death agony" of one fighter, Jesus Crespino, whose

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For contemporary examples of these views from *The Ring*, see, "What More Can Be Said in Defense of Boxing's Favor," *Cablenews-American*, February 14, 1920, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19200214-01.1.4>; "Smiles and Slams," *Cablenews-American*, December 12, 1919, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19191220-01.1.5>; The Sportsman, "Ring Thrills," *The Ring*, March 1947; Nat Fleischer, "As We See It," *The Ring*, February 1925; Nat Fleischer, "As We See It," *The Ring*, July 1925; Nat Fleischer, "As We See It," *The Ring*, March 1925; Nat Fleischer, "As We See It," *The Ring*, July 1925; Nat Fleischer, "As We See It," *The Ring*, October 1925; Nat Fleischer, "As We See It," *The Ring*, April 1925.

<sup>27</sup> For the beginnings of prizefighting's 'corporatization' during the Gilded Age, see, Elliott J. Gorn, *The Manly Art: Bare-Knuckle Prize Fighting in America*, Kindle (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2010); Jeffery A. Clymer, "The Market in Male Bodies: Henry James's The American and Late-Nineteenth-Century Boxing," *The Henry James Review* 25, no. 2 (2004): 127–45, <https://doi.org/10.1353/hjr.2004.0013>.

<sup>28</sup> Daniel, "Haunted Hands: A Tale of Hoodoos and the Supernatural."

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

ghost still has the “gash under his right eye which had started him toward his downfall – and death.”<sup>30</sup> After Crespino’s passing, Hawkinson “had vowed that never again would he manage or second a boxer,” a short-lived vow, for “[t]he insistent call of the ring proved too strong.”<sup>31</sup>

Historians have also heeded, in recent decades, the “insistent call of the ring.”

Prizefighting histories bear important structural and analytical similarities: many are biographies while others centre their account, or each chapter, on one fighter.<sup>32</sup> Earlier histories were decidedly American; many recent studies have shifted geographically but have retained the nation-state as the unit of analysis.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, almost all have sought to analyze the public

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<sup>30</sup> Daniel, “Haunted Hands: A Tale of Hoodoos and the Supernatural.”

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> See, Randy Roberts, *Papa Jack: Jack Johnson and the Era of White Hopes* (New York and London: Free Press, 1983); Runstedtler, *Jack Johnson, Rebel Sojourner*; Michael T. Isenberg, *John L. Sullivan and His America* (Urbana, Illinois: University of Illinois Press, 1994); Enver Michel Casimir, “Champion of the Patria: Kid Chocolate, Athletic Achievement, and the Significance of Race for Cuban National Aspiration” (Ph.D., Chapel Hill, NC, The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2010), <http://www.proquest.com/docview/751236357/abstract/B2EE6653930146D1PQ/1>; Stephen D. Allen, *A History of Boxing in Mexico: Masculinity, Modernity, and Nationalism* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2017); Kaye, *The Pussycat of Prizefighting*.

<sup>33</sup> For American histories, see, Gorn, *The Manly Art*; Louis Moore, *I Fight for a Living: Boxing and the Battle for Black Manhood, 1880-1915* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2017); Dan Streible, *Fight Pictures: A History of Boxing and Early Cinema* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008), <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heh.08056>; Meg Frisbee, *Counterpunch: The Cultural Battles Over Heavyweight Prizefighting in the American West* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2016); Gregory Steven Rodriguez, “‘Palaces of Pain’ - Arenas of Mexican-American Dreams: Boxing and the Formation of Ethnic Mexican Identities in Twentieth-Century Los Angeles” (Ph.D., San Diego, University of California, San Diego, 1999), <http://www.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/304496900/abstract/6E55618E48B140FEPQ/1>; Sammons, *Beyond the Ring*. For non-American, nation-state histories, see, Anju Nandlal Reejsinghani, “For Blood or for Glory: A History of Cuban Boxing, 1898-1962” (Ph.D., Austin, The University of Texas at Austin, 2009), <http://www.proquest.com/pqdtglobal/docview/365556025/abstract/DED6E6BBE69E4E68PQ/1>; Casimir, “Champion of the Patria”; Allen, *A History of Boxing in Mexico*. For notable exceptions, see, Runstedtler, *Jack Johnson, Rebel Sojourner*; Theresa Runstedtler, “Visible Men: African American Boxers, the New Negro, and the Global Color Line,” *Radical History Review* 2009, no. 103 (January 1, 2009): 59–81, <https://doi.org/10.1215/01636545-2008-031>; Theresa Runstedtler, “White Anglo-Saxon Hopes and Black Americans’ Atlantic Dreams: Jack Johnson and the British Boxing Colour Bar,” *Journal of World History* 21, no. 4 (December 2010): 657–89; Avi Astor, Jofre Riba Morales, and Raúl Sánchez García, “‘A Latin Can Be Worth Just as Much or More than a Saxon’: Boxing, Gender, and Transnational Latinity in Late Nineteenth-Century and Early Twentieth-Century Spain,” *The International Journal of the History of Sport* 37, no. 1–2 (January 22, 2020): 55–74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523367.2020.1732932>; Matthew Taylor, “The Global Ring? Boxing, Mobility, and

reception of prizefighters and of lay discourses surrounding them, often to discern social ‘truths.’<sup>34</sup> This holds true for the small body of historical scholarship that has examined Filipino prizefighters from the 1920s-1930s, upon which this thesis builds. Linda España-Maram has considered the important role of prizefighting in the homosocial practices of young, working-class Filipino labourers in California, and the Filipino prizefighter’s body, around which “counter-hegemonic” narratives were constructed: the fighter, whose social class often mirrored that of Filipino labourers, embodied a virile, public masculinity whose physicality countered the racialization and feminization of their compatriots, individually overcoming the collective exploitation to which they were daily subjected.<sup>35</sup> Theresa Runstedtler has examined the (albeit limited and tenuous) connections that, in discrete instances, may have bound black American and Filipino prizefighters as visible exemplars of (proto)-revolutionary, black and brown working-class consciousness, hinting at “the broader matrix of class inequality, caste exclusion, and

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Transnational Networks in the Anglophone World, 1890–1914,” *Journal of Global History* 8, no. 2 (July 2013): 231–55, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S174002281300020X>.

<sup>34</sup> For examples, besides those mentioned above, see, Richard V. McGehee, “The Dandy and the Mauler in Mexico: Johnson, Dempsey, et al., and the Mexico City Press, 1919-1927,” *Journal of Sport History* 23, no. 1 (1996): 15; Elliott J. Gorn, “The Manassa Mauler and the Fighting Marine: An Interpretation of the Dempsey–Tunney Fights,” *Journal of American Studies* 19, no. 1 (April 1985): 27–47, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S002187580002003X>; Justin D. García, “Boxing, Masculinity, and *Latinidad*: Oscar de La Hoya, Fernando Vargas, and *Raza* Representations,” *The Journal of American Culture* 36, no. 4 (December 2013): 323–41, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jacc.12053>; Kevin B Wamsley, “Celebrating Violent Masculinities: The Boxing Death of Luther McCarty,” *Journal of Sport History* 25, no. 3 (Fall 1998): 419–31; Clymer, “The Market in Male Bodies”; Gregory S. Rodríguez, “Saving Face, Place, and Race: Oscar de La Hoya and the ‘All-American’ Dreams of U.S. Boxing,” in *Sports Matters: Race, Recreation, and Culture / Edited by John Bloom and Michael Nevin Willard*, ed. John Bloom and Michael Nevin Willard (New York: New York University Press, 2002), 279–96; Fernando Delgado, “Golden but Not Brown: Oscar de La Hoya and the Complications of Culture, Manhood, and Boxing,” *International Journal of the History of Sport* 22, no. 2 (March 2005): 196–211, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09523360500035818>; Christina D Abreu, “The Story of Benny ‘Kid’ Paret: Cuban Boxers, the Cuban Revolution, and the U.S. Media, 1959-1962,” *Journal of Sport History* 38, no. 1 (Spring 2011): 95–113; Will Cooley, “‘Vanilla Thrillas’: Modern Boxing and White-Ethnic Masculinity,” *Journal of Sport and Social Issues* 34, no. 4 (November 2010): 418–37, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0193723510379992>.

<sup>35</sup> Linda España-Maram, *Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles’s Little Manila: Working-Class Filipinos and Popular Culture, 1920s-1950s* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 73–103. For an account of an (allegedly) former Churchill fighter who became a migrant labourer in California before returning to fight after some of his compatriots told of his fighting ability to a local promoter, see, “Zorilla-David Bout Presents Old Argument,” *Imperial Valley Press*, November 12, 1931.

plebeian masculinity that continually replenishes the supply of fighters and the asymmetric system of positions and transactions that define the division of labor undergirding” the sport.<sup>36</sup> These insights, however, also highlight an important problem: the (un)intended consequences of the virilization of darker bodies. Filipino prizefighters’ bodies were not only lenses through which to contemplate social developments, conduits through which state discourses were channelled, or sites upon which resistance to hegemonic racial formations was enacted, they were also the locus of intense epistemological transformation within the pugilistic realm: as Filipino identity became synonymous with pugilistic excellence, Filipino pugilistic bodies were laden with predictable features and reshaped as exceptionally reliable ‘commodities.’

This study differs from many histories of prizefighting in two ways. First, the field of analysis is trans-imperial. Drawing inspiration from Runstedtler’s work on globetrotting black American fighters and Matthew Taylor’s work on prizefighting networks in the early twentieth century, I examine the exchange of racial formations and discourses among actors in the pugilistic realm in an ‘Anglosphere’ encompassing the US-occupied Philippines, the United States, and Australia, and their effects on the creation and consolidation of a novel, context-specific Filipino identity in and for prizefighting’s “imagined community.”<sup>37</sup> Second, this study is about the production of situated knowledge, primarily within and for the hermetic pugilistic

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<sup>36</sup> Theresa Runstedtler, “The New Negro’s Brown Brother: Black American and Filipino Boxers and the ‘Rising Tide of Color,’” in *Escape from New York: The New Negro Renaissance Beyond Harlem* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 105–26. For passage cited, see, Loïc Wacquant, “The Pugilistic Point of View: How Boxers Think and Feel about Their Trade,” *Theory and Society* 24, no. 4 (August 1995): 494, <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00993521>.

<sup>37</sup> For Benedict Anderson’s definition of an ‘imagined community,’ see, Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Rev. ed (London and New York: Verso, 2006), 5–7.

realm.<sup>38</sup> Actors in the pugilistic realm were not only grafting existing notions of difference onto Filipino performances as ways of seeing; these ways of seeing informed ways of doing, too.<sup>39</sup> In turn, these contributed to the creation of what I have called the ‘Filipino-*as*-prizefighter’ commodity identity, an identity that existed in discourse and was *created* through the repeated and mutually reinforcing processes of practice, promotion, and performance. Prizefighting reportage and prizefighting business were not separate practices, nor reflective or reiterative processes that exploited or reproduced difference; they were productive, transformative, and linked practices that consolidated identities created in the gym. Drawing on Loïc Wacquant, I resituate the gym, “the workshop wherein is manufactured [the pugilist’s] body-weapon and shield,” and the productive role of its unique, institutional practices, at the centre of inquiry.<sup>40</sup> This focus on the inner workings of the “pugilistic economy” is, arguably, what separates this study from many prizefighting histories: it bridges historical scholarship, which has seldom examined the *transformation* of public discourses within the pugilistic realm, with sociological inquiries of the sport, which have examined its inner workings and their role in individual identity-formation without explicitly considering whether or how these processes may have shaped collective identities. Thus, some of the principal questions guiding this inquiry are: How have lay discourses impacted processes of identity-formation in the pugilistic realm? How have processes in the pugilistic realm contributed, in turn, to consolidating, even creating, new

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<sup>38</sup> For ‘situated knowledge,’ see, Warwick Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness: Science, Health and Racial Destiny in Australia*, 2nd ed. (Carlton, Vic.: Melbourne University Press, 2005), 9, <http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.03408>.

<sup>39</sup> ‘Boxing people’ refers to fighters, trainers, managers, and promoters. ‘Actors in the pugilistic realm’ encompasses anyone connected to prizefighting and not actively involved in craft or production; usually, fans and reporters.

<sup>40</sup> Loïc Wacquant, *Body & Soul: Notebooks of an Apprentice Boxer* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 14.

identities, rather than reproducing identities that have been ‘imported’ to the practice? What is the gym’s role in ‘making’ class, ethnicity, race, or variations thereof?<sup>41</sup>

The period under examination is roughly 1918 to 1930, when prizefighting became a multi-million-dollar business and when those born during the Philippine-American War, displaced by the conflict, coming of age on the streets of Olongapo and Manila, were drawn to the sport’s ‘factories.’ Manila Bay is the point from which we expand our search to track the trade in bodies between the Philippines, Australia, and the United States. I have drawn almost exclusively from newspaper accounts and contemporary sports periodicals from these three countries; there are few, if any, state documents.<sup>42</sup> The reason is threefold: first, state documents have been amply mined in scholarship of sport and the state; second, periodicals are often the only means, however mediated or fanciful their accounts may be, of glimpsing the inner workings of the ‘pugilistic economy’; third, prizefighters from the interwar Philippines offer an opportunity to consider the confluence, consonances, and dissonances of state discourses with the “indigenous values” of prizefighting, a sport bereft of state involvement or approval and whose practitioners, by dint of their class and the sport’s dubious ‘morality,’ could be construed as antithetical to the objectives of state-sponsored athletics.

I have relied, selectively, on three analytical tools. First, my readings are buttressed by Bederman’s discussions of ‘civilization,’ its context-specific manifestations in Kramer’s three narratives of ‘inclusionary racism,’ and Warwick Anderson’s exegeses of the construction of

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<sup>41</sup> This is not to suggest that fighters adopt styles based on their racial or ethnic background, but that (perhaps) discourse may subtly dictate stylistic decisions in their everyday work from the moment of their initiation, that their identities as fighters of a given group are not only discursively produced in public expectations but, influenced by discourse, also materially produced in training before even their first performance. For the unimportance of identity with regards to fighters’ tactical decisions once in the ring and, conversely, its importance to fighters in selling a fight before entering the ring, see, Benita Heiskanen, *The Urban Geography of Boxing: Race, Class, and Gender in the Ring* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2012), 85–91.

<sup>42</sup> These primary sources, save for issues of *The Ring*, were obtained principally through digital databases.

whiteness in the Philippines and Australia through tropical medicine: Filipino prizefighters were visible exemplars onto whom existing discourses might be mapped and through whom they might be altered; their performances provided a virtual layperson's laboratory for racial fitness and examples, however fictive, of the success of the colonial tutelary project.

Second, the sporting press is approached as an actor and integral component of prizefighting's informal 'archive,' the repository of the sport's ideological imperatives.<sup>43</sup> These imperatives include the ethe of sacrifice and individualism which pervade accounts of the sport and which are, however implicitly, always unambiguously 'masculine' – these are the 'grain' along and against which I read.<sup>44</sup> My (re)reading of 'pugilistic masculinity,' however, does not consider the foreclosures it presents to alternative conceptions of masculinity in society; rather, I foreground the (sometimes gruesome) foreclosures it has presented to fighters themselves.<sup>45</sup> I use Wacquant's insights on the 'pugilistic economy' and the affective dimension of prizefighting labour to examine some of the sport's fundamental operating principles and ethe, which have remained remarkably consistent over time and across space, even as the economic landscape of

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<sup>43</sup> For an archive "as something in between a set of documents, their institutions, and repository of memory – both a place and cultural space that encompass official documents but are not confined to them," see, Ann Laura Stoler, *Along the Archival Grain: Epistemic Anxieties and Colonial Common Sense* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 49.

<sup>44</sup> See, *ibid.*, 50. Whether I have read along the grain, against it, or not at all, I leave to a more discerning reader.

<sup>45</sup> For authors who have considered 'prizefighting masculinity' as a kind of 'sub-species' of *ur*-masculinity or 'hegemonic masculinity,' see, Joyce Carol Oates, *On Boxing*, 1st Harper Perennial ed, Harper Perennial Modern Classics (New York: Harper Perennial, 2006), 70–74; Constancio R. Arnaldo, Jr., "'I'm Thankful for Manny': Manny Pacquiao, Pugilistic Nationalism, and the Filipina/o Body," in *Global Asian American Popular Cultures*, ed. Shilpa Davé, Leilani Nishime, and Tasha Oren (New York: NYU Press, 2016), 27–45; Constancio R. Arnaldo, Jr., "Manny 'Pac-Man' Pacquiao, the Transnational Fist, and the Southern California Ringside Community," in *Asian American Sporting Cultures*, ed. Stanley I. Thangaraj (New York: NYU Press, 2016), 102–24; Constancio R. Arnaldo, Jr., "'Undisputed' Racialised Masculinities: Boxing Fandom, Identity, and the Cultural Politics of Masculinity," *Identities* 27, no. 6 (November 1, 2020): 655–74, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1070289X.2019.1624068>; Kath Woodward, *Boxing, Masculinity, and Identity: The "I" of the Tiger*, 1st ed. (London: Taylor and Francis, 2006), <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/9780203020180>.

prizefighting has changed.<sup>46</sup> Given the context in which Wacquant performed his research – among (mostly) black American boxers of late 1980s-early 1990s Chicago – my use of his interventions, particularly when considering that which compelled Filipino prizefighters to adopt and stay with the trade, is necessarily suggestive rather than definitive: barring contrary evidence, Filipino fighters’ motivations are presumed to be, but may not have been, like those of prizefighters in other times and places. Wacquant’s insights give tentative voice to these motivations, help recover voices where they are absent and to interpret sparse statements when they are not, and suggest that participation in the sport – the source and object of deep attachment and passion – is validated by its ideological imperatives as much as it is coerced by them. Finally, they underscore the demographic realities, in different sociohistorical contexts, of the sport’s labour pool and the kinds of bodies – overwhelmingly those of the immigrant, black, or brown working-class – upon which the business operates and to which the sport’s ethe (and their consequences) most often apply.

Finally, my analyses of discourse, power, and agency in the sport have drawn, sparsely, on Michel Foucault’s more generalizable insights on discourse and power.<sup>47</sup> First, power and resistance do not derive from a single source: both are local, alterable, and contingent; even ‘average’ prizefighters could exercise agency at specific points and moments in the ‘pugilistic economy.’<sup>48</sup> Second, state discourses and ‘hegemonic’ social formations are sustained by local

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<sup>46</sup> For examples of the historical continuity of the sport’s ethe, see, n. 45. For examples of the continuity of (some of) its operating principles, see, Taylor, “The Global Ring?”; Loïc Wacquant, “A Fleshpeddler at Work: Power, Pain, and Profit in the Prizefighting Economy,” *Theory and Society* 27 (1998): 1–42; Wacquant, *Body & Soul*, 126.

<sup>47</sup> It may be better (and more charitable) to consider my use of Foucault’s insights, not as “methodological imperatives,” but as “precautionary prescriptions” (« ce ne sont point des impératifs de méthode; tout au plus des prescriptions de prudence »). See, Michel Foucault, *Histoire de la sexualité I : La volonté de savoir*, Collection Tel 248 (Paris: Gallimard, 2014), 129. All translations are mine.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 121-7.



conditions: the minute interrogation of the “most localized and immediate power relations” illuminates how the Filipino prizefighter’s body was made into “an object to be known” and invested with particular schemata.<sup>49</sup> Third, whether explaining the successes and ‘failures’ of the Filipino body or sketching the alleged relationship between prizefighting and the tutelary project, actors in the pugilistic realm relied on the “tactical multivalence” of discourses, uniting a “number of discursive elements...in diverse strategies,” occasionally using “identical formulae for opposite ends.”<sup>50</sup> Filipino prizefighters, however, existed in a kind of ‘dual discursive’ universe, one which reckoned with them solely as actors in the pugilistic realm, a world imbued with its own indigenous, ‘redemptive’ values, and another which reckoned with them as exemplars of successful American tutelage, a project laden with its own ‘redemptive’ purpose. Prizefighting’s ‘redeeming’ power was intelligible because it was fixed, like the tutelary project, within a larger, ‘civilizing’ strategy yet, however superficially contiguous, the success of Filipino prizefighters was not a miniaturization of the colonial state’s efforts.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, the linkage between the tutelary project and the achievements of Filipino prizefighters – and the conspicuous absence of the former’s invocation in defeat – suggests the overarching purpose of these discrete turns by actors in the pugilistic realm: the obscuring of the practical realities of the sport, as much to themselves as to others, to maintain internal, ideological consistency with its indigenous values and secure its continued existence against sustained opposition.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> For passages cited, see, Foucault, *La volonté de savoir*, 124, 128, 130. For whole argument, see, *ibid.*, 121-130. Discourse “must not be analyzed simply as the surface upon which mechanisms of power are projected. It is indeed in discourse that power and knowledge are expressed.” (« Ce qui se dit...ne doit pas être analysé comme la simple surface de projection...[des] mécanismes de pouvoir. C’est bien dans le discours que pouvoir et savoir viennent s’articuler. »). See, *ibid.*, 133.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 131-5.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 131-2.

<sup>52</sup> For a possible theorization of the simultaneous (or alternately) unhypocritical and expedient application of discourses by actors in the pugilistic realm and their pursuit of explicit goals – whose specific formulation may not

Before outlining the chapters, some clarifications. First, this study is neither a comprehensive history of prizefighting in the Philippines, nor a set of short biographies: it is strictly an historical analysis of the discursive and material conditions that conspired to produce the ‘Filipino-*as*-prizefighter’ commodity identity, which I argue was a novel, consciously crafted racial formation, the result of efforts directed principally by the Olympic Athletic Club of Manila, run by American businessmen Frank Churchill and Eddie Tait, to produce and ‘package’ athletes as the possessors of nationally inherent and emblematic characteristics.<sup>53</sup> Second, there are virtually no discussions of Filipino influence on or views of the sport: this is a lacuna imposed by the sources. Third, I do not intend to critique or condemn prizefighting *in toto*, to consider (at length) its role in Philippine society during the interwar period or in societies *tout court*, or what its continued existence ‘says’ about societies. This is an investigation of the *discourses*, refracted from a wider social context, deployed amongst a small but influential set of actors, of the knowledge these discourses *produced*, of the conditions this knowledge *obscured*, and of *agency* in the shadow of these discourses and knowledge.

Finally, a brief word on ‘savagery,’ ‘civilization,’ and ‘modernity.’ It has been the conceit of some to see prizefighting as ‘atavistic,’ to focus on its brutality as proof of its ‘primitiveness.’<sup>54</sup> Yet prizefighting as we know it (and as Cabanela and Villa knew it), however

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have been “the result of choices or decisions made by any individual subject” – within a “unifying ideological mechanism,” see, Wacquant, *Body & Soul*, 148-9; Foucault, *La volonté de savoir*, 125.

<sup>53</sup> The term ‘Filipino-*as*-prizefighter’ is my own: it had no currency in the era under scrutiny, nor in any other, and has none now. It conveys, first, that notions of Filipino identity led actors in the pugilistic realm to mould Filipinos into certain kinds of fighters; second, that the styles and tactics (purportedly) adopted by many Filipino prizefighters were presented as a genuine expression of intrinsic Filipino characteristics rather than the product of practices motivated by prior notions of Filipino identity; and, third, that Filipinos were said to possess an inherently pugnacious character – only some were made into prizefighters but all Filipinos, irrespective of their trade or class, were (born) fighters.

<sup>54</sup> For examples, see, Oates, *On Boxing*, 19, 21, 101–6; Sammons, *Beyond the Ring*, 251; Gorn, *The Manly Art*, 4; John Peter Sugden, *Boxing and Society: An International Analysis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 174–79.

brutal it is and atavistic it appears, is thoroughly modern, not merely because of its increased corporatization in the 1920s or its (albeit uneven and erratic) bureaucratic regulation, but because of the fundamental anatomical restructuring it has wrought on its practitioners, the realignment of physical force which Maurice Maeterlinck observed in “the boxer’s stance...[where] all the muscles of the body become legible,” in which “[e]very ounce [of strength] is directed toward one or the other of two massive fists, each supercharged with energy.”<sup>55</sup> Maeterlinck evokes a quasi-mythical figure, a myth made flesh by the sport’s codification (whose rules only permit strikes with a closed fist) and its adoption of gloves (which protect the fist, not the opponent).<sup>56</sup> The artificiality of two people fighting solely with their fists suggests a myth made flesh by, and perhaps of a whole with, modernity, intimating that prizefighting is not, after all, a ‘primitive’ fight for ‘survival,’ nor even a close approximation, but a highly stylized spectacle of violence – whose aesthetics and techniques are anchored in a fist made unnaturally invulnerable and more destructive by modern developments – that cannot but be ‘modern.’<sup>57</sup>

Chapter one focuses on Dencio Cabanela, the first Filipino prizefighter to achieve extranational prominence, the articulation of discourses of tropicality, race, and discipline about his body, and the crafting of a narrative with which his successes and ‘failures’ could be explained. I first consider the personal links and networks through which this narrative was

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<sup>55</sup> Quoted in Gerald R. Gems, *Boxing: A Concise History of The Sweet Science* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2014), xi–xii.

<sup>56</sup> For a considered example of the increased dangers of ‘civilized,’ gloved combat, see, Kenneth G. Sheard, “Aspects of Boxing in the Western ‘Civilizing Process,’” *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 32, no. 1 (March 1997): 31–57, <https://doi.org/10.1177/101269097032001004>.

<sup>57</sup> The inadvisability of relying solely on pugilism as a survival practice was cogently expressed by one of the North Irish amateur boxers interviewed by John Sugden: “‘Boxing’s not much good to you in the street. You don’t only just punch when you’re fighting in the street. There’s kicking, biting, pulling hair, screaming [scratching] and poking eyes. Boxing doesn’t count much.” See, Sugden, *Boxing and Society*, 99.

produced and through which elements of an inchoate, Filipino pugilistic identity would be consolidated and forged using Cabanela's body. I then examine Cabanela's brief sojourn and demise in Australia, as his *in situ* manager Eddie Tait and others struggled to explain why one 'closer to nature' should so easily succumb to injury, finding their answers in his body, rather than his trade. Finally, I reconsider these answers with additional evidence, arguing that Tait and others obscured – as much to themselves as to others – the conditions inherent to prizefighting that led to Cabanela's demise, individualizing Cabanela's 'failures' while generalizing the features that allegedly produced them.

Chapter two centres on Pancho Villa, world's flyweight champion between 1923 and 1925, his manager Frank Churchill, and the business of boxing. First, I consider Villa's role as Cabanela's 'successor,' his 'embodiment' of Philippine nationhood, and Churchill's mapping of state narratives of 'inclusionary racism' onto Villa's achievements as an unhypocritical expression of paternalism and the self-conscious legitimation of an endeavour whose brutal consequences ran counter to the (avowed) objectives of these narratives. Then, I consider the impact of the discourses examined in both chapters, and of Villa's success, on the business practices of prizefighting in the Manila Bay area. While the first chapter examines the promotional processes through which demand for Filipino fighters was created, partly through a sporting press that applied and transformed existing discourses, the second chapter examines the application and transformation of these discourses on the supply side, focusing on the routine, material practices of the Olympic, the fight scene around Manila Bay during the 1910s and 1920s, and their productive role in creating the 'Filipino-*as*-prizefighter' commodity identity. Finally, I consider agency within the constraints of this identity, first by examining a unique but compelling example of collective action by 'average' Filipino fighters in Manila, before turning

again to Villa and Churchill to examine the near-sundering of their professional relationship, what the episode tells us about Villa's position in prizefighting's hierarchy, and the strategies available to him.

The inspiration for "Haunted Hands" – the death of Sencio Moldez on 20 April 1926 – touched off a brief debate in the sporting press. Its focus was not the sport's inherent danger, nor the fact – readily acknowledged by all – that Moldez was the third Filipino fighter managed by Churchill to have died, but the supposed danger of allowing Filipinos, whose alarmingly frequent ring deaths suggested physiological unfitness, to participate in the sport at all.<sup>58</sup> The debate was anomalous: for most of the decade, and for decades thereafter, Filipino bodies were construed as better suited than most to the rigours of the prize ring. Even Churchill, who after Moldez' death became convinced of the unfitness of Filipino bodies, vowing to quit the fight game, soon recanted: by 1927, like his fictional counterpart Hawkinson, who had vowed the same, only to again "crouch...in the corner of still another son...Mindanao," Churchill was once again managing several Filipino fighters.<sup>59</sup> The identities he had been so instrumental in crafting were too lucrative: as with Hawkinson, "the insistent call of the ring proved too strong." It is to this "insistent call," its lure, its lucre, its power to create and destroy, utterly, to which we now turn.

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<sup>58</sup> See, United Press, "Sencio Burial Plans Held Up," *Indianapolis Times*, April 21, 1926; Maurice H. Goldner, "Filipinos Too Game, Says Critic Who Analyzes Causes Behind Sencio's Death," *The Ring*, June 1926; Harry Currie, "Sencio's Death," *Sydney Sportsman*, July 13, 1926, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article166772354>; Arty Schinner, "Are Filipinos Unsuitable for Ring Contests?," *Sporting Globe*, June 12, 1926, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article184837356>; Nat Fleischer, "As We See It," *The Ring*, June 1926.

<sup>59</sup> See, Currie, "Sencio's Death"; "Sencio Found Dead After Taylor Bout," *New York Times*, April 21, 1926, sec. SPORTS; "Manager Quits," *Alaska Daily Empire*, April 20, 1926; Associated Press, "Bud Taylor's Fist Kills Sencio: Filipino Second Ring Victim of Terre Haute Boxer. Churchill to Abandon His Entire Stable of Fighters.," *Washington Post*, April 21, 1926, sec. SPORTS.

## Chapter One: “That Little Model of Shape and Muscular Development” – Popular Eugenic Thought and Prizefighting’s Ethos of Sacrifice in the Life and Death of Dencio Cabanela

Clutched in his mother’s arms, the boy “squirmed and turned” to catch glimpses of the “continuous...stream” of strangers; occasionally, his gaze must have fallen upon the casket. His mother, a “girlish-looking” woman “dressed in deepest black” whose countenance suggested lack of sleep, fixed her gaze on the “flower-covered funeral bier” to which thousands had come to pay their respects.<sup>60</sup> It was 20 August 1921 at the National Funeral Parlors on Avenida Rizal, Manila, Philippines, the penultimate day of a six-day watch over the body of Dencio Cabanela, the Filipino prizefighter who had died earning his living in Australia. The boy and woman were his son and wife.

Most of the mourners had been Filipinos, from “lowly taos patter[ing] by barefooted rubbing shoulders with high ladies in their best dresses” to “[s]nappy, neat young Filipinos in whites tak[ing] their place behind poorly-clad women from the Tondo...”<sup>61</sup> Thousands more, including members of “56 [sic] branches of the Federation of Labor and 68 [sic] branches of the Labor Council,” turned out the day of the funeral, packing every street from Plaza Goiti to the Olympic Athletic Club, Cabanela’s old haunt, where the services were held.<sup>62</sup> They lined Avenida Rizal “eight and ten deep,” braving the rain to watch the casket on its journey to La Loma cemetery where, draped in the Philippine and American flags, it was lowered into the ground forever.<sup>63</sup> The chairman of the funeral arrangements committee, who had “maintain[ed] a

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<sup>60</sup> “Under Flickering Shadows of the Candles of Death,” *The Referee*, September 14, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article121159891>.

<sup>61</sup> “Under Flickering Shadows of the Candles of Death.”

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>63</sup> Details have been drawn from several accounts. See, “Big Money For Filipinos,” *The Referee*, September 21, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article121159454>; “Boxing,” *The Evening News*, September 29, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article260693946>.

constant watch,” claimed that no greater crowd had ever “passed through any Manila building when any body was lying in state,” outnumbering “by far” the crowd that had “marched by the coffin of M.H. Del Pilar” – one of the principal figures of the *ilustrado* Propaganda Movement – “when his body was brought back from Spain.”<sup>64</sup>

Fittingly, accounts of Cabanela’s wake and funeral emphasized – through the cross-section of Philippine society in attendance, the presence of labour organizations, and the twin flags draping the casket – the symbolic investment others had made in his body, glossing over his origins, his achievements, even the manner of his demise: it is fitting because his demise was as much the occasion for symbolic investment as it was (partly) caused by it. In the pugilistic realm, where larger discourses and political narratives were refracted and reshaped, Cabanela arrived always already invested with one narrative – which depicted him as the possessor of a ‘natural,’ impervious body – that even the most gruesome realities could not alter, as actors in the pugilistic realm tried obstinately to make sense of a narrative that no longer worked.<sup>65</sup>

I begin by briefly examining Cabanela’s origins. I then consider the intra-Pacific connections that enabled the grafting of older discourses of racial and tropical difference onto Cabanela’s body, and their alteration in and for the world of prizefighting. Finally, I consider the events leading to Cabanela’s demise in Australia and the role of these discourses, including the tacks they took and the conditions they obscured, in contributing to his death. I conclude with a

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<sup>64</sup> “Under Flickering Shadows of the Candles of Death.” M.H. del Pilar was a lawyer, born to a member of the wealthy landed elite, and the founder of the Philippines’ first Tagalog daily. His anti-friar activism compelled him to flee the archipelago for Spain, where he continued to write anti-friar invectives. In 1889, he became the editor of *La Solidaridad*, the Propaganda movement’s most important publication, until 1895, when the paper folded. He was an active Freemason and died, impoverished, of tuberculosis. See, Reyes, *Love, Passion and Patriotism*, 261–62.

<sup>65</sup> For an example of an athlete’s body as a site for multiple narratives, see, Mary Ting Yi Lui, “Sammy Lee: Narratives of Asian American Masculinity and Race in Decolonizing Asia,” in *Body and Nation: The Global Realm of U.S. Body Politics in The Twentieth Century*, ed. Emily S. Rosenberg and Shanon Fitzpatrick, Kindle (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 209–30.

reflection on the construction of Cabanela as an *ur*-type for other Filipino prizefighters and his role, however unwitting, in uniting key components of a nascent ‘Filipino-as-prizefighter’ identity.

### The Olympic Athletic Club, Australia, & Prizefighting’s Informal Networks of Exchange

In November 1919, shortly after Cabanela turned nineteen, an item appeared in *Boxing*, a weekly magazine published by ‘Churchill & Tait, Inc.’ His success in 1918 had elicited debates about his origins, which the publishers were determined to settle.<sup>66</sup> He was born in October 1900, in the city of San Fernando, Pampanga, but his parents had arrived “there from Camarines where the fighting between the American soldiers and the natives was,” as the author cheekily put it, “quite a bit too hot.”<sup>67</sup> In 1914, Cabanela left San Fernando for Olongapo, where most sources claim he became a coppersmith’s apprentice in the navy yard, introduced to the sport by watching American servicemen train for their fights.<sup>68</sup> His ‘discoverer,’ Edward Gallaher, proprietor of the Subic Bay Athletic Club, impressed by the boy’s “natural speed and cleverness...immediately took an interest in him and became his manager and mentor.”<sup>69</sup> He “encouraged [Cabanela] to train regularly...[and] helped him master the rudiments of boxing. [Cabanela], however, needed no urging, for he took to the sport,” it was said, “as naturally as a

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<sup>66</sup> He had secured simultaneous possession of the bantamweight, featherweight, and lightweight titles of the Orient. See, “Manila’s Triple Champion, Kid Dencio,” *The Referee*, April 30, 1919; “Is Kid Dencio Still A Bantamweight Boy?,” *Boxing*, February 1, 1919.

<sup>67</sup> “Some Early [?],” *Boxing*, November 15, 1919. The last word of the title was illegible due to poor image quality.

<sup>68</sup> “The Filipino Les Darcy,” *Sydney Sportsman*, February 7, 1922, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article167188100>; “Some Early [?]”; Joe Waterman, “Evolution of the Filipino Boxer,” *The Referee*, January 7, 1920, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article121155113>.

<sup>69</sup> “Some Early [?].”



baby takes to a bottle of milk.”<sup>70</sup> Even as a young adolescent, his ‘natural’ predisposition to fighting was coupled with notions, held by actors in the pugilistic realm, of an already ‘impervious’ body, the putative source of his preternatural power: at age fifteen, he possessed “a powerful torso and muscular physique” and “[h]is wonderful symmetry and powerful-looking compactness suggested not only speed, but also abnormal punching power,” while “[a]n American sport writer once stated that punches fairly ‘rolled’ off [him].”<sup>71</sup> His reputation for uncommon durability was either produced or cemented by one of the “new stunts” he was trying every day: reportedly, Gallaher once found Cabanela “‘hardening his jaw’” in a “marine’s gymnasium,” where a two-hundred pound sailor was “heaving a [thirteen pound] medicine ball at [it].”<sup>72</sup> The reporter could not verify the efficacy of this carnivalesque practice, nor, if true, what Gallaher did upon seeing it, but concluded that “the fact remains that a punch on the jaw never put [Cabanela] down for the full count.”<sup>73</sup> By age fifteen or sixteen, Cabanela was fighting professionally; by March 1919, he was the best fighter in the Philippines, preparing to face the first of several Australian opponents he would encounter at home and abroad, the last of whom would be the instrument, but not the cause, of his demise.<sup>74</sup>

The presence of Australians in Manila in 1919 was no happenstance, but the result of negotiations between Frank Churchill and Australian promoter Jack Munro of Stadiums Ltd.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> “The Filipino Les Darcy.”

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> “The Filipino Les Darcy”; “Some Early [?].”

<sup>75</sup> R.M. Stephens, “Boxing: Filipino Fighters,” *Sydney Sun*, July 8, 1919, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article221983343>.

Churchill and Eddie Tait had found some success pitting Filipinos against each other and, later, against Americans and other visitors to Manila but, by 1918, Filipino fighters, Cabanela especially, were running out of new foes: until Churchill and Tait could test their ‘product’ against better opponents, their operation would remain local. It was too early to bring in the best Americans but Australians, well-regarded in the pugilistic community and somewhat closer to home, might do.<sup>76</sup>

By the late 1910s, ‘Philippine boxing,’ as it were, was still concentrated almost entirely around Manila Bay. There were several clubs in Manila and enviroing towns; the Olympic was its most prominent. Founded in or around 1910 by Churchill, Stewart Tait (Eddie’s brother), and others, it began, ostensibly, as an ‘amateur’ athletic club staging boxing ‘exhibitions’ for dues-paying members.<sup>77</sup> Its relationship with rival promotions was more often incestuous than contentious: in a developing market, neither the Olympic, nor Manila, could furnish all the talent for the prize ring. Club affiliation was tenuous: what mattered were the personal connections through which reciprocal networks of recruitment and exchange might be built.<sup>78</sup> These

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<sup>76</sup> For a slightly later example of the esteem in which Australian fighters were held, see, “An Interesting Letter from An Australian Fight Fan,” *The Ring*, March 1925.

<sup>77</sup> This was a common ruse used by clubs in the United States to circumvent anti-prizefighting laws. See, Riess, “In the Ring and Out: Professional Boxing in New York, 1896-1920,” 106–11. For the foundation of the Olympic, see, “Opening Smoker on November 19,” *Cablenews-American*, November 11, 1910, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19101111-01.1.3>; “Olympic Club Is Now Incorporated,” *Cablenews-American*, February 3, 1912, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19120203-01.1.12>; “Cradle of P. I. Boxing Game May Be Memory Soon,” *Tribune*, February 15, 1934, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article249638271>.

<sup>78</sup> For selected examples of conflict and connection, see, “Santa Ana Program Nearing Completion,” *Cablenews-American*, October 28, 1914, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19141028-01.1.6>; “Olongapo to Pull Off Big Smoker on Friday, Jan. 24,” *Cablenews-American*, January 17, 1919, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19190117-01.1.4>; “Frank Haynie a Bear for Work but Velgas Goes Him One Better,” *Cablenews-American*, April 21, 1920, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19200421-01.1.4>; “Whisperweights Pandon and Adriano Battle for Title Tonight at Olongapo,” *Cablenews-American*, December 23, 1919, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19191223-01.1.4>; “Eddie Tait May Hold Dark House at Olympic Saturday,” *Cablenews-American*, May 29, 1918, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19180529-01.1.4>; “Olympic Card for Saturday Undergoes Slight Change but It’s Good Card Just the Same,” *Cablenews-American*, June 5, 1918,

networks were not unique to the Philippines but replicated, on a smaller scale, those through which prizefighting had become, in preceding decades, a ‘global’ sport.<sup>79</sup> According to Matthew Taylor, these networks were “fluid, multiple, and loosely structured...characterized more by personal relationships and partnerships, and loosely structured flows of information, than by formalized institutional links,” had “developed alongside, and built upon, the global circuits of the late-nineteenth century entertainment industry” (and the new technologies of which they took advantage), and “were always contingent and subject to reconfiguration.”<sup>80</sup> A crucial component of these relationships, besides those between ‘boxing people,’ was the fostering of ties with those who might aid ‘boxing people’ in making their “performers...conspicuous in different parts of the world” – reporters. While connections between ‘boxing people’ created and ensured supply, those between ‘boxing people’ and reporters created and sustained demand. Churchill and Tait fostered such a rapport with prominent Australian sports columnist W.F. Corbett, and each would maintain correspondence with him after their respective visits to Australia.<sup>81</sup>

Australia’s relative geographical proximity and its established position in pugilism’s nascent global circuits, an ‘imagined community’ of prizefighting whose boundaries were roughly those of an imperial Anglosphere, made it a natural ‘trading partner.’ Australia’s fluency

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<https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19180605-01.1.2>; “Manager Tait Up in the Air; Saturday’s Card Not Settled,” *Cablenews-American*, August 22, 1918, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19180822-01.1.4>; Antonio H. Escoda, “Fans Will Get Their Fill of Good Bouts in Next Three Weeks,” *Cablenews-American*, August 28, 1918, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19180828-01.1.4>; “Sporting Editor’s Letter Box,” *Cablenews-American*, July 8, 1919, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19190708-01.1.4>.

<sup>79</sup> Taylor, “The Global Ring?,” 231–55. For examples of the disintegration of networks as actors or loci change, see, Jack Read, “Boxing,” *Australian Worker*, November 14, 1928, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article145992503>; “Filipinos May Not Come,” *Sydney Sportsman*, July 21, 1925, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article167183234>.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 233-4; 246-51. The Tait brothers were well established in entertainment industry circuits.

<sup>81</sup> For the exchange of correspondence between actors in the pugilistic realm as a means of obtaining information, see, Taylor, “The Global Ring?,” 246–47. For examples of missives in my own sources, see, “Llew Edwards for World’s Championship,” *The Referee*, April 23, 1919, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article120316919>; W.F. Corbett, “Jerry Sullivan’s Breach,” *Arrow*, December 17, 1920, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article103426782>; “Big Money For Filipinos.”

with American discourses of tropical and racial difference likely made it equally appealing: as Warwick Anderson observes, whites in the Philippines and Australia experienced these countries as ‘alien frontiers’ where the boundaries of whiteness, first threatened by ‘inimical,’ tropical environments and, later, by ‘undisciplined,’ foreign bodies, would be most clearly defined and hardened through tropical medicine.<sup>82</sup> Moreover, Australian scientists had painstakingly disseminated their knowledge to the lay public over several decades: by the time Cabanela arrived, there existed a rich, well-established, but changing, field of knowledge through which his body might be assessed and a receptive, fluent, but unevenly-informed, public.<sup>83</sup> Indeed, reporters’ assessments of Cabanela suggest that Australian scientists’ efforts had perhaps been too successful: for laypersons, older notions of ‘natural’ endowments conferred by tropical environments could not easily be extricated from newer conceptions of culture and habit, all of which were reconstituted, and possessed a fruitful afterlife, in the pugilistic realm.<sup>84</sup>

Climate, whether boon or bane, remained a persistent source of (dis)advantage to visiting fighters and their opponents.<sup>85</sup> Insufficient acclimation was proffered as the reason for the poor

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<sup>82</sup> Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies*, 6–7; 38; 47; 72–93; Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness*, 63–67; 75–76; 187.

<sup>83</sup> For dissemination of this knowledge, see, Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness*, 68–69. For the absence of terms like ‘eugenics’ and ‘social Darwinism’ in the work of Australian scientists, see, *ibid.*, 3. For the pervasiveness of discourses among lay publics despite the absence of any explicit engagement with all its terms or foundational texts, see, Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 40, 43–44, and, especially, 223–32; see, also, Foucault, *La volonté de savoir*, 124–5.

<sup>84</sup> For the change of focus from environment, to culture and discipline in tropical medicine, and continuing but diminishing resistance to this change, see, Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies*, 38, 46–52, 75–78, 91–102, 106, 112–13; Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness*, 14, 28, 60–85, 96–98, 124.

<sup>85</sup> Persistent, but inconsistent: each country’s climate could be depicted as restorative, harmless, or harmful; for examples, see, “The Fighting Filipino: How He Learnt the Game.,” *Sydney Sportsman*, February 16, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article168486539>; W.F. Corbett, “Dencio and Flores Here,” *The Referee*, February 9, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article121168910>; “Boxing,” *Advocate*, May 5, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article171058200>; “Shade and Lockwood Discussed,” *The Referee*, March 9, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article121161803>; “Harry Holmes and Tracey Back,” *The Referee*, January 14, 1920, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article121157114>.

performances of “the greatest aggregation of boys that ever left [Australia]” against Filipinos in Manila.<sup>86</sup> Syd Godfrey, who attributed his loss to Cabanela to a weakened state from swallowing water ““with the germ [sic] in it,”” remarked that ““[n]o man not a native, or thoroughly acclimatised could live in the Philippine Islands long with lowered vitality and escape one or other of the many diseases lurking in the air.””<sup>87</sup> Apologists observed that “the Australian boys have only been here a few weeks...none...are acclimated yet,” and had not become “accustomed to the heat and other Manila conditions.”<sup>88</sup> There was, however, another obstacle to white success in the Philippines, besides climate: poor discipline. George Bailieu, the Australians’ manager, was impressed by the modern amenities implemented at Churchill’s behest but aghast at the thoroughly ‘unmodern’ (and ‘undisciplined’) practices he had observed from most of the sport’s Filipino initiates, remarks which we shall reconsider shortly.<sup>89</sup> Inadequate knowledge of rules (even on the part of the referees), improper bandaging techniques, haphazard training methods: prior to the Australians’ arrival, he exclaimed, “[b]oxing was in a poor way...in Manila” and “[c]ritics...stated that [we] did more for the game in the Philippine[s] than anybody else...The result is that boxing, as far as rules go, is now as well conducted there as in any other part of the world.”<sup>90</sup>

The visit was also an opportunity to report on Cabanela firsthand: Bailieu claimed he “takes a punch without flinching...does not know the full extent of his powers...[and] stands and

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<sup>86</sup> W.F. Corbett, “W.F. Corbett’s World of Boxing: Australians in the Philippine Islands,” *Arrow*, February 28, 1919.

<sup>87</sup> W.F. Corbett, “The Boxing World,” *The Referee*, October 15, 1919, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article120318095>.

<sup>88</sup> Corbett, “W.F. Corbett’s World of Boxing: Australians in the Philippine Islands.” Some allowance must be made, however: almost anyone training or competing in a new locale, especially with different climatic conditions, would experience some level of temporary discomfort. The other common explanation was that Australians were victims of allegedly incompetent local referees. See, Corbett; “Our Boys at Manila,” *The Referee*, April 23, 1919.

<sup>89</sup> Reg. L. (Snowy) Baker, “Boxing: Doings in Manilla - Chat with Bailieu,” *Evening News*, July 2, 1919.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*

acts like a fighting cock in the ring.”<sup>91</sup> Cabanela’s resemblance to a fighting bantam suggested an aggressive style, even brazen contempt of injury.<sup>92</sup> For Bailieu, this appeared to be as much a function of Cabanela’s ‘natural’ advantages and proclivities as it was of his (and his trainers’) allegedly insufficient comprehension of technique. Although Cabanela was “‘the toughest boy [Bailieu] ever saw,’” he had untapped potential which his “‘native trainers” could not exploit.<sup>93</sup> “‘[I]n my opinion,’” said Bailieu, “‘he would be a world beater if he had a competent coach and trainer.”<sup>94</sup> Vince Blackburn, Cabanela’s opponent, thought likewise: hitting him was like “‘hitting a brick wall. He never shifts, and never seems stung,’” his body so resilient that Blackburn had reportedly “‘crippled his hands hammering at [him].”<sup>95</sup> Yet Cabanela was also “‘served up in a rough-and-ready way, and...takes a whole heap of beating...what a boy he would be,’” Blackburn exclaimed, “‘if he thoroughly trained in accordance with Australians’ ideas of preparing.”<sup>96</sup> Supposedly, then, Cabanela was talented, but unskilled and undisciplined, and his “‘native trainers” were (predictably) unable to possess or inculcate adequate discipline. These early observations, and their focus on environment and discipline, were the first steps in the rapid consolidation of a Filipino pugilistic identity through Cabanela, its greatest exemplar, that would soon circulate in the ‘imagined community’ of prizefighting, emphasizing always and thoroughly the peculiarity of the Filipino body and its ‘closeness to nature.’

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<sup>91</sup> Baker, “Boxing: Doings in Manilla - Chat with Bailieu.”

<sup>92</sup> It also suggested ‘natural’ pugnaciousness. Moreover, given cockfighting’s popularity in the Philippines, the reference to a fighting bantam was likely uncoincidental.

<sup>93</sup> Baker, “Boxing: Doings in Manilla - Chat with Bailieu.”

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

<sup>95</sup> W.F. Corbett, “W.F. Corbett’s World of Boxing,” *Arrow*, July 18, 1919, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article103529325>. We must be careful not to read too much into the remarks, either, for it may only have been respectful hyperbole.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

## “His Closeness to Nature Undoubtedly Aided Him Materially”: Dencio Cabanela in Australia

Cabanela sailed to the Antipodes with Eddie Tait and several ‘stablemates’ in 1921, where his first opponent was Eugène Criqui, a French Great War veteran who later captured the world’s featherweight title in 1923.<sup>97</sup> The upcoming fight spurred Corbett, the reporter who had forged ties with Churchill and Tait, to consider the advantages with which ‘nature’ had endowed “the short and rounded boyish-looking” Cabanela.<sup>98</sup> Corbett billed the fight as a contest between a ‘civilized’ European and an Asian whose compatriots were scarcely, if at all, removed from prehensile-tailed simians: “What of Criqui and [Cabanela] to-morrow night? Will the world-wide discussed aboriginal of the Philippine Islands, where there are men with tails and others without them who live in trees like apes – thus proving the correctness of Darwin's theory – rise superior to the skill of the cultured young Frenchman...?”<sup>99</sup> This was no pre-fight, promotional ballyhoo: Corbett’s post-fight report, in which he reiterated his belief in the existence of tailed human beings from the archipelago and their relationship to Cabanela’s natural predisposition to primordial violence, carefully and methodically examined the ‘evidence’ for the reader. His analysis was motivated, partly, by the distress wrought by triumphant, darker bodies in the ring:

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<sup>97</sup> “Consignment of Filipinos,” *The Referee*, January 19, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article121153830>. I have opted for ‘stablemate,’ the traditional term by which boxers from the same gym and under identical management were called, precisely because it powerfully conveys their commodification as virtual chattel. A group of these fighters was traditionally referred to as a ‘stable.’ See, Wacquant, “A Fleshpeddler at Work: Power, Pain, and Profit in the Prizefighting Economy,” 25. For Criqui’s ring record, see, “BoxRec: Eugene Criqui,” accessed January 24, 2023, <https://boxrec.com/en/box-pro/9863>.

<sup>98</sup> For biographical information on W.F. Corbett, see, Chris Cunneen, “Corbett, William Francis (1857–1923),” in *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, 18 vols. (Canberra: National Centre of Biography, Australian National University), accessed June 23, 2022, <https://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/corbett-william-francis-5778>.

<sup>99</sup> W.F. Corbett, “American National Boxing Commission,” *Arrow*, March 18, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article103431422>.

“When a colored man defeats a white antagonist, *as he often does* [emphasis added], a good deal is written about the pigmented person being much closer to Nature...and consequently better fitted for a battle wherein Nature’s weapons must be used.”<sup>100</sup> Corbett, however, seemed unfazed by this grim harbinger; rather, with awed, pseudo-scientific curiosity, he sought answers to the secret of Cabanela’s power, for it was not the mere fact of victory that had impressed him, but its manner.<sup>101</sup> Cabanela had not only beaten Criqui, he had “pasted and punished” him and “*made play* [emphasis added] of his battle with...a man who had beaten convincingly the very best [Australia] could pit against him...[Cabanela was] ever going forward...[with] little or no break in the continuity of his...aggressiveness.”<sup>102</sup> This was no rhetorical contrivance: Cabanela’s response to fighting as ‘play’ cast him – through a distilled, disjointed, and widely discredited form of Lamarckian thought of the kind expounded by American psychologist G. Stanley Hall at the dawn of the century – as a ‘racial adolescent,’ perpetually mired in a liminal state of ‘savage play.’<sup>103</sup>

Cabanela had also absorbed strikes with nary a murmur, smiling “at his opponent’s attack as if every blow...was a mere love tap...”<sup>104</sup> The disparity in imperviousness was illustrated most saliently by the occasion of a “right uppercut [that] apparently did not trouble [Cabanela] the

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<sup>100</sup> W.F. Corbett, “Dencio Cabanela A Great Fighter,” *The Referee*, March 23, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article121154921>.

<sup>101</sup> For ‘race suicide’ in Australia and its influence on ‘White Australia’ legislation, see, Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness*, 89, 158–62, 172, 181, 187.

<sup>102</sup> Corbett, “Dencio Cabanela A Great Fighter.”

<sup>103</sup> In grossly simplified terms, Lamarckian genetics held that children were the sum of their heredity: ancestral traits were passed down from one generation to the next. In Hall’s formulations, ‘races’ developed very much like individual human beings, their characteristics – and their level of ‘development,’ determined principally by environment – were also passed down and retained in this manner. For a discussion of outmoded Lamarckian genetic theories, which the “educated public retained...decades longer than scientists,” and their influence on Hall, who linked childhood/adolescent development and racial development to each other through a developmentalist (from ‘savagery’ to ‘civilization’) rather than dualist (‘savagery’ versus ‘civilization’) framework, see, Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 29; 77–120.

<sup>104</sup> Corbett, “Dencio Cabanela A Great Fighter.”



least little bit, but a similar punch troubled [Criqui] muchly.”<sup>105</sup> Anyone who had seen the fight would “no doubt be impressed with this nearer-to-Nature theory,” not only because Cabanela, living outside pugilism’s traditional circuits, had “never had anything like the opportunities the best white boxers in the world have had to acquire the art,” but because he, “like *all other Filipino boxers, acquired his fighting ability naturally. He was not taught* [emphasis added].”<sup>106</sup> Like Bailieu, Corbett remarked that “[n]o patterns were set him till the Australians visited his native place,” but even these were of no consequence: “He learned nothing from them because he proved equal or superior to all whom he met in the ring...”<sup>107</sup> While Corbett acknowledged that Cabanela “did not leap from the raw into the position of a great ringman,” the pre-eminent place of environment was unquestionable: “He fought his way to that height, but *his closeness to nature undoubtedly aided him materially* [emphasis added].”<sup>108</sup>

Corbett’s awe masked a grim reality: although victory had seemed assured, in the fourteenth round, “[i]n the middle of a rough rally,” Cabanela “fell to one knee...”<sup>109</sup> He arose, shaken, until another rally just before the bell sent him to the canvas again. As he returned to his corner, he collapsed. His “seconds got to work on [him] to no purpose. He was completely gone, and...had to be carried from the ring.”<sup>110</sup> *The Referee* had published a cartoon telling the story of the fight, *en miniature*. The caption for the first illustration – “a study in types” – suggests a

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<sup>105</sup> Corbett.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid. Corbett also explicitly acknowledged the imperviousness of the *Filipino* body in particular, observing that, prior to meeting Cabanela, Criqui’s “knockout career [in Australia] was checked only by another aboriginal from [the Philipines]...[Silvino] Jamito.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

quasi-anthropological study of two, distinct ‘races’ and the peculiar physiological reaction of a Filipino to pain: the taller Criqui, his back turned to the reader, looms over the slouching Cabanela, whose countenance and posture are almost simian, his fists almost reaching his knees.<sup>111</sup> Each illustration shows a large-lipped Cabanela gleefully absorbing Criqui’s best punches, each caption remarking, in slightly altered form, on the ‘ludic’ element of the scene. The final caption (“Even after his mysterious collapse Dencio continued to look cheerful”) suggested that Filipinos not only ‘made play’ of fighting, they ‘made play’ of getting hurt, too.

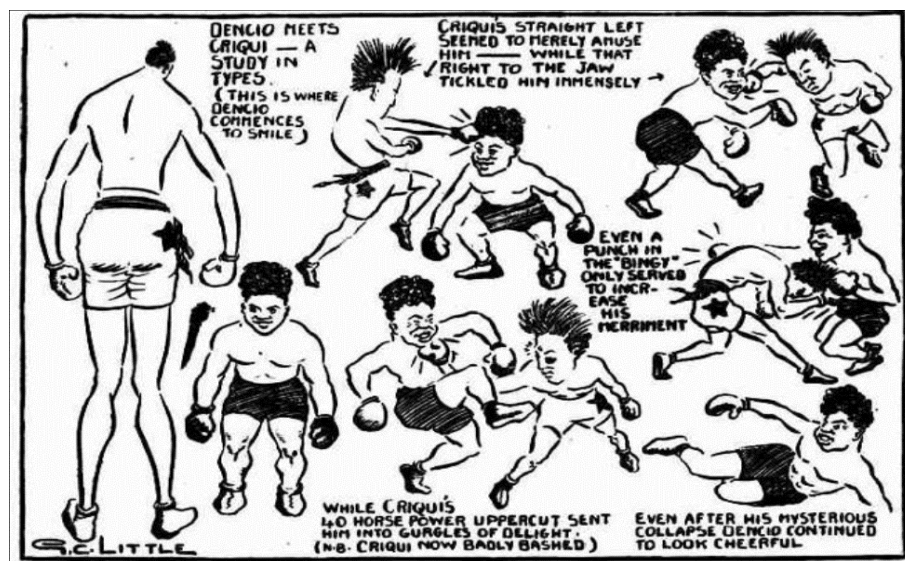


Figure 1 - Cartoon Depicting Outcome of Cabanela vs. Criqui, *The Referee*, 23 March 1921.

Cabanela recovered but his collapse remained a mystery, though not for lack of discussion. Corbett asked Tait what had happened but the latter “seemed to be as much at a loss

<sup>111</sup> Cabanela did, however, possess unusually long arms for such a short man (a reported five feet, one inch or five feet, one and a half inches): his reach was allegedly sixty-six or sixty-eight inches. See, “Feather-Weight Championship Number,” *Boxing*, September 19, 1919, 3. One source claimed it was the longest reach of any featherweight or bantamweight in the world. See, “Kid Dencio Has Longer Reach Than Any Man of His Weight in the World,” *Cablenews-American*, September 16, 1919, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19190916-01.1.4>.

as most of the spectators,” adding that Cabanela ““has been suffering from severe headaches since his arrival...and was ill for a few days.””<sup>112</sup> Perhaps Cabanela’s body, as had those of many of his “meretriciously healthy” compatriots, had concealed some hidden defect.<sup>113</sup> Tait volunteered that ““[m]aybe malaria or some other constitutional trouble [was] responsible.””<sup>114</sup>

Cabanela’s next bout, against Joe Symonds, would occur on 30 April. In the interim, one paper noted that the “dynamic fighting demon” had “been in the doctor’s hands before the [Criqui] fight” and had been “unable to undergo a preparation.”<sup>115</sup> While Tait had proffered latent disease as an explanation for Cabanela’s collapse, the *Sydney Arrow* suggested, as Australians in Manila had done to explain their defeats, that Cabanela had been insufficiently acclimated; now, “better fortified through having become more acclimatised and used to the conditions here...[he] should prove...strong.”<sup>116</sup> Even Tait, initially concerned about acclimation for his ‘boys,’ was now “perfectly satisfied with [Cabanela’s] condition.”<sup>117</sup>

Cabanela defeated Symonds but victory came at a familiar cost: he took too much damage, “wad[ing] in to finish his opponent,” displaying “an utter disregard for Symonds’

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<sup>112</sup> Corbett, “Dencio Cabanela A Great Fighter.”

<sup>113</sup> The term is drawn from Warwick Anderson’s *Colonial Pathologies*, and it maps one of the key changes in tropical medicine in the Philippines, from environment “towards microbiological interrogation,” whereby native absence of symptoms no longer connoted health, let alone immunity. See, Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies*, 102–3.

<sup>114</sup> Corbett, “Dencio Cabanela A Great Fighter.”

<sup>115</sup> “Saturday Coming - Dencio v. Symonds - Great Struggle Anticipated,” *Sydney Sportsman*, April 27, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article168497869>. The Adelaide *Southern Cross* reported that “[Cabanela] had suffered from neuralgia,” while Sydney’s *Arrow* contended that “no doctor, or any body [sic] else, has discovered that anything beyond headaches or a bilious attack, or something else of a similar nature, worried the Filipino during his preparation.” See, “Sports and Pastimes,” *Southern Cross*, March 25, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article167026053>; W.F. Corbett, “Dencio-Criqui Sensation,” *Arrow*, March 25, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article103431087>.

<sup>116</sup> W.F. Corbett, “What Boxers Are Doing,” *Arrow*, April 29, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article103430709>.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*

efforts to...hurt him.”<sup>118</sup> The *Sydney Daily Telegraph*’s reporter admired Cabanela’s “wonderful strength and capacity to take punishment” but, unlike most observers, expressed grave reservations: Cabanela’s “policy...to take all the punishment...and wait for a chance to finish” was “foolish.”<sup>119</sup> Whatever “moral influence” these tactics may have had on his opponent, who “realises that it is almost impossible to stop the lithe, persistent dark man,” was offset by the toll they exacted, “only injuring a splendid constitution.”<sup>120</sup> Cabanela had also been noticeably “slower than in his contest with Criqui,” unwilling (or unable) to take advantage of his reach or to defend himself against left jabs, which he absorbed “like *all the Filipinos* [emphasis added]...as if they did not matter.”<sup>121</sup> The *Telegraph*’s reporter was one of the few to question Cabanela’s tactics but even he did not consider why Cabanela had appeared so lacklustre: it is unlikely that anyone, given that knockouts were popularly construed as a mere “jarring of the nerves,” would have imagined that Cabanela, who had had over a month to recover since Criqui, was not sufficiently conditioned, or that the toll of his collapse remained.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> “Boxing - Symonds Knocked Out, Dencio A Champion,” *Daily Telegraph*, May 2, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article239740488>.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>122</sup> Even by the mid-1920s, popular opinion in the ‘boxing trade press’ contended that a knockout was a mere, temporary ‘jarring’ of the “nerves...resulting in partial or complete unconsciousness...If the nervous system...is not very sensitive a knock out [sic] is not likely.” See, Francis Albertanti, “In Our Question Box,” *The Ring*, July 1926. For a similar view, see, Rev. Earl A. Blackman, “A Defence of Boxing,” *The Ring*, April 1925. In 1928, however, *The Ring* published an interview with Dr. William Walker of the New York State Boxing Board, who attributed knockouts to “a stoppage of the blood supply” caused by the brain being thrown to the back of the skull. See, Nat Fleischer, “The Knockout - How It Is Produced and Its Effects on the Brain,” *The Ring*, May 1928. For a brief discussion of the history of medical science and knockouts, and the actual effects of knockouts, see, Sammons, *Beyond the Ring*, 247–51.

Two weeks later, a bout against Syd Godfrey, an opponent ten pounds heavier, caused another collapse, as Cabanela's tactics remained unchanged.<sup>123</sup> He took severe punishment. By the seventh and eight rounds, both his eyes were swollen, "the left slightly cut underneath," and he was "swallowing his own blood" as he drank water in his corner.<sup>124</sup> In an era when stoppages were rarer and in which brutal, gory matches were often allowed to continue until one opponent finally succumbed to his adversary or to exhaustion, even the *Sydney Sportsman* was dismayed at the refusal of Cabanela's corner to stop the fight: "By rights his towel should have been sent in...he...had as much chance as a snowball in Hell. It was painful to watch and Referee Wallis looked inquiringly over at his corner, in vain."<sup>125</sup> Arising from a second knockdown in the seventeenth round, Cabanela began to move forward when, suddenly, he "sank slowly to one knee and went forward, face to the canvas."<sup>126</sup> He would, again, not leave the ring under his own power.<sup>127</sup>

Many were perplexed: Cabanela had "attacked with a velocity and vigour he had never displayed in his previous contests [in Australia]" but he had again collapsed.<sup>128</sup> Admittedly, he had "appeared to treat with contempt" the jabs with which he had been hit "continuously" but observers thought that the punch that had knocked him down had been "no heavier than fifty

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<sup>123</sup> See, "At The Stadium: Godfrey v. Dencio," *Truth*, May 15, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article169179898>; "Boxing," *Grafton Argus and Clarence River General Advertiser*, May 16, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article235723968>; "Dencio Dumped," *Sydney Sportsman*, May 18, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article168502367>.

<sup>124</sup> "Dencio Dumped."

<sup>125</sup> For examples of brutal fights from this era 'going the distance,' see, Oates, *On Boxing*, 48–49.

<sup>126</sup> "Dencio Dumped."

<sup>127</sup> W.F. Corbett, "Dencio Collapses Again," *Sunday Times*, May 15, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article123236113>; "Dencio Dumped."

<sup>128</sup> "At The Stadium: Godfrey v. Dencio"; Corbett, "Dencio Collapses Again," May 15, 1921; "Sporting - Boxing," *Barrier Miner*, May 16, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article45557040>.

former ones.”<sup>129</sup> There had been no “hair-raising rally” as in the Criqui fight and the ubiquitous Corbett thought that Cabanela was still “alert,” having just “cleverly avoided a...[punch] to the jaw when” he collapsed, initially believing that the fighter had been disqualified for “going to the floor without cause.”<sup>130</sup> Now that foreign disease and insufficient acclimation had been ruled out, however, something else had to account for his ‘natural’ body’s inability to do what was expected of it.

If tropical ‘proximity to nature’ had endowed Cabanela with an uncommonly (but predictably) durable body, it had also, conversely, endowed him with equally poor habits of mind.<sup>131</sup> In 1919, Syd Godfrey, returning from his Manila sojourn, related to Corbett that Cabanela usually trained only four days before a fight.<sup>132</sup> Manila’s boxing fraternity knew well of his tendencies to train little, to postpone or cancel bouts, to refuse to fight if he disapproved of the referee, and of his “fits of temperament” and “midnight meanderings.”<sup>133</sup> Promoters had

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<sup>129</sup> Corbett, “Dencio Collapses Again,” May 15, 1921; W.F. Corbett, “Dencio Collapses Again,” *The Referee*, May 18, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article121169029>. Similar compensatory psychological mechanisms also exist in the minds of fighters; see, Christopher R. Matthews, “‘The Fog Soon Clears’: Bodily Negotiations, Embodied Understandings, Competent Body Action and ‘Brain Injuries’ in Boxing,” *International Review for the Sociology of Sport* 56, no. 5 (August 2021): 719–38, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1012690220907026>; Loïc Wacquant, “Pugs at Work: Bodily Capital and Bodily Labour Among Professional Boxers,” *Body and Society* 1, no. 1 (1995): 85; Loïc Wacquant, “Whores, Slaves, and Stallions: Languages of Exploitation and Accommodation among Boxers,” *Body and Society* 7, no. 2–3 (2001): 189, 191; Wacquant, “A Fleshpeddler at Work: Power, Pain, and Profit in the Prizefighting Economy,” 29.

<sup>130</sup> Corbett, “Dencio Collapses Again,” May 18, 1921.

<sup>131</sup> For examples of ‘poor Filipino discipline,’ especially in the contexts of labour and hygiene, see, Anderson, *Colonial Pathologies*, 106–13; Kramer, *The Blood of Government*, 200–203, 312–14; Gems, *Sport and the American Occupation of the Philippines*, 5, 111–12, 116; Davis, “Cockfight Nationalism,” 558–60.

<sup>132</sup> Corbett, “The Boxing World,” October 15, 1919.

<sup>133</sup> For “fits of temperament,” see, “Dencio Fights Brown for Lightweight Championship at Olympic Stadium Saturday,” *Cablenews-American*, November 18, 1919, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19191118-01.1.4>. For “midnight meanderings,” see, “Godfrey and Dencio Soon to Decide Who’s Who in the Feathers,” *Cablenews-American*, August 29, 1919, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19190829-01.1.5>. For other examples of agency, see, “Smiles and Slams,” *Cablenews-American*, February 17, 1920, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19200217-01.1.4>; “Echoes from the Ring,” *Cablenews-American*,

“always accepted” this and made “the best...of it,” knowing Cabanela was “too great an attraction to be dropped or even crossed.”<sup>134</sup>At the time, Godfrey’s report illustrated Cabanela’s supreme confidence in his abilities and drawing power, and his unparalleled agency; now, it illustrated his failure to submit to the discipline the sport demanded of its practitioners but which Filipinos, Cabanela most of all, reputedly lacked. “Most people who give more than passing attention to the doings of boxers,” wrote Corbett, “appeared to know that Dencio had not trained anything like properly.”<sup>135</sup> He added, “[j]oy rides in motor cars and things of that kind appealed to [Cabanela] more than the grind of a planned preparation,” hinting that “one man who should have known what he was talking about” – one suspects Tait – “predicted that [Cabanela] would collapse as he did with Criqui.”<sup>136</sup> The Sydney *Sun* echoed Corbett; however, the *Sun* claimed it had been “freely mentioned before the contest...that [Cabanela] had not attended to his training as strictly as he should have,” adding “there is reason to think that [Cabanela] is a boxer who might become disheartened when there is a tough job in front of him, after he has done his hardest for a few rounds and has not floored his opponent.”<sup>137</sup>

Godfrey had “done more damage to other[s]...with less than a third of the blows he landed on [Cabanela],” yet Cabanela had withstood (almost) all of them. Corbett stated that

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December 24, 1918, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19181224-01.1.4>; “Olympic Club Manager Explains Referee Question in Last Smoker,” *Cablenews-American*, December 25, 1918, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19181225-01.1.4>; “The Sporting Editor’s Letter Box,” *Cablenews-American*, May 8, 1919, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19190508-01.1.5>; “Dencio Picked to Outpoint Ryan in Main Event Tonight,” *Cablenews-American*, May 10, 1919, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19190510-01.1.4>; “Dencio Will Not Fight Llew Edwards Next Saturday,” *Cablenews-American*, August 6, 1919, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19190806-01.1.4>; “Smiles and Slams,” *Cablenews-American*, November 14, 1919, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19191114-01.1.4>. “Echoes from the Ring”; “Olympic Club Manager Explains Referee Question in Last Smoker.”

<sup>134</sup> Corbett, “The Boxing World,” October 15, 1919.

<sup>135</sup> Corbett, “Dencio Collapses Again,” May 15, 1921.

<sup>136</sup> Corbett, “Dencio Collapses Again,” May 18, 1921.

<sup>137</sup> R.M. Stephens, “Boxing,” *Sydney Sun*, May 17, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article221468177>.

“[o]nly a man as tough as [Cabanela] could have withstood this battery as long as that little model of shape and muscular development did...[although] [w]hether [Cabanela] would not, or could not, be hurt I am unable to say.”<sup>138</sup> But, Corbett concluded, “Filipino fighters are made of tough stuff. They take a good deal of beating back.”<sup>139</sup> Cabanela, then, was not merely a talented fighter, nor a remarkably resilient, individual subject, nor one invested with ‘national’ or ‘cultural’ predispositions to combat: he was the possessor (or, alternatively, the hostage) of a *Filipino* body, endowed with all its ‘natural’ (dis)advantages. He was not merely a fighter, but a *Filipino* fighter, the finest exemplar of a reproducible template fans would eagerly pay to see in years to come. Despite overwhelming evidence to the contrary, even in defeat, the idea of a nigh impervious body remained intact: Cabanela’s Filipino body had not betrayed him, *he* had betrayed *it*.

Cabanela would fight again. Tait was “much concerned” over the second collapse, but he took the fighter to Melbourne, where his ‘stablemates’ were scheduled to fight; there, Tait thought, Cabanela would “find better opportunity for training.”<sup>140</sup> On 2 July, he would face Bert McCarthy. The day before the fight, George Poste, Cabanela’s trainer, stated that he was “in his best trim.”<sup>141</sup> It seemed the pugilist had not willfully neglected his conditioning – at least, not entirely: he had been afflicted with “neuralgia” upon arriving in Australia “and the complaint affected his training”; it is this ailment which, apparently, had surfaced during his bouts with

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<sup>138</sup> Corbett, “Dencio Collapses Again,” May 18, 1921; “Dencio Dumped.”

<sup>139</sup> Corbett, “Dencio Collapses Again,” May 18, 1921.

<sup>140</sup> W.F. Corbett, “Dencio for Melbourne,” *The Referee*, May 18, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article121169080>.

<sup>141</sup> “Dencio To Meet M’Carthy,” *The Herald*, July 1, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article242428567>. This is the only item I have come across where Cabanela’s trainer is mentioned.



Criqui and Godfrey.<sup>142</sup> Almost two months had passed since his last fight: surely, this had been sufficient time for the “little model of shape and muscular development” to recover.

Cabanela died on the morning of 3 July 1921 at St. Vincent’s Hospital, Melbourne, “three hours after admission.”<sup>143</sup> His last hours alternated between rallying from death and blackness, until blackness prevailed at 1:30 A.M. He had, only hours earlier, contested the last of his forty-four (recorded) bouts; he was not yet twenty-one years old. A post-fight report announced a “clot of blood on the brain,” later confirmed by post-mortem examinations and an autopsy.<sup>144</sup> What had, until then, been a mystery explained by everything – from poor acclimation to tropical disease to insufficient discipline – had become patently obvious: Cabanela had “complained continually” about headaches since arriving in Australia and they had rendered him unable to “train assiduously.”<sup>145</sup> The clot of blood could not have been discovered prior to his death but post-fight reports noted that Cabanela had been “suffering from an *old* [emphasis added] head ailment,” varyingly called “concussion and brain paralysis” or “concussion compression [sic] of the skull.”<sup>146</sup> The Melbourne *Age*, in what was likely an elliptical reference to Cabanela’s training habits, wrote that “events leading up to the fatal ending cover *a range outside the local boxing ring* [emphasis added],” but “it is reasonable to suppose that circumstances surrounding a

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<sup>142</sup> “Dencio To Meet M’Carthy.”

<sup>143</sup> “Boxing Sensation: Death of Dencio,” *The Age*, July 4, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article206707036>.

<sup>144</sup> “Filipino Boxer’s Death,” *The Age*, July 5, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article206701244>; “World of Recreation,” *Worker*, July 14, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article71052444>; “Sporting Notes,” *Sydney Catholic Press*, July 7, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article106256456>. Sydney’s *Catholic Press* continued to refer to Cabanela’s condition, days after the post-mortem results had been published, as “an ailment which he had contracted in his native land.”

<sup>145</sup> “The 13th Round,” *The Daily Telegraph*, July 4, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article239749839>.

<sup>146</sup> “The 13th Round”; “Boxing Sensation: Death of Dencio.”

keen contest accentuated an ailment which was apparently little known of, and could not have been regarded as very serious by the acquaintances of the deceased boxer.”<sup>147</sup>

This was a half-truth: the ailment may not have been taken seriously and its nature, both upon arrival and thereafter, may have been unclear, but it was not “little known of.” Throughout their stay, it had warranted sufficient consideration to worry Cabanela’s camp. Rather, the triviality with which they treated his condition – whatever it was, initially, and whatever it turned into – and their knowledge of an “old head ailment” suggests, even accounting for the paucity of contemporary medical knowledge and the even more meagre knowledge of laypersons, that Cabanela’s handlers were not as credulous, and slightly more duplicitous, than might otherwise have been believed. The nature of Cabanela’s condition prior to the Criqui fight is impossible to determine but we need not dwell on it; in the event, it did not cause his collapse, but it rendered one much likelier and, afterwards, its nebulosity allowed for a set of potent explanatory mechanisms to be deployed around it. These mechanisms were tools with which – however genuinely and unhypocritically they may have been used – one could obscure the conditions, inherent to the sport, that had led to Cabanela’s first collapse and to the exacerbation of his state thereafter. These conditions, finally, were undergirded by a pervasive, unquestioned, and unquestionable ethos of sacrifice that bound all under prizefighting’s thrall – managers, trainers, spectators, and fighters alike – to a contract which, well beyond mundane legalisms, captured the body and ensnared the soul.<sup>148</sup>

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<sup>147</sup> “Boxing Sensation: Death of Dencio.”

<sup>148</sup> See, Wacquant, “The Pugilistic Point of View,” 492, 502–8.

## “Even Those Who Pay for Blood Must Not Speak Openly of a Man Being a ‘Quitter’”: The Metamorphosis and Masculine Legacy of Dencio Cabanela

In 1921, Australians had expected to see an aggressive fighter who eschewed tactics and relied instead on his ability to sustain punishment and inflict it on larger and more experienced adversaries. However, prior to his acquaintance with Australian fighters in 1919, Cabanela had often aroused the impatience, if not the ire, of awed but lukewarm Manila fans for his overly cautious approach in the ring.<sup>149</sup> Syd Godfrey observed that, because Cabanela seldom trained more than four days before a fight, he had to “act the general in the ring,” relying on his superior boxing ability and defensive skills to offset his reputedly poor conditioning, exerting himself only once his opponent had expended much of his own energy.<sup>150</sup>

That which turned Cabanela from cagey to ‘careless’ was a ten-round decision loss to Vince Blackburn in June 1919 during which Cabanela had “stalled, played, and r[u]n around the ring” until the fifth round, after which he got “the best of the fighting,” but too late to make up for his earlier “loafing.”<sup>151</sup> The *Cablenews-American* concluded that the judges’ awarding the decision to Blackburn for being the more aggressive, if not the more skilled, fighter “should

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<sup>149</sup> For examples of his defensive style and criticism thereof, see, “Dencio-Flores Bout Still Discussed by Fight Fans,” *Cablenews-American*, February 12, 1918, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19180212-01.1.4>; “Dencio-Flores Bout Still Main Topic of Discussion,” *Cablenews-American*, March 26, 1918, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19180326-01.1.4>; “Dencio Will Miss Another Boat; Is Under Contract with Olympic,” *Cablenews-American*, July 19, 1919, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19190719-01.1.4>.

<sup>150</sup> Corbett, “The Boxing World,” October 15, 1919. More remarkable still was that, prior to his alteration, many doubted whether Cabanela could even take a punch and believed he possessed no punching power. For examples of earlier assessments, see, “Harry Holmes Picked to Outpoint Dencio in Great Battle Tonight,” *Cablenews-American*, March 1, 1919, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19190301-01.1.4>; “Dencio and Godfrey to Go 10 Rounds for Lightweight Crown,” *Cablenews-American*, September 2, 1919, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19190902-01.1.4>.

<sup>151</sup> “Dencio Stalling Early in Contest Gives Blackburn Win,” *Cablenews-American*, June 15, 1919, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19190615-01.1.4>. Aggressive fighters need not be reckless although they do, by dint of their tactics, expose themselves to greater risk.

teach [Cabanela] a lesson.”<sup>152</sup> Several months later, ‘Booster’ Joe Waterman – a pugilistic jack-of-all-trades based in Olongapo – noted that fans, once wont to call Cabanela a “‘cheese champion’...because of his predilection for running away...and for his covering up tactics,” were now awed as he “threw boxing science to the winds.”<sup>153</sup> Waterman claimed that the Blackburn loss “WAS THE TURNING POINT OF [CABANELA’S] CAREER [sic]. Since that night he has never run from an opponent and seems to have altogether forgotten his ‘turtle’ covering up methods.”<sup>154</sup> By December, Cabanela’s style had “undergone a radical change: where once he would stand off and stall, doing his fighting in the last minute of every round, now he crowds in and work [sic] both hands...”<sup>155</sup> His punches carried “more weight...and his opponents generally [left] the ring badly battered men.”<sup>156</sup> The *Cablenews-American* made a final, crucial distinction: Cabanela was no longer the boxer, “he is now *the fighter* [emphasis added].”<sup>157</sup>

What George Bailieu had observed, then, was not ignorance of craft or Cabanela’s ‘native’ trainers’ inability to impart him with it; rather, Cabanela’s “radical change” occurred when he realized that his performances were subject, above all, to the vicissitudes of prizefighting judges and spectators. He had misunderstood a dual premise foundational to American prizefighting: unlike ‘boxing,’ it was not solely a sport, but primarily a form of violent entertainment; it was not solely, and sometimes not at all, an exhibition of skill but, primarily,

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<sup>152</sup> “Dencio Stalling Early in Contest Gives Blackburn Win.”

<sup>153</sup> Joe Waterman, “Fight Talk,” *Boxing*, November 15, 1919.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid.

<sup>155</sup> “Dencio to Defend Lightweight Crown against Harry Holmes at Olympic Stadium Saturday Night,” *Cablenews-American*, December 16, 1919, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19191216-01.1.4>.

<sup>156</sup> “Dencio to Defend Lightweight Crown against Harry Holmes at Olympic Stadium Saturday Night.”

<sup>157</sup> Ibid. For an example of Cabanela not appearing fully committed to his new style, even after the Blackburn fight, see, “Dencio and Godfrey to Go 10 Rounds for Lightweight Crown.”

about two men hurting each other. One Australian reporter noted this correctly: unlike those who claimed that Cabanela had been untaught and had learned nothing from Americans or Australians, he observed that Cabanela had indeed been taught, belonging “to the school of boxing which believes that the solid punch is the most effective, if not the readiest way of securing victory. It is the American way of thinking, but not altogether the Australian.”<sup>158</sup> Cabanela had thought he was a boxer; his loss to Blackburn taught him otherwise.

Despite his transformation, Cabanela’s reputation for laziness and the subterranean rumblings about his reluctance to fight never quite disappeared: Jack Munro, the man who had paid to bring him to Australia, had favoured postponing the fight against Criqui, finally giving way “only to what...Tait told him regarding [Cabanela’s] nature.”<sup>159</sup> Tait, however, sensed that Cabanela’s affliction was of a different ilk, for he “did not recall a time when [Cabanela] suffered as he did in Sydney.”<sup>160</sup> Corbett added, parenthetically, that ‘stablemate’ Francisco Flores “knew more about his compatriot’s illness than did anybody else,” but no one appears ever to have asked Flores about it.<sup>161</sup> Nonetheless, the fight occurred and subsequent events, in and out of the ring, suggest that Tait, Munro, and Cabanela’s trainer George Poste, were not only unmindful of the fighter’s health, but directly contributed to its deterioration after the first collapse.

First, we may recall Cabanela’s corner’s refusal to throw in the towel during the Godfrey bout, during which Cabanela experienced his second collapse. Only days before, still recovering

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<sup>158</sup> “Boxing Sensation: Death of Dencio.” For examples of boxing fans expressing their preference for this style in performance and in training through letters to *The Ring*, see, Theron Fisk, “What They Are Doing in California,” *The Ring*, March 1927; “Interesting Letters from Our Readers!,” *The Ring*, January 1926.

<sup>159</sup> Corbett, “Dencio Cabanela A Great Fighter.”

<sup>160</sup> Ibid.

<sup>161</sup> Ibid.

from the Criqui and Symonds bouts, Cabanela had been engaged in a vicious, three-round sparring session with an Australian fighter, Jack Finney.<sup>162</sup> The purpose of the session, arranged by Tait at Churchill's behest (the latter had cabled the former with a request for "a couple of good quality light boxers"), had not been to sharpen Cabanela for his upcoming contest, but to "test Finney's powers."<sup>163</sup> The ailing Cabanela had served as the tool with which Tait and Churchill might assess a potential short-term investment.<sup>164</sup> Second, as Cabanela recovered from the Godfrey collapse, an exasperated Tait blamed the outcome on the fighter, bemoaning the fickle nature of a talented but undisciplined athlete: "it is a most difficult thing to get [Cabanela] to train properly. He would never work in Manila, and still fought good battles as a rule."<sup>165</sup> Tait, however, then added something that condemned his lack of managerial acumen, his indifference, or both: "[b]ut the limit [in Manila] is 10 [sic] rounds. It is twice as long in Australia."<sup>166</sup> Cabanela had indeed suffered from an acclimation problem – not to climate, but to ring conditions. His poor training habits, even if true, were immaterial: it would have been virtually impossible for him, even healthy and well-conditioned, to suddenly double the number of rounds, especially against so formidable an opponent as Criqui.<sup>167</sup> Furthermore, the persistent headaches following each collapse and the nature of the collapse against Godfrey which,

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<sup>162</sup> W.F. Corbett, "The Boxing World," *The Referee*, May 11, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article121157361>. Corbett noted the session "...was to have been a spar...but...very soon developed into a fight." For an explanation of the forms and purposes of sparring, see, Wacquand, *Body & Soul*, 78–85.

<sup>163</sup> Corbett, "The Boxing World," May 11, 1921.

<sup>164</sup> Ibid. We must temper these remarks, however, by acknowledging the distinct possibility that, especially (but not only) in this era, no one would have looked askance at this episode. It is also unknown how much or little Cabanela had trained between fights.

<sup>165</sup> "Boxing," *Weekly Judge*, June 3, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article257891731>.

<sup>166</sup> Ibid.

<sup>167</sup> Another possible explanation for this seeming lapse in judgement, besides indifference and duplicity, is that if Tait believed matching Cabanela with Criqui would make an eventual world's title shot likelier (as it almost surely did), he may have taken the risk anyway.

observers claimed, had not occurred because of a punch, suggested that these had not been ‘normal’ knockouts, but something altogether different. Finally, although the blood clot could not have been confirmed until after Cabanela’s death, even contemporary, anecdotal evidence from boxing trade publications had established a connection between the frequency with which one was exposed to punishment and the concomitant deterioration of one’s physical and mental faculties.<sup>168</sup> Cabanela’s handlers would undoubtedly have been aware of this although, given his youth, their notions – in many respects, genuinely held – of his body’s ‘natural’ endowments, and their belief in the sport’s ideological imperatives, they paid it little mind.<sup>169</sup> Nonetheless, they would have known that his tactics, especially with sub-optimal conditioning (of which they were aware), were inviting serious injury or death.

Yet this does not explain why Cabanela – uncommonly stubborn and self-assured in and out of the ring, wont to cancel fights for lesser motives – elected to compete and train while injured.<sup>170</sup> There were physical constraints: in Manila, Cabanela could fight at another venue, or withdraw his services altogether; in Australia, no such opportunity existed. His contract had been signed with Munro, and Tait’s presence likely ensured his compliance. There was, however, another possible constraint, the sport’s ethos of sacrifice, which according to Wacquant “stands at the core of the occupational belief system of” prizefighting, one of whose “core dictates” is

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<sup>168</sup> For a slightly later example of this kind of anecdotal knowledge, see, Spike Webb, “‘Iron Men’ Always Pay the Penalty,” *The Ring*, May 1926.

<sup>169</sup> The time elapsed between many of the bouts, and the attendant expectation that Cabanela would have had sufficient time to recover, were likely factors, as well.

<sup>170</sup> Decades later, Llew Edwards recalled the McCarthy fight for the *Adelaide Mail*, claiming that Cabanela had “complained to me of a feeling that his head was going to split... [George] Bailieu suggested cancelling the fight, but Dencio would not hear of this. He said that he felt fit except for the throbbing in his head.” See, Llew Edwards, “Fighting the Filipinos,” *The Mail*, September 11, 1937, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article55071745>.

“stoically putting up with pain.”<sup>171</sup> Constancio Arnaldo contends that masculine identity in prizefighting is never truly undisputed: it must constantly be (re)presented to and reacknowledged by the public, and reconfirmed in the mind of the practitioner, as any identity might, yet over and against pretenders and contenders whose purpose is to violently and relentlessly test it. It is, assuredly, both more unambiguously ‘masculine’ and more tenuous than most.<sup>172</sup> As Cabanela’s transformation had shown, adherence to this ethos promised great rewards, while deviation from it subjected the fighter to scorn, ridicule, and, sometimes, ignominy. Two accounts, published decades later, suggest the physical consequences of subscription to and deviation from this ethos, respectively, and its perpetual tenuousness; they also suggest that, although Cabanela appeared, outwardly, to have embraced it, its hold was not irrevocable.

In the first account, Bert Spargo, former featherweight champion of Australia, recalled that Cabanela’s final collapse against McCarthy had caused some elements of the crowd to question his resolve, calling him “‘the little ‘yellow’ man instead of the little brown man.’”<sup>173</sup> Rumours of similar vituperations after his first collapse against Criqui suggest that the events had allowed Cabanela’s manliness to once again be questioned. His earlier tactics as a defensive fighter, which had cost him a fight, occasioning his “radical change,” apparently had never been forgotten, nor the barbs which had been thrown his way for avoiding that to which he was expected to willingly, even gleefully, submit. The second account, a recollection of the Criqui fight by its promoter, Jack Munro, suggests that, despite his new style, Cabanela could express

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<sup>171</sup> Wacquant, “Pugs at Work: Bodily Capital and Bodily Labour Among Professional Boxers,” 75, 91.

<sup>172</sup> Arnaldo, Jr., “‘Undisputed’ Racialised Masculinities,” 655–56.

<sup>173</sup> Bert Spargo, “Spargo Looks Back—No. 7,” *Sporting Globe*, March 21, 1936, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article190321393>.



reservations about it long after his transformation: that he may have done so solely through his body is unsurprising, but appropriate.<sup>174</sup> Munro, who had wanted to cancel the Criqui fight, only to give ground to Tait when informed about Cabanela's 'nature,' proved easily suggestible once convinced: in 1949, recalling the fight for the Sydney *Herald*, Munro claimed that "[f]or the first four rounds, the dancing, clever Filipino played with the Frenchman."<sup>175</sup> Cabanela had, by all appearances, reverted to his 'safety-first' tactics of old. Munro "got irritated by this, and...passed the word to [Cabanela's] manager [presumably Tait] to *make his man go in and fight* [emphasis added]."<sup>176</sup> Cabanela complied, briefly, then reverted to his old tactics and, at the end of the thirteenth round, Munro once again exhorted the pugilist to do "some real fighting" because "[h]e still looked fresh": he had not, apparently, absorbed sufficient damage for Munro's liking.<sup>177</sup> We may recall what occurred next. Munro was undoubtedly in attendance but, because Corbett's immediate post-fight report differs markedly, we must treat his account with some scepticism: if it is true, we still cannot know whether Cabanela's decision to box 'cleverly' was a momentary questioning, if not quite repudiation, of the spectatorial imperative of bloodletting, or if, quite simply, he had had to avoid direct engagement because of his weakened state.<sup>178</sup> If the tale is apocryphal, it nonetheless offers us an unequivocal expression of the kinds of risks, over and above merely entering a ring to face an opponent, a 'real' prizefighter had to entail.

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<sup>174</sup> I have found very few instances of Cabanela's words being reported, and even these, save one, were paraphrased; moreover, it is impossible to know if the only source with quotations was genuine or embellished. For examples, see, "Dencio Dumped"; "Would You Rather Have a Man Jiu-Jitsu You or Punch You?," *Cablenews-American*, May 28, 1920, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19200528-01.1.4>; Pablo T. Anido, "Little Truths on Great Filipino Boxers," *Tribune*, November 2, 1930, sec. Magazine.

<sup>175</sup> Jack Munro, "Fights I'll Never Forget," *The Sunday Herald*, January 30, 1949, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article18463624>.

<sup>176</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>177</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>178</sup> I have included it because of what it can tell us about the sport's ideological imperatives. However, even post-fight reports published immediately after a fight can vary widely.

However coercive this ethos may have been, its potential rewards may explain why Cabanela (and, in similar circumstances, Pancho Villa) competed while injured. Subscription to it, coercive as it was and pervading the sport to such a degree that it hardly needed expression, allowed one to embody a “purified and magnified masculine self” within the “luxuriant sensory landscape” of the prize ring, and conferred a degree of social (and, for a select few like Cabanela, financial) capital otherwise unimaginable.<sup>179</sup> As we have seen, however, adherence to it could be fluid – one needed not accept it or have internalized it to adhere to it, one simply had to manifest it outwardly to claim its rewards. Whatever reservations Cabanela may still have had were, perhaps, offset by his adoption (and the recognition) of a public persona – self-assured, assertive, independent – he had earned performing a craft that entailed the very (public) embodiment of powerful, individual manliness. And indeed, tragic defeat, although virtually ensured by the contributions of others, was Cabanela’s alone: “in view of [his previous collapses in Australia],” wrote one reporter, “it would seem that [Cabanela] was unwise in essaying [another] attempt in the ring.”<sup>180</sup> His body would “be taken back to Manila,” where Tait believed “a public holiday will be declared.”<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>179</sup> Wacquant, “The Pugilistic Point of View,” 511. For accounts of Cabanela’s popularity and his public embodiment of manhood, see, “Smiles and Slams,” *Cablenews-American*, February 14, 1920, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19200214-01.1.4>; “Here He Is! Will He Sail or Must Dame Rumor Get Another Bump?,” *Cablenews-American*, February 28, 1920, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19200228-01.1.4>.

<sup>180</sup> “Sporting Notes,” *Sydney Catholic Press*, July 7, 1921.

<sup>181</sup> “Dencio Cabanela’s Death,” *Barrier Miner*, July 5, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article45560270>. For the role of the ethos of individualism in placing responsibility solely on fighters, something done even by fighters themselves, see, Wacquant, “Whores, Slaves, and Stallions: Languages of Exploitation and Accommodation among Boxers,” 189–90.

The autopsy attributed Cabanela's death to "natural causes."<sup>182</sup> Tait remained circumspect about his role in the events but his parting remarks to Corbett betrayed his unease: "When I tell you that [Cabanela] was to the natives of the Philippine Islands what [Les] Darcy," a prominent Australian fighter who had died in the United States a few years earlier, "was to Australians, you will understand what I have to face. They *may hold me responsible* [emphasis added]. He was their idol."<sup>183</sup> Tait's remarks, besides evincing the distress wrought by a fighter's death and the cognitive dissonance elicited by one's confrontation with one's complicity in it, alluded to a double failure. First, prizefighting, which finds much of its self-justification in its putative power to redeem bodies, physically and socially, had failed.<sup>184</sup> Second, the conscious, recurring deployment of the colonial state's narratives by Americans involved with Philippine boxing (which we shall consider in chapter two), however dissimilar to the state's their own objectives may have been and despite the absence of state involvement in producing prizefighters, suggested that the tutelary project – the edifice justifying continued and indefinite occupation of the archipelago – had failed also. There was no more spectacular example of its failure than the death of Cabanela who, reports claimed, was idolized by millions of his compatriots ("a pleasure-loving people") in the Philippines where, reportedly, eighty percent of schoolchildren, when asked, had answered that Cabanela was "the man who had done most to advance *civilization* [emphasis added] in the Philippine Islands."<sup>185</sup>

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<sup>182</sup> "World of Recreation," *Worker*, July 14, 1921.

<sup>183</sup> W.F. Corbett, "National Funeral for Dencio's Remains," *The Referee*, July 27, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article121159229>.

<sup>184</sup> See, Wacquant, "The Pugilistic Point of View," 516–19; Sugden, *Boxing and Society*, 64–67. According to John Sugden, "missionary amateurism" and "commercial professionalism," although seemingly "ethically incompatible," have "been operationally welded together to form the guiding principle" of the 'pugilistic economy.'

<sup>185</sup> "The 13<sup>th</sup> Round," *Daily Telegraph*, July 4, 1921.

In subsequent years, boxing people periodically reflected on Cabanela's demise. Some referred, elliptically, to an inherent "weakness that showed up when he was called on to sustain an effort too long," for "[McCarthy] had not hit [Cabanela] in the head in any way that would be likely to cause serious injury....[but] there were signs of a predisposition to the condition...that the hemorrhage was accelerated by excitement, and had not been the result of a punch."<sup>186</sup> Others, too invested in the sport's ideological imperatives, could say little more than "[s]omething must [have been] wrong with...[Cabanela]'...[but] even those who pay for blood must not speak openly about a man being a 'quitter.'"<sup>187</sup> But the brain hemorrhage, now public knowledge, would forever exonerate Cabanela: "He was *a manly little chap* [emphasis added] who gave the fans what they like for their money – action."<sup>188</sup>

Others, however, explicitly acknowledged (or, at least, considered) that it was this 'action' style that had contributed to his grievous injury. Lew Edwards, a former opponent, noted that "[Cabanela] had the habit of dropping his chin, taking blows on the top of the head. This, incidentally, in my opinion, was the cause of his tragic end."<sup>189</sup> Pablo T. Anido of the *Manila Tribune* wrote, "one sure thing, unlucky Dencio's unwise tactics of letting his head be the target of all sorts of heavy blows was mainly responsible for his...death."<sup>190</sup> Anido added that, in his younger days, he and the fighter "used to frequent the same barber-shop in Trozo" where Anido had "once overheard [Cabanela] boast about" his tactics: "Well, you see," Cabanela

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<sup>186</sup> Sid Godfrey, "Tough Battles with Spargo," *Sporting Globe*, October 26, 1940, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article188817535>; "The Real John Wren and His Melbourne," *The Argus*, January 16, 1957, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article71776517>.

<sup>187</sup> "His Last Fight," *The Daily News*, July 7, 1931, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article83899297>.

<sup>188</sup> Godfrey, "Tough Battles with Spargo."

<sup>189</sup> Edwards, "Fighting the Filipinos."

<sup>190</sup> Anido, "Little Truths on Great Filipino Boxers."

said, “I always allow them to hit my head as hard as they wish. I tell you, this head of mine is like stone. And like my elbows, it can receive the hardest of my opponent’s blows and still break their arms.’ And [Cabanela] grinned with assurance.”<sup>191</sup> If true, Anido’s account becomes perhaps the most tragic element of Cabanela’s story: a fighter who, reveling in the adulation his trade had conferred upon him, became convinced, as had those around him – whether through personal experience, the workings of discourse, or both – of his body’s preternatural resilience, and paid the ultimate price. If apocryphal, its circulation nonetheless illustrates the extent to which Cabanela’s body was popularly construed as fundamentally different from other pugilistic bodies – until it wasn’t.<sup>192</sup>

There is nothing unprecedented or unique about the facts of Cabanela’s story: other prizefighters have been considered preternaturally resilient, presumed to have lacked discipline, and have died from their trade (or from poor living conditions after their careers had ended).<sup>193</sup> The practices in which Cabanela engaged, to which he was subjected, and the behaviour of those around him were not exceptional, either. That which is, if not exceptional, then extraordinary (and, given the discourses in which they were rooted, perhaps unique), is the series of questions and explanations which Cabanela’s existence, experience, and demise in Australia elicited: his resiliency, although individually remarkable, and his aversion to training, although peculiar to

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<sup>191</sup> Anido. It is impossible to verify the accuracy of Anido’s account, to which one might juxtapose the posthumous tale of Cabanela’s training ‘stunt’ of the medicine ball and the sailor, making the latter, if both are true, a haunting beginning to a predictable end.

<sup>192</sup> In truth, it remained fundamentally different, irrespective of the circumstances: it was either fundamentally impervious, or fundamentally defective.

<sup>193</sup> Accounts of broke and ‘broken’ fighters were common currency, even in publications like *The Ring*. See, for example, Joe Vila, “Shadows of the Past - Young Griffo,” *The Ring*, October 1925; Edward Merrill, “Frank Slavin, Broken in Health and Penniless, Beggars to Be Sent Back to Australia,” *The Ring*, October 1925; Daniel M. Daniel, “From ‘The Black’ of 1791 to Harry Wills - History of the Negro in the Ring,” *The Ring*, March 1926.

him, were indissociable from his Filipino body.<sup>194</sup> It was not his body alone that was considered exceptionally resilient, it was invested with an ‘inherited’ imperviousness which, irrespective of his individual level of tolerance to physical punishment, was shared with all other Filipino prizefighting bodies. While the tragic death of other fighters might have brought on cries for the abolition of the sport or occasioned an inventory of the fighter’s vices or personal predispositions to ‘failure,’ Cabanela’s disciplinary shortcomings were deeply individual and inescapably collective, discursively woven into the fibre of his being.<sup>195</sup> Most importantly, these features stemmed not solely from media representations and dissections of his body – crucial though they were in assembling and uniting key components of an inchoate ‘Filipino-*as*-prizefighter’ identity in the *ur*-type of Cabanela – nor from their illusory power, nor, finally, from importing and disseminating existing notions of Filipino difference to the prize ring but, as we shall see, from the techniques which produced a particular kind of prizefighter whose style was likelier to provide ‘action,’ bring on injury, or invite death.<sup>196</sup>

Tait returned to Manila with Macario Villon, one of Cabanela’s ‘stablemates’ who was “broken-hearted over the death of his compatriot...”<sup>197</sup> But Villon “may visit [Australia] again,” Tait said, for the sport had just recently been legalized throughout the Philippines and, although

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<sup>194</sup> For an example of the unimportance of race or ethnicity in the varying resilience of white fighters, see, Frank G. Menke, “Human Frames Differ Radically in Structure,” *The Ring*, April 1925. For the purported (but vague) influence of racial or ethnic endowments on predispositions to fighting for white fighters, see, Edward Merrill, “Jack Dempsey’s Parents Mormons of Pioneer American Stock, Records Show,” *The Ring*, February 1926. For an example of how ‘natural’ inheritance was used to explain the success of black American fighters, but not white, ‘ethnic’ fighters, see, Kaye, *The Pussycat of Prizefighting*, 12, 32–36.

<sup>195</sup> ‘Nature’ was an identical element with which opposite outcomes might be explained; the overarching strategy, however, remained the same: the defense of prizefighting’s ‘redemptive’ power. For the circulation of contradictory discourses in identical ‘strategies,’ see, Foucault, *La volonté de savoir*, 134-5. For an approach inspired by this insight in an historical study, see, Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization*, 24.

<sup>196</sup> “His Last Fight,” *The Daily News*, July 7, 1931. This ‘action’ style was, of course, also effective, but it was adopted primarily for its entertainment value.

<sup>197</sup> Corbett, “National Funeral for Dencio’s Remains,” *The Referee*, July 27, 1921.

“Manila always has a number of good young boxers,” many more would now seek to “feed the demand...now and henceforth greater than ever.”<sup>198</sup> Tait and Villon returned to an archipelago swarming with increased pugilistic activity, and Tait promised Corbett that there would be many “additional crops...coming on...”<sup>199</sup> Someone would need to harvest them.

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<sup>198</sup> Corbett, “National Funeral for Dencio’s Remains,” *The Referee*, July 27, 1921.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid.*

## Chapter Two: “An Industrious Collector of Revenue” – Pancho Villa, Frank Churchill, and the Business of Prizefighting

In January 1943, Damon Runyon, American newspaperman and writer, devoted part of his syndicated column to a letter he had received from former Filipino pugilist Pete Sarmiento. Sarmiento had never quite achieved the level of fame, fortune, or tragic notoriety of his compatriots Cabanela, Villa, and Moldez, but he had been one of many Filipinos to compete in the United States in the 1920s.<sup>200</sup> He never contended for a title, but he fought and sometimes defeated men who were world champions. Like many prizefighters, he hung on too long and lost a lot of money, retiring from the ring in 1931, with one hundred and nine (recorded) professional engagements to his credit and an alleged \$150,000 “squandered on loud colored roadsters, gaudy suits and shirts and ten cent dance halls,” noted *The Ring*’s Theron Fisk, who added, “Pete lived only for the day...and now.”<sup>201</sup>

When Runyon received Sarmiento’s missive, the ex-fighter was “working in a shipyard in Southern California,” reporting “no regrets” about his lost fortune.<sup>202</sup> Despite the column’s subtitle (“Filipino Fighter Loves His War Job”), Runyon said little about the “buzzsaw” fighter who “never clinched” and had displayed the pugilistic version of Filipino “racial tenacity and courage...only recently demonstrated in fire and blood on Bataan...”<sup>203</sup> Instead, Runyon devoted most of his column to “a quiet, self-effacing, sickly chap...one of the shrewdest of...the many shrewd fellows who have been in the business end of boxing,” the man who had “brought

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<sup>200</sup> Damon Runyon, “The Brighter Side: Filipino Fighter Loves His War Job,” *Detroit Evening Times*, January 16, 1943. For Sarmiento’s record, see, “BoxRec: Pete Sarmiento,” accessed December 19, 2022, <https://boxrec.com/en/proboxer/10097>.

<sup>201</sup> Theron Fisk, “News from the State of California,” *The Ring*, October 1928. For ‘taxi dances’ and Filipino masculinity, see España-Maram, *Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles’s Little Manila*, 105–33.

<sup>202</sup> Damon Runyon, “The Brighter Side: Filipino Fighter Loves His War Job,” *Detroit Evening Times*, January 16, 1943.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid.*



[Sarmiento] and most of the other Filipino fighters [to America]...during the gold rush of the '20's," a "somewhat shadowy figure...named Frank Churchill."<sup>204</sup> Churchill, Runyon wrote, was a paternal figure "who seemed to really regard his Filipinos as a trust from their homeland [and] had great affection for Sarmiento."<sup>205</sup> He "had a big advertising concern in Manila with a chap named Tait when he got hold of Pancho Villa," whom he would accompany to the United States, overseeing Villa's rise to the world's flyweight championship.<sup>206</sup> Villa's success paid dividends for Churchill and led Eddie Tait, who had remained in the Philippines, to send to him "other Filipinos as fast as they developed."<sup>207</sup>

Villa's success and Sarmiento's unglamorous post-ring life are the extremes that frame the theme of this second chapter, the business of prizefighting. Chapter one explored the prevalence and influence of discourses and their impact on the perception and construction of the performances, death, and performance *in* death of one fighter, while chapter two considers the role of the business of prizefighting – not merely its discursive and promotional practices, but its routine, everyday, material practices, too – in crafting a novel, context-specific racial formation, a commodified identity applied to almost all Filipino fighters, the 'Filipino-*as*-prizefighter,' a human being who could not but fight, a virtual Philippine 'raw material' nearly as reliable in its inherent properties as copra or sugar.<sup>208</sup> Runyon's article hints at all the elements forming the substance of this chapter: the notion that most Filipino fighters were possessed of special

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<sup>204</sup> Runyon, "The Brighter Side."

<sup>205</sup> Ibid.

<sup>206</sup> Ibid.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> For a strikingly parallel example of the human body as a 'natural resource' in the Philippines, consider Genevieve Clutario's work on beauty pageants in the Philippines and the Manila Carnival Queen; see, Genevieve A. Clutario, "The Appearance of Filipina Nationalism: Body, Nation, Empire" (PhD, Urbana-Champaign, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, 2014).

attributes that rendered them fit for, and desirable as, reproducible commodities in the prize ring; the role of businessmen like Churchill as ‘shadows,’ shadowy men about whom, much like the fighters they managed, little was known and as dark, paternal shadows cast over careers; and, finally, the revenue generated during what Runyon called boxing’s “gold rush of the ’20s,” its impact on production, and its role in manifestations of power and agency in the sport.<sup>209</sup>

The chapter begins with a brief sketch of Villa’s early life, after which I contemplate his role as Cabanela’s ‘successor’ and his ‘embodiment’ of Philippine nationhood. Then, I return to Manila Bay to examine the practices onto which discourses were grafted and through which they were transformed into a new, pugilistic identity. Finally, I consider agency in the sport by turning to an example of collective action by ‘average’ Filipino fighters, suggestive of the ways their ‘commodified’ identity may have been instrumentalized for their own gain, before concluding with an episode of discord between Churchill and Villa, illustrating the agentic limits and possibilities conferred upon Villa by his elite status.

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<sup>209</sup> In 1921, the sport drew its first million-dollar gate; by 1923, the year Villa claimed his world’s title, the *New York Times* reported that “more people enjoyed ring matches, and more money was paid to promoters and boxers, than in any other single year in the history of the sport.” See, “Sport Has Banner Year During 1921,” *New York Times*, 1921, sec. Sports; “New Standards Set in Sport During 1923,” *New York Times*, December 30, 1923, sec. SPORTS.

## “The Most Glorious Exponent of the Vitality and the Energy of His Race”: Pancho Villa, Citizenship, Capital, and Tutelage

Pancho Villa was never born, he was invented.<sup>210</sup> The man who would become him was born 1 August 1901, in Iloilo, to what one reporter described as “average native parents.”<sup>211</sup> Details of his early years are even scarcer than for Cabanela: Villa, according to one contemporary report, had simply been a “barefoot boy...running around the rice paddies and canebrakes”<sup>212</sup> until, spectrelike, he “emerged from the canebrakes” one day and “wandered into Manila...ragged and hungry.”<sup>213</sup> Precious little, much of it contradictory, was said about his condition or his time in Manila before becoming a prizefighter, save that he “made the streets...his home,” a “ragged urchin hanging around the Olympic Club.”<sup>214</sup> The accounts’ inconsistency is unsurprising: written well after Villa had become famous, their purpose was not to offer an accurate account but to buttress prizefighting’s self-legitimizing narratives.<sup>215</sup> As with virtually every other pugilistic ‘origin story’ (including Cabanela’s), the fighter happens upon the sport, displays an aptitude that is discovered by an older male figure and, after years of training,

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<sup>210</sup> For accounts of the moniker’s origin, uncorroborated by Villa, see, “Eager to Match Villa with Buff in Bout for Flyweight Honors,” *Washington Times*, August 9, 1922, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84026749/1922-08-09/ed-1/seq-15/>; “In Memory of Pancho Villa,” *The Leatherneck* (Quantico, United States: Marine Corps Association, July 25, 1925); “Filipino’s Rise in Ring Game Would Make One of Alger’s ‘Heroes’ Turn Green: Pancho Villa, Once A Waif, Earns Title,” *Washington Herald*, December 26, 1922; John L. (Ike) Dorgan, “Grim Reaper Removes Two Fistic Stars,” *The Ring*, September 1925.

<sup>211</sup> “In Memory of Pancho Villa.” For additional information about Villa’s birth name and his origins, see, “Eager to Match Villa with Buff in Bout for Flyweight Honors”; “Filipino’s Rise in Ring Game Would Make One of Alger’s ‘Heroes’ Turn Green: Pancho Villa, Once A Waif, Earns Title”; Joaquin Jay Gonzalez III and Angelo Michael Merino, *From Pancho to Pacquiao: Philippine Boxing In and Out of the Ring*, Kindle (Mandaluyong City, Philippines: Anvil Publishing, Inc., 2013), 1–12.

<sup>212</sup> Dorgan, “Grim Reaper Removes Two Fistic Stars.”

<sup>213</sup> Dorgan; “Villa Says He Does Not Wish to Crow,” *New York Times*, June 19, 1923, sec. SPORTS.

<sup>214</sup> “Filipino’s Rise in Ring Game Would Make One of Alger’s ‘Heroes’ Turn Green: Pancho Villa, Once A Waif, Earns Title”; Dorgan, “Grim Reaper Removes Two Fistic Stars.”

<sup>215</sup> Consider: “Pancho Villa’s life reads like a romance. ‘From Rags to Riches’ would be an ideal caption for Pancho’s life history,” or, “Villa’s rise from a barefoot boy in the rice paddies of the Philippines, to the championship at his weight...reads like a fiction story.” See, Dorgan, “Grim Reaper Removes Two Fistic Stars.”

redeems either himself (in elevating his social status) or his body (which, in some cases, had been sickly before boxing saved it), emerging as a “quintessential Horatio Alger of the masculine body.”<sup>216</sup> The inconsistencies across accounts (sometimes, even within the same account) and the uncertainty about Villa’s real name, hardly mattered; rather, they highlighted the stories’ purpose: to illustrate Villa’s status as an unperson before prizefighting made him one.<sup>217</sup> Before it, he was invisible; without it, he would never have existed.<sup>218</sup>

Villa’s first boxing ‘father’ was not Churchill, but a Filipino named Francisco ‘Paquito’ Villa.<sup>219</sup> Even after Churchill became Villa’s manager, the elder Villa remained an important figure in the fighter’s life, accompanying him on his first American trip.<sup>220</sup> It was likely no accident that young Villa should become involved with the Olympic: several accounts note that Paquito Villa worked there as an assistant matchmaker.<sup>221</sup> Villa’s early career resembled Cabanela’s: both were precocious talents who held multiple title belts simultaneously and defeated most of their opponents.<sup>222</sup> Mere months after appearing on a charity boxing card to

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<sup>216</sup> Wacquant, “Whores, Slaves, and Stallions: Languages of Exploitation and Accommodation among Boxers,” 192. Wacquant, however, writes of a related medium, champions’ (auto)biographies. For a similar view, see, Sugden, *Boxing and Society*, 191–92.

<sup>217</sup> For example, “Grim Reaper Removes Two Fistic Stars” provides two ‘discovery’ stories: the first has Paquito Villa notice the boy ‘playing at boxing’ in a schoolyard; the second has the boy hanging around the Olympic. For selected examples of similar origin stories from *The Ring* that play on similar tropes, see, Francis Albertanti, “At 16, Weighing Only 101 Pounds, Corporal Izzy Schwartz Fought His Way Into Uncle Sam’s Army,” *The Ring*, February 1925; Tim McGrath, “How Young Griffo Started His Career,” *The Ring*, July 1925; Francis Albertanti, “From Messenger Boy to Leading Contender for Lightweight Honors,” *The Ring*, September 1925. For fighters as ‘unpersons’ before the sport makes them one, see, Wacquant, “Whores, Slaves, and Stallions: Languages of Exploitation and Accommodation among Boxers,” 188.

<sup>218</sup> For fighters’ “impersonation of a character” and “fashioning themselves into a new being,” see, Wacquant, “The Pugilistic Point of View,” 501, 514.

<sup>219</sup> “‘Puncho’ Pancho Passes On,” *Sydney Sportsman*, July 21, 1925, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article167183241>.

<sup>220</sup> “Filipino’s Rise in Ring Game Would Make One of Alger’s ‘Heroes’ Turn Green: Pancho Villa, Once A Waif, Earns Title.”

<sup>221</sup> See, Dorgan, “Grim Reaper Removes Two Fistic Stars”; “Filipino’s Rise in Ring Game Would Make One of Alger’s ‘Heroes’ Turn Green: Pancho Villa, Once A Waif, Earns Title.”

<sup>222</sup> Joe Waterman, “Australians at Manila,” *Referee*, December 21, 1921, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article121164286>.

raise money for Cabanela's widow and young son, Villa, still only twenty years old, weighing a mere one hundred and three pounds, and possessor of both the flyweight and bantamweight titles of the Orient, was being hailed as a "pocket edition of [Cabanela]." <sup>223</sup> As with Cabanela, Villa's handling of a highly regarded Australian proved to Churchill and Tait, Inc. that he was ready to take on the best in the world. <sup>224</sup> But the best would not yet come to Manila – Villa would have to go them.

In September 1922, some two months after alighting on American shores with Churchill, Villa defeated the American flyweight champion Johnny Buff; in July 1923, he claimed the world's title from Jimmy Wilde. <sup>225</sup> W.F. Corbett reported that "within an hour or two" of receiving the news, "Manila was at...[his] feet...ready to do his bidding..." <sup>226</sup> Bernabe Gutierrez, a Filipino fight manager, remarked that "despite torrents of rain...so great was the crowd...that all traffic was stopped." <sup>227</sup> Reporters, as they had done with Cabanela, proclaimed Villa as "the young man who has put the Philippine Islands more in the news than it has been since Admiral Dewey...sailed into Manila Bay." <sup>228</sup> Villa's achievements were indisputable but

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<sup>223</sup> Waterman. For Villa's appearance on the charity card to support Cabanela's family, see, "Under Flickering Shadows of the Candles of Death." Charity is, even today, virtually the only means of support for incapacitated prizefighters and their families, and for the families of deceased prizefighters.

<sup>224</sup> See, "Ring Pars," *Sydney Sportsman*, July 11, 1922, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article167189524>; "Ring Pars," *Sydney Sportsman*, November 7, 1922, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article167185699>; Thomas S. Rice, "Pancho Villa's Great Win," *The Referee*, October 25, 1922, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article127926541>; "Filipino's Rise in Ring Game Would Make One of Alger's 'Heroes' Turn Green: Pancho Villa, Once A Waif, Earns Title"; W.F. Corbett, "My Notebook," *The Referee*, January 24, 1923, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article128114069>.

<sup>225</sup> See, James J. Corbett, "Villa Startled Whole Sport World in Title Bout With Johnny Buff," *Great Falls Tribune*, November 8, 1922; "Villa Says He Does Not Wish to Crow.") This Corbett, the former world's heavyweight champion, bore no relation to W.F. Corbett of Australia.

<sup>226</sup> W.F. Corbett, "My Notebook," *The Referee*, July 25, 1923, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article128112559>.

<sup>227</sup> The Count, "Children in the Kindergarten Classes Are Taught Boxing in Manila," *Sporting Globe*, November 14, 1923, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article184814371>.

<sup>228</sup> "Sent Over to Advertise Islands, Villa Wins Title," *The Washington Times*, October 23, 1922.

what, precisely, was their role in, or usefulness to, the Philippine nation? Several American and Australian reporters had suggested that, to Filipinos, Villa's accomplishments were matchless: the Philippines were not only best advertised by fighters, but now worthier of attention because of them; furthermore, fighters were peerless within the nation and their achievements, seemingly, worthier than any. Tempering of this enthusiasm, however, would come from Philippine quarters: Corbett had also reprinted an item from the Philippines *Herald* in which an unnamed Filipino writer (presumably, given the tone and content of his essay, a member of the Filipino elite) placed Villa's physical prowess, and its implications for the inchoate Philippine nation, in perspective.

The author acknowledged that to deny or belittle Villa's accomplishments "would be manifest ingratitude and mean entire ignorance of real facts."<sup>229</sup> The "feverish enthusiasm" for his victory was an expression of the "intense satisfaction which fills all Filipino hearts" for a "popular idol."<sup>230</sup> This enthusiasm had not been misplaced but "[i]t would *be indicative of lack of sense of proportion* [emphasis added] to say that Pancho Villa is a national hero"; kept in proper perspective, however, his accomplishments served several, useful functions.<sup>231</sup> First, "[Villa's] fists of steel give lie to the supposed inferiority of the Filipino."<sup>232</sup> Second, "[Villa's] art, which masters all the secrets of boxing," not only "bespeaks his talent," but his discipline, the kind purportedly still lacking in Filipinos, yet presumably indispensable for self-

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<sup>229</sup> Corbett, "My Notebook," July 25, 1923.

<sup>230</sup> Ibid.

<sup>231</sup> Ibid.

<sup>232</sup> Ibid. España-Maram, however, observes that prizefighting, as "arguably the most popular organized recreational activity," did not arouse the disapproval of the "small self-appointed elite of the [Filipino] community" in California; see, España-Maram, *Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles's Little Manila*, 74.

government.<sup>233</sup> There was hardly a better metaphor for the current ability of every Filipino to master themselves, to fully participate in the administration of the body politic, and to weather the trials with which it would be faced, than the body of Villa, a man of humblest origins capable of exercising supreme self-mastery through the monotonous, endless rigours of training and in the heat of almost weekly battle.<sup>234</sup>

Mere physical prowess, however, was not sufficient, for every display of Filipino ability, in every arena of interaction, was met with a countermove based in the notion of ‘capacity’: if ‘ability’ signaled ‘current readiness,’ then ‘capacity’ was purposefully and perennially inchoate, forever fraught with the promise of future readiness but current inability.<sup>235</sup> Physical prowess, moreover, could too easily be dismissed as ‘proximity to nature.’ Thus, the author contended, celebration for Villa’s achievements was – indeed, *had* to be – ““more than national vainglory, based on empty pride””: the reason ““great athletic victories have the character and importance of veritable national triumphs”” was because Filipinos did not consider sport a mere diversion, but fully appreciated the lessons in citizenship it ostensibly inculcated. ““This celebration,” the author wrote, ““signifies that athletics in all forms have come to be *an essential part of our social organising* [emphasis added].””<sup>236</sup> But, for observers who might equate Villa with the entire Philippine nation, who might measure their progress by his accomplishments alone, the author

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<sup>233</sup> Corbett, “My Notebook,” July 25, 1923.

<sup>234</sup> For Villa’s full record, see, “BoxRec: Pancho Villa,” accessed January 10, 2023, <https://boxrec.com/en/box-pro/9433>.

<sup>235</sup> Filipinos’ rapid adoption and mastery of the sport might prove they were physical equals, or that they were at an earlier stage of physical and social evolution. The intelligence and personal discipline required to master the sport might prove that Filipinos possessed discipline and reason equal to that of others, or that their development of ring skills was attributable, primarily, to a ‘proximity to nature’ which allegedly predisposed them to learn and master a martial craft. For a similar discussion of this tug-of-war in American assessments of black prizefighters, see, Kaye, *The Pussycat of Prizefighting*, 31–36.

<sup>236</sup> Corbett, “My Notebook,” July 25, 1923.

offered this caution: “‘Villa is *one of our national peaks*. He is, *in the role which is assigned to him in the different manifestations of our national life*, the most glorious exponent of the vitality and the energy of his race [emphasis added].’”<sup>237</sup> Villa was thus a symbol of one aspect of the Philippine nation, but not the whole Philippine nation, a token rather than a synecdoche. Finally, his victories would belong to Filipinos and Americans, a vindication of the colonial-tutelary project and the collaboration of Filipino elites in its realization: his “‘triumph...[would be] another reason for the cementing of the cordial relations which exist between Americans and Filipinos. For [Villa]...is an honor both to the Philippines and the United States.’”<sup>238</sup>

For some Filipinos, then, Villa’s success needed to be qualified as less than heroic, yet more than novel. But novelty had played a role in Villa’s obtention of a world title shot; it would play no smaller a role after his victory.<sup>239</sup> Two days after winning his world championship, the *New York Times* expressed its amazement at the feat, reiterating what, until recently, had been the *doxa* of (white) pugilism: “In Fistiania no stranger thing has been recorded than the overthrow of the British flyweight champion...by a Malay...”<sup>240</sup> Villa’s victory was no grim portent, however: like the unnamed Filipino author, the *Times*’ reporter saw Villa’s victory as redounding to the credit of the United States, for “[b]oxing is one of the boons that we have bestowed upon our subject people.”<sup>241</sup> Both the *Times*’ reporter and the author from the Philippines *Herald* were

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<sup>237</sup> Corbett.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

<sup>239</sup> “Jimmy Wilde May Not Fight Villa,” *Washington Post*, March 7, 1923. The promoters thought that Villa, “because of his nationality” and his style, “is a novelty in the ring and has proved a gate magnet from his debut here” and, therefore, would be a better draw than American flyweight champion Frankie Genaro.

<sup>240</sup> “A Malay Champion,” *New York Times*, June 20, 1923. I borrow ‘*doxa*’ from Wacquant, expanding its reach to encompass the historical context under scrutiny. See, Wacquant, “Pugs at Work: Bodily Capital and Bodily Labour Among Professional Boxers,” 88.

<sup>241</sup> Ibid.



convinced that prizefighting, absent the involvement of the state, had successfully inculcated Villa with values similar to those derived from state-sponsored athletics.<sup>242</sup> Villa's work discipline, according to the *Times*, was "not easily explained, "for "Malays...[a]s a rule are indolent and fond of their ease...[a] pleasure-loving people, addicted to bright colors and knowing little of the value of money," but indicated that perhaps some Filipinos now possessed sufficient 'ability' – for some things.<sup>243</sup>

But Villa was no common labourer. Prizefighting, of course, is similar to other forms of labour, less evident in performance, which is both product and labour, than in training, which is entirely labour.<sup>244</sup> As Wacquant notes, training is time-bound and rigidly segmented, subject to near-panoptic scrutiny (from trainers, 'stablemates,' friends, and family), and requires a mustering of the body's forces in precise, purposeful movements which the fighter must be able to replicate consistently and with sustained effectiveness.<sup>245</sup> There are, however, significant differences that separate it from other forms of material production, namely, a "high degree of control over the labor processes and unparalleled independence from direct supervision," the notion that it is the fighter, most of all, who will "lose by slacking," and the fighter's valorization of the idea of "'being [their] own boss' and claiming accountability for [their] occupational efforts."<sup>246</sup> Furthermore, given the poor remuneration at most tiers of the sport, passion is

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<sup>242</sup> I have found only one account where it was reported that boxing was taught in schools in the Philippines. See, The Count, "Children in the Kindergarten Classes Are Taught Boxing in Manila." There is no other evidence to corroborate it and, in fact, limited evidence suggests that it was not taught in schools, despite the fervent desire of 'boxing people' for it to be so. See, "Teaching School Boys The Manly Art of Self-Defence," *Boxing*, November 15, 1919.

<sup>243</sup> "A Malay Champion."

<sup>244</sup> To claim that training is "purely labour" is not entirely true, either; see, Wacquant, *Body & Soul*, 126–28; Sugden, *Boxing and Society*, 51.

<sup>245</sup> Wacquant, "The Pugilistic Point of View," 502.

<sup>246</sup> *Ibid.*

required to sustain prolonged engagement. Fighters, then, “resemble the artisan more than they do the classical proletarian of Marxian theory: they are small entrepreneurs in risky bodily performance.”<sup>247</sup> These differences contribute to prizefighting’s “collective *illusio*,” which encompasses the sport’s foundational ethos of individualism.<sup>248</sup>

Villa, then, not only redounded to the credit of the United States, he was becoming American: his discipline as an earner was not solely, or at all, the discipline of a pliant labourer, but that of a tireless, budding capitalist, submitted to capital but as its active agent and producer, not merely as the channel through which others might funnel it. He was an individual, sovereign subject (as Cabanela had been), fully in control of and responsible for his fate, inside the ring and out. Predicting that “Señor Villa’s share of the gate money... would make him a man of substance in Iloilo,” the *Times*’ author concluded, “[t]here stands Pancho Villa, a first-class fighting man and an industrious collector of revenue.”<sup>249</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Wacquant, “The Pugilistic Point of View,” 502. See, also, Wacquant, *Body & Soul*, 66. For ‘bodily capital,’ see, Wacquant, “Pugs at Work: Bodily Capital and Bodily Labour Among Professional Boxers,” 66–67, 81, 90. For building up what must be destroyed, see, Wacquant, 67; Wacquant, “The Pugilistic Point of View,” 522, 524. For poor remuneration, fighters working second jobs, and the need for passion to sustain involvement, see, S. Kirson Weinberg and Henry Arond, “The Occupational Culture of the Boxer,” *American Journal of Sociology* 57, no. 5 (March 1952): 463–65, <https://doi.org/10.1086/221014>; Wacquant, *Body & Soul*, 46; Sammons, *Beyond the Ring*, 237; Sugden, *Boxing and Society*, 188–89.

<sup>248</sup> For *illusio*, see, Wacquant, “The Pugilistic Point of View,” 493; Wacquant, “Pugs at Work: Bodily Capital and Bodily Labour Among Professional Boxers,” 85–86; Wacquant, “Whores, Slaves, and Stallions: Languages of Exploitation and Accommodation among Boxers,” 191. On the sport’s ethos of individualism and its role in disguising the exploitation of fighters, see, Wacquant, 189–91; Wacquant, “A Fleshpeddler at Work: Power, Pain, and Profit in the Prizefighting Economy,” 2, 29, 35; Sugden, *Boxing and Society*, 88, 186, 190–92. For other examples of the effects of the twin ethe of individualism and sacrifice, see, Weinberg and Arond, “The Occupational Culture of the Boxer,” 462–69; Wacquant, “Pugs at Work: Bodily Capital and Bodily Labour Among Professional Boxers,” 85.

<sup>249</sup> “A Malay Champion.” For the inculcation of bourgeois values through prizefighting and the gym as a “small-scale civilizing machine,” see, Wacquant, “The Pugilistic Point of View,” 499; Wacquant, “Pugs at Work: Bodily Capital and Bodily Labour Among Professional Boxers,” 76, 85–87; Sugden, *Boxing and Society*, 183, 190–92.

Capital and Filipino-American collaboration were the sum and substance of the trip (more aptly, the true ends and the ostensible ends), which Frank Churchill seldom let anyone forget. Prior to the Buff fight, Churchill's "threefold" objective for bringing "his brown skinned battling midget" stateside was to develop Villa and 'stablemate' Elinio Flores, for Villa to contend for the world championship, and "to show people...what we have been doing in the glove game in the Phillipine[s]."<sup>250</sup> Pitting Villa "against all suitable opponents" would ensure his development and the hectic fight schedule attests to Churchill's singlemindedness in reaching this goal.<sup>251</sup> Villa's title shot, meanwhile, had been years in the making: an offer to bring Buff to Manila had been rebuffed, as it were, as had earlier attempts by Churchill to lure other big names to the islands.<sup>252</sup> The efforts had been funded by "Manila merchants...[and] Philippine planters...anxious to advertise their country," who made "good what deficit there is after the house is counted."<sup>253</sup> Undeterred and still playing with house money, Churchill then convinced these businessmen to fund an American trip.<sup>254</sup> Champions would come and go, but a convincing enough showcase of his two 'boys,' no matter the outcome, would be considered successful: "if we can build up boxing in the Philippines as a result of this trip we shall be well rewarded for it."<sup>255</sup>

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<sup>250</sup> "Eager to Match Villa with Buff in Bout for Flyweight Honors."

<sup>251</sup> Ibid.

<sup>252</sup> See, "Llew Edwards for World's Championship"; "Vince Blackburn and Hermann," *The Referee*, May 21, 1919, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article120304407>; W.F. Corbett, "The Boxing World," *The Referee*, June 25, 1919, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article120303618>.

<sup>253</sup> "Geo. Bailieu's Quest Fails," *The Referee*, November 19, 1919, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article120299934>.

<sup>254</sup> "Eager to Match Villa with Buff in Bout for Flyweight Honors"; "Sent Over to Advertise Islands, Villa Wins Title."

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

After Villa's victory over Buff, Churchill claimed he had always had other designs besides fame for Villa, fortune for himself, and increased revenue for Manila Americans. Prizefighting would be yet another way Filipinos might prove their worth: "These boys if they get their chance will prove to the world that Filipinos are a fighting people; game, courageous, fast in mind and fast in body."<sup>256</sup> Several months later, Churchill offered his most complete reflection: Villa's success had "proved that...Filipinos are fighters," but "before I am through here, I mean to prove that whatever the Filipinos can do in a prize ring they can do in politics, in commerce, and in finance."<sup>257</sup> The relationship between prizefighting excellence and excellence in other spheres, and how Churchill expected to prove this, remained unclear, but his conviction was not the naïve enthusiasm of the dilettante – he was speaking as an authority on the country and its inhabitants:

I know the Filipino people about as well as any man knows them. And I know those Filipinos as a hard working, courageous, and intelligent people, who not merely are worthy and competent of independence and control of their affairs, but a nation of people which, if given a chance, will rise up within a generation to ranking as one of the most important nations in any part of the world.<sup>258</sup>

Seldom had the three 'inclusionary racist' narratives of 'calibrated colonialism' been so exquisitely intertwined or so explicitly stated in the pugilistic realm: the family metaphor embodied in the paternal figure of Churchill who 'knows' his 'children' better than anyone; the evolutionary narrative expressed, its goal expedited, and its legitimacy validated in his assertion that it would take no more than a 'generation' for Filipinos to take their rightful place among nations (thus, they were not yet quite ready yet); and the tutelary-assimilationist narrative

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<sup>256</sup> Corbett, "Villa Startled Whole Sport World in Title Bout With Johnny Buff."

<sup>257</sup> Frank G. Menke, "Those Little Filipino Gladiators," *The Referee*, January 3, 1923, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article128108081>.

<sup>258</sup> Menke, "Those Little Filipino Gladiators."

illustrated in his confidence that prizefighting excellence was but one benchmark of Filipino progress (bearing, somehow, almost equal significance to politics or commerce) in a colonial ‘school’ that encompassed “virtually [every] arena of Filipino-American interaction.”<sup>259</sup> In Churchill’s earliest formulations, prizefighting accomplishments had merely been benchmarks of physical prowess and development, existing almost independently of others; his revisions rhetorically linked them to those in other spheres while simultaneously acknowledging the benchmarks’ internal hierarchy (and each’s current achievability for Filipinos): individual, corporeal achievements preceded larger social developments.

Churchill was probably not entirely disingenuous: constant exposure to these narratives must have wrought some level of belief in them.<sup>260</sup> But invocation of, and consonance with, the narratives of ‘inclusionary racism’ should not be mistaken for ideological consistency, for doing so ignores the expediency of garbing a sport that continued to meet opposition from Filipino elites – upon whose collaboration the American colonial state relied – in the very narratives that legitimated and encouraged collaboration, and its objectives.<sup>261</sup> There was likely no better way to ensure that his business, still unsavoury to many elite Filipinos, continued as untrammelled as possible.<sup>262</sup>

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<sup>259</sup> Kramer, *The Blood of Government*, 201–3.

<sup>260</sup> The same may be said for their subscription to prizefighting’s purported ‘redemptive’ power.

<sup>261</sup> The narratives of ‘inclusionary racism’ were an element whose form had not changed but was being used to defend an endeavour whose central feature – the willed, gradual, and certain degradation of human bodies – was entirely opposite to these narratives’ (avowed) objectives of uplifting and upbuilding them. For the use of identical discourses in opposite ‘strategies,’ see, Foucault, *La volonté de savoir*, 134-5.

<sup>262</sup> There were several episodes, over the course of the 1910s, of Filipino elites making life difficult for Churchill and Tait; see, for example, “City Fiscal Issues Warrants for Tait and Villa in Attempt [Sic] to Abolish Boxing in Islands,” *Cablenews-American*, December 23, 1919, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19191223-01.1.4>; “Eddie Tait Acquitted of Operating Without A License,” *Cablenews-American*, June 17, 1920, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19200617-01.1.3>.

Villa's share of the gate following his victory over Wilde was a reported \$11,823.75, negligible compared to Wilde's \$65,000, but larger purses and shares would follow the championship.<sup>263</sup> For Churchill, whose club had reportedly been paying Villa a monthly salary and defraying all expenses, victory must have been equal parts affirmation and relief: Churchill had known he "had the goods, and only had to display them once or twice to find a ready market."<sup>264</sup> Since then, Villa had "proved a veritable gold mine" for Churchill who, reputedly, had once prospected for the real thing in the Klondike.<sup>265</sup> But the manager also knew the toll prizefighting exacted of all its practitioners: he had to ensure, first, that he could continue to produce fighters who, although not as exceptionally talented or as skilled as Villa, might possess some of his characteristics and, second, that he could continue to produce and maintain demand for a certain kind of fighter. Carroll D. Alcott, writing for *The Ring*, observed, "[Villa] was a sensation and every one [sic] opined that...Churchill had a gold mine if he could pick up a few more like this jabbing, dancing wildcat in the form of a human."<sup>266</sup> Fortunately, Eddie Tait "had plenty more back in Manila."<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>263</sup> "Villa and Wilde Drew \$94,590 Gate," *New York Times*, June 20, 1923, sec. SPORTS. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics' CPI Inflation Calculator, this amount corresponds to \$206,088.66 in June 2022. See, "CPI Inflation Calculator," accessed December 20, 2022, [https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation\\_calculator.htm](https://www.bls.gov/data/inflation_calculator.htm).

<sup>264</sup> W.F. Corbett, "Within and Without the Ring," *Arrow*, September 7, 1923, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article103540365>.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>266</sup> Carroll D. Alcott, "Boxing in Philippines Got Big Impetus with Villa's Victory Over Jimmy Wilde," *The Ring*, October 1928.

<sup>267</sup> *Ibid.*

## “An Ideal Arrangement”: Cultivating a Philippine ‘Raw Material,’ Assembling a Human ‘Export Commodity’

Most prizefighters, Filipino or otherwise, were not elite, but most Filipino prizefighters, irrespective of their ability, style, or tactics in the ring, were said to share characteristics with their more elite peers by dint of their nationality. Indeed, the elite represented the apex of what was, at bottom, a pugilistic (or pugnacious) identity, putatively intrinsic to all Filipinos.

According to *The Ring*’s Alcott:

The development of boxing in the Philippine Islands has kept pace with its politics. Any line of endeavor that has for its principal ingredient, the art of fighting, whether it be debate or fistic in nature is welcomed by the advancing Filipino. His fibre is of such composition that he must sock someone or get socked. The ring and the courtrooms have furnished him with an outlet for this fiery temperament and he manages to keep consistently in the spotlight of the world. The Pacific wards of the United States are a nation of lawyers and boxers.<sup>268</sup>

Filipinos did not merely make good fighters, they *were* fighters – it was simply that some did their fighting outside the ring. This idea was not the product of sportswriters’ imaginations, but the result of a conscious and mutually reinforcing process of information exchange between actors in the pugilistic realm, continually reinscribing bodies with existing racial formations, which we examined in the first chapter, and the routine, material practices at the point of production, Manila Bay, which we shall now examine, producing thereby a new racial formation unique to the sport: the ‘Filipino-*as*-prizefighter’ commodity identity.

There is nothing novel about acknowledging the ‘commodification’ of athletes, but there are many things which make the ‘Filipino-*as*-prizefighter’ identity remarkable and, arguably,

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<sup>268</sup> Alcott, “Boxing in Philippines Got Big Impetus with Villa’s Victory Over Jimmy Wilde.”

unique and unprecedented in prizefighting, or any sport.<sup>269</sup> First, the consistency and persistency of its features: while there were some contradictions, variations, and discrepancies between authors and over time, the core elements making up this identity – small stature, youth, aggressiveness, and resiliency – were consistently invoked (often, all at once), almost without variation, over more than a decade. Second, the extent to which this identity reified the notion of the fighter as a commodity through ‘raw materials’ vocabulary and the consistent assertion of the reliability of the article being bought. If we follow Marx in defining a commodity as “a thing that by its properties satisfies human wants of some sort or another,” whose use value “become[s] a *reality* [emphasis added] only by use or consumption,” then the ‘Filipino-as-prizefighter’ was the most reliably satisfactory of commodities, becoming real, not solely through repeated discursive invocation but also through repeated physical performance, use, and (disconcertingly frequent) consumption.<sup>270</sup> Third, although the Olympic was not the only club in the Manila Bay area, and not every Filipino fighter of note was managed by Churchill, many of the most prominent exemplars of the Filipino ‘type’ who visited the United States in the 1920s were Churchill fighters. That such a distinct and well-defined identity should have emerged around Filipino fighters was no accident: it was the result of an extremely localized, concerted effort, principally by one athletic establishment, to produce an identity that would appeal to fans, to create and

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<sup>269</sup> It is arguably unprecedented because, although other ethnic, racial, and national groups could be said to bring their own ‘characteristics’ to the prize ring, the consistency with which these features were invoked did not approach the consistency with which they were invoked for Filipino fighters who, moreover, always represented a distinct, territorially separate, geographical unit (more often, discussions of group ‘characteristics’ in the prize ring occurred in a domestic American context with black Americans and ‘hyphenated,’ white Americans). It is arguably unique because this identity was crafted principally through the efforts of one establishment, the Olympic Athletic Club. Consider, for contrast, Randy Roberts’ discussion of the black American defensive fighting style, which had distinct social origins, but was not engineered by a small set of actors; see, Roberts, *Papa Jack*, 25.

<sup>270</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy*, ed. Frederick Engels, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, vol. 1 (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1996), 27, <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Capital-Volume-I.pdf>.



maintain demand for it, and, most importantly, to produce fighters who would, in turn, fit this identity.<sup>271</sup>

Small stature was a prominent feature of Australian and American assessments of Filipino prizefighters. George Bailieu remarked matter-of-factly that “[t]here are few big men in Manila. The Filipinos are, as a race, small.”<sup>272</sup> By 1923, the Philippines had produced, according to Australia’s *Sporting Globe*, one cruiserweight and “a few middleweights.”<sup>273</sup> The number of Filipinos in each weight division was (almost) inversely proportional to its weight limit: “welter[weight]s [are] more frequent, and lightweights are numerous, but most of their boxers are to be found in the ranks of the flyweights, bantamweights, and featherweights.”<sup>274</sup> Even Villa, shortly before his demise, had said that, “[w]e have welters, middleweights, light heavies, and heavyweights, but they don't amount to much. We have them as big as 185 [sic] pounds, but they are terribly slow. I don't think they would be better than fourth-raters [in America].”<sup>275</sup>

Gideon Lasco argues that the American colonial encounter made height, theretofore of limited importance in earlier accounts of interactions between Filipinos and whites, an important

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<sup>271</sup> None of this should suggest that Filipino fighters were reckless or unskilled: the sheer number of bouts contested by many of the most prominent, and the paucity of losses by knockout, clearly suggests otherwise. For the role of private capital in crafting a distinct, ‘commodified’ identity for Filipinos, see, De Leon, “Sugarcane *Sakadas*,” 51–56.

<sup>272</sup> Baker, “Boxing: Doings in Manilla - Chat with Bailieu.”

<sup>273</sup> The Count, “Children in the Kindergarten Classes Are Taught Boxing in Manila.”

<sup>274</sup> Ibid.

<sup>275</sup> Norris C. Mills, “Filipino Boxing Invasion Coming,” *The Ring*, September 1925. One wonders if there were no Filipino heavyweights because gyms only concentrated on producing smaller fighters. One item, however, relates the story of an intensive search throughout the archipelago for a heavyweight of Villa’s calibre. See, “Boxing Has Become Most Popular in Philippines,” *Washington Times*, December 1, 1922, <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84026749/1922-12-01/ed-1/seq-26/>.

“relational” marker of difference between Americans and Filipinos.<sup>276</sup> Small stature was naturalized as an inherent feature of the Filipino body and pathologized as yet another obstacle which American colonial health practices, including sport, might overcome: height increases were thus another marker of Filipino ‘progress’ and American success.<sup>277</sup> In prizefighting, smaller stature was a source of novelty and tongue-in-cheek relief: Robert Edgren’s observation that “[w]atching Villa...I couldn't help thinking it's lucky for [then-world’s heavyweight champion] Jack Dempsey that Filipino fighters are all little fellows” was echoed almost verbatim by Harry Currie years later: “middles, light heavies and heavyweights can thank their lucky stars that...[Filipinos] do not grow to any size, else there would be a brown peril among big fellows as well...!”<sup>278</sup> Thankfully, genetics and human physiology had conspired to protect the heavyweight division for the nonce. But, novelty notwithstanding, small stature in prizefighting was no obstacle: although Lasco contends that the American colonial state, whether through military service requirements or by privileging taller bodies for scholastic athletics, made tallness part of an “idealized male aesthetic,” prizefighting allows us to consider another realm of aesthetics and opportunities belonging to another social class.<sup>279</sup> Filipino prizefighters were a near-antithesis to state-sponsored national health campaigns: men and boys whose height and class might have

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<sup>276</sup> Gideon Lasco, “‘Little Brown Brothers’: Height and the Philippine–American Colonial Encounter (1898–1946),” *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 66, no. 3 (2018): 375–406, <https://doi.org/10.1353/phs.2018.0029>. For contrast, see Lasco’s more recent article on height and physicality in the Spanish colonial Philippines, Gideon Lasco, “De Estatura Regular: Height and Filipino Bodily Representations during the Spanish Colonial Period (1521–1898),” *Philippine Studies: Historical and Ethnographic Viewpoints* 68, no. 1 (2020): 57–82, <https://doi.org/10.1353/phs.2020.0003>.

<sup>277</sup> Lasco, “Little Brown Brothers,” 377–81, 387.

<sup>278</sup> Harry Currie, “Fight Flashes in Manila,” *Sydney Sportsman*, April 13, 1926, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article166763347>.

<sup>279</sup> Lasco, “Little Brown Brothers,” 391–96. For accounts hinting at the class origins Filipino fighters, see, The Count, “Children in the Kindergarten Classes Are Taught Boxing in Manila”; Joe Waterman, “Filipino Boys Well Recommended,” *The Referee*, August 27, 1919, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article120313727>; Alcott, “Boxing in Philippines Got Big Impetus with Villa’s Victory Over Jimmy Wilde”; Waterman, “Evolution of the Filipino Boxer”; “The Payoff,” *Tacoma Times*, November 1, 1939.

precluded their participation in scholastic athletics and whose small stature, in other contexts, might have provided potent proof of the failure of the colonial administration to successfully develop vigorous male subjects, here could be reworked as both a tactical advantage in the ring and as a ‘successful failure.’<sup>280</sup> Filipino prizefighters had either not been subjected, or not ‘responded,’ to efforts aimed at the cultivation of height, while Filipino ring achievements, sometimes partly attributable to their smaller statures, might be construed as the natural redistribution and rational recruitment of bodies (and classes) to trades that suited them.<sup>281</sup>

The relative youth of the practitioners likely made height even more salient than it might otherwise have been.<sup>282</sup> Jack Watson, an Australian overseeing a contingent of visiting fighters in 1923, remarked that boys “start working...at very tender ages”: Robert Edgren claimed that fighters started at ages eleven and twelve, while another reporter claimed it was ten.<sup>283</sup> Their youth was no accident: as one author put it, “success cannot be expected from adults who take up the sport.”<sup>284</sup> Thus, “an effort was made to develop boxers among the hundreds of boys” who, displaced by war, rural poverty, or both, “habited the streets of the capital.”<sup>285</sup> Looking back on their ‘development’ in 1927, Art McQueen remarked, “‘Churchill started on right lines. He

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<sup>280</sup> One reporter noted Villa’s small stature as a distinct advantage in his contest against ‘Bud’ Taylor, who was nearly half a foot taller. See, “Villa Is Winner Over Bud Taylor,” *New York Times*, June 11, 1924, sec. SPORTS.

<sup>281</sup> For examples of the almost anthropological cataloguing of ‘typical’ Filipino physiques and the putative advantages conferred by them, see, “No Title,” *Sydney Sportsman*, November 28, 1923, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article167179001>; Robert Edgren, “Sports Through Edgren’s Eyes,” *Washington Post*, November 30, 1922; “New Filipinos—The Fighting Flores,” *Sydney Sportsman*, October 24, 1923, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article167169594>; “Filipinos as Boxers,” *Sydney Sportsman*, July 7, 1925, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article167177972>.

<sup>282</sup> Lasco, however, acknowledges that there was nonetheless a “physical basis” for these remarks. See, Lasco, “Little Brown Brothers,” 381.

<sup>283</sup> See, “Jack Watson’s Trip,” *Sydney Sportsman*, May 15, 1923, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article167187198>; “Filipinos as Boxers”; Corbett, “What Boxers Are Doing”; Edgren, “Sports Through Edgren’s Eyes.” Eddie Tait remarked that one of the Flores brothers, Elino Flores, started fighting professionally at age ten. See, Corbett, “National Funeral for Dencio’s Remains.”

<sup>284</sup> The Count, “Children in the Kindergarten Classes Are Taught Boxing in Manila.”

<sup>285</sup> “Filipino Boxers Are Popular with the Fans in West,” *Alaska Daily Empire*, May 4, 1926.

realised that there was plenty of material, but it had to be moulded.”<sup>286</sup> The ‘material,’ according to Joe Waterman, were the “kiddies” wont to box “without gloves in the middle of the streets of any town.”<sup>287</sup> For the Filipino boy, Waterman wrote, “boxing is not fighting, it is playing. It is a GAME [sic] with him. He will never say, as does the American boxer, ‘I’ll fight you,’ or ‘I’ll box you.’ With the Filipino boy it is ‘I will play boxing with you... They just like the game, that is all.”<sup>288</sup> In subsequent years and in the hands of other reporters, Waterman’s story featured a new wrinkle: the “hundreds of boys eating their hearts out to break into the boxing game” now carried gloves with them, “fighting whenever the opportunity occurs” and “proudly displaying a thickened ear as a result of never ceasing battling in the gymnasium.”<sup>289</sup>

The ages at which Filipino boys were introduced to the sport are not unusual but, in the Philippines, there existed something that did not exist elsewhere: the ‘vacuumweight’ class.<sup>290</sup> It was likely invented by the Olympic and designed for fighters weighing less than eighty-five pounds.<sup>291</sup> This does not eliminate the possibility that amateur boxing for boys and adolescents

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<sup>286</sup> Stephens, “Filipino Stars,” *Sydney Sun*, December 14, 1927.

<sup>287</sup> Joe Waterman, “Evolution of the Filipino Boxer,” *The Referee*, January 7, 1920. W.F. Corbett republished the article in *The Referee*, which had originally appeared in the *Cablenews-American*, under the title, “The Filipinos’ Remarkable Progress in Boxing,” on 26 November 1919.

<sup>288</sup> Ibid. Waterman’s article is noteworthy, not only for its comparison of the (presumably adult) American boxer with the Filipino boy (in its literal sense and in its connotations of ‘racial adolescence’), but also for its invocation of prizefighting’s version of ‘calibrated colonialism,’ replete with its own ‘benchmarks,’ and of Filipinos as ‘apt pupils.’

<sup>289</sup> “Jack Watson’s Trip”; “Filipinos as Boxers.”

<sup>290</sup> For examples of the average age of initiation, see, Sugden, *Boxing and Society*, 62–64; Weinberg and Arond, “The Occupational Culture of the Boxer,” 460–61.

<sup>291</sup> Waterman, “Evolution of the Filipino Boxer.” It was also known as the ‘whisperweight’ class. Villa’s earliest professional contests were in this division, which boasted of its own championship. For the division’s Philippine origins, the average weight of its fighters, and the preponderance of ‘vacuumweights’ in Manila rings, see, “Smiles and Slams,” November 14, 1919; “Flores and Brown Getting In Some Hard Licks as Finishing Touches for Saturday’s Scrap,” *Cablenews-American*, November 21, 1919, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19191121-01.1.4>; “Olympic Gym a Bee Hive Full of Boxers Preparing for Bouts,” *Cablenews-American*, December 12, 1919, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19191212-01.1.4>.

existed but there is virtually no doubt that vacuumweights were professionals, and no doubt whatsoever that the weight class was designed for young, undeveloped fighters.<sup>292</sup>

Vacuumweights, according to Waterman, “put more action into their contests than some of the older boys,” a distinction that would hardly have mattered had they been adults (even accounting for the more liberal use of ‘boys’), adding that “[t]hey are great attractions whenever they are billed to box, and are generally the most enjoyable item on the card.”<sup>293</sup> Another reporter wrote that, “[m]ore often than not these *rough, raw, green articles* [emphasis added] put up scraps better than the average main event, and their efforts are generally more interesting to watch.”<sup>294</sup> It is impossible to know precisely how old most vacuumweight fighters were, but the maximum weight limit, eighty-five pounds (traditionally, the smallest professional weight division, flyweight, was capped at one hundred and twelve pounds), suggests many were in late pre-adolescence or early adolescence.<sup>295</sup> A December 1919 report of an upcoming vacuumweight bout in Olongapo between titleholder Terio Pandong (another Paquito Villa fighter) and Young Adriano, jointly promoted by Waterman and Cabanela’s ‘discoverer,’ Ed Gallaher, suggests likewise: “to correct wrong impressions,” the report stated that Adriano was thirteen-and-a-half years old and still attending school. His studies were preventing him from moving to Manila until April, where he would then be “under the protecting wing” of ‘Booster’ Joe.<sup>296</sup>

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<sup>292</sup> For scant evidence of amateur contests in the Manila Bay area, see, “Dencio Training in New Olympic Gym for His Battle with Ingle,” *Cablenews-American*, October 24, 1919, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19191024-01.1.4>; Dorgan, “Grim Reaper Removes Two Fistic Stars.”

<sup>293</sup> Waterman, “Evolution of the Filipino Boxer.”

<sup>294</sup> “Terio-Reyes, Macario-Jena in Double Main Event at Stadium on Saturday Evening’s Card,” *Cablenews-American*, November 11, 1919, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19191111-01.1.4>.

<sup>295</sup> This is further supported by one report in the *Cablenews-American*, stating that the average weight was “approximately seventy-five pounds.” See, “Smiles and Slams,” November 14, 1919.

<sup>296</sup> “December 23 Will See Whispers Battle a Main Event at Olongapo,” *Cablenews-American*, December 14, 1919, 23, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19191214-01.1.4>.

The fortuitous genetic alchemy and predilection for combat that had purportedly predisposed Filipinos to the sport had also supposedly attuned them to their role as exceptionally reliable performers. Art McQueen observed that Filipinos knew ““that the public want sensational happenings in the ring, and they provide them.””<sup>297</sup> The country, despite its ““limited population,”” could be counted on to produce a steady supply of fighters, for “[t]here is [one] in nearly every house in the Philippines.””<sup>298</sup> Although some had ““had the displeasure of seeing a few duds in action,”” Filipinos had earned a reputation as fighters whose inherent properties, much like raw materials, could vary in quality and occasionally spoil, but were always predictable.<sup>299</sup> Indeed, sportswriters consistently used language suggesting the assessment of raw materials: here, too, the formative role of the Australia-Philippines exchange cannot be overlooked.<sup>300</sup> When Ben Tracey, an Australian boxer, returned home with the first team of Filipino fighters to visit Australia, one writer noted that “[t]heir appearance takes the eye well.”<sup>301</sup> Stadiums Ltd. had not received a ‘team,’ or even members of a ‘stable,’ but a “*bunch of Filipinos...consigned to...Stadiums Ltd.,*” and Tracey “had *landed the goods* in capital order [emphasis added].”<sup>302</sup> These “invaluable importations” soon became invaluable to the United States, as well: Norris C. Mills assured readers of *The Ring* that “[p]romoters will find their gate receipts mounting with these men fighting in American rings, for most of them...are game to the

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<sup>297</sup> R.M. Stephens, “Filipino Stars,” *Sydney Sun*, December 14, 1927, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article222743884>.

<sup>298</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>299</sup> For examples, see, “Filipino Stars”; The Count, “Children in the Kindergarten Classes Are Taught Boxing in Manila”; “Filipino Boxers Are Popular with the Fans in West.”

<sup>300</sup> See, “No Title.”

<sup>301</sup> “From The Orient,” *The Referee*, April 21, 1920, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article121159761>.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*

core.”<sup>303</sup> Even if there was not a fighter in every house in the Philippines, by 1929, at the conclusion of an almost decade-long procession of Filipinos in American rings, it certainly appeared so to NEA Sports Service’s Werner Laufer, who extended the commodification of the Filipino fighter to its logical, metaphorical extreme:

The boys who compile the big red geography text books [sic] have evidently overlooked something. In treating the exports of the Philippines, much space has been given over to the amount of sugar, coffee, copra, and so forth, that is yearly sent out from those tiny specks in the Pacific, but not one word of the game little brown men that have come over to win the hearts of the American fight lovers...Should [Ignacio] Fernandez or [Lope] Tenerio [sic] trip up the champion in their respective classes, it would seem in order to put an addends to that big red book. That addition would add fighters to the list of Filipino exports.<sup>304</sup>

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<sup>303</sup> “No Title”; Mills, “Filipino Boxing Invasion Coming.” Jack Watson, an Australian, remarked that any Filipino prizefighter could break the heart “of the *ordinary* [emphasis added] white boy who visits the land...by the remarkable manner in which the little brown fighters smile and continue to back up under the heaviest of punishment.” The implication was clear: it may have taken more than an ‘ordinary’ white fighter to knock out a Filipino, but even the most ‘ordinary’ Filipino fighter could sustain extraordinary amounts of punishment – and look happy doing it. See, “Jack Watson’s Trip.”

<sup>304</sup> Werner Laufer, “Filipinos Are All Battling Fighters,” *New Britain Herald*, January 18, 1928.



Figure 2 - "Filipinos Are All Battling Fighters," Cartoon by Werner Laufer, *New Britain Herald*, 18 January 1928.

The ‘Filipino-as-prizefighter,’ then, was not the fanciful projection of sportswriters simply seeing what they expected to see, the already constituted subject of discourse; rather, existing notions of rapidly maturing tropical bodies and of ‘natural’ Filipino aggressiveness, inherited from the Philippine-American War, found an insidious afterlife in prizefighting (given the social origins of those to whom it would be applied, perhaps its last acceptable, public refuge in a now ‘collaborative’ society).<sup>305</sup> We see, then, the historical and material bases of these

<sup>305</sup> For the war “haunting colonial politics” – and public life – “at various levels of remove,” see, Kramer, *The Blood of Government*, 32–33; Corbett, “Within and Without the Ring”; Laufer, “Filipinos Are All Battling Fighters.” For notions of the rapid maturation of darker bodies and the influence of ‘tropical’ environments on rapid maturation, see, Anderson, *The Cultivation of Whiteness*, 26; John M. Hoberman, *Darwin’s Athletes: How Sport Has Damaged Black America and Preserved the Myth of Race* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1997), 120.



discourses and their inner workings as they were grafted onto the practice of throwing young, inexperienced bodies into the ring, the mutually reinforcing processes through which their performances confirmed the accuracy of existing knowledge and produced new knowledge about the Filipino body, finally disseminating both. Having not yet developed their craft, these boys – and they were, truly, boys – could only have relied on aggression, instinct, and their individual levels of talent and resiliency to get by; indeed, whatever came ‘naturally.’<sup>306</sup> The “Philippine planters...anxious to advertise their country” through Churchill’s American venture, whose rapacious practices had funnelled natural resources and many erstwhile peasants to urban centres, had also unwittingly created a new Philippine ‘natural resource’ out of “a third-world...imaginary.”<sup>307</sup> This transformation of Filipino bodies, extracted and cultivated as any resource might, was suggested by reporters, who likened Filipino bodies to soulless substances or, alternatively, unsettlingly reified by some of the trade’s singularly exploitative and bestializing, ‘pastoral’ nomenclature, which likened gym-mates to chattel (‘stablemates’) and fighters of a certain weight to fighting cocks (‘bantamweights’).<sup>308</sup> Quotidian training at the gym,

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<sup>306</sup> For the use of children in professional bouts in New York state, see, Riess, “In the Ring and Out: Professional Boxing in New York, 1896-1920,” 113. There is no evidence, however, that a special, professional weight class, designed for children, was ever created anywhere else, or that it possessed its own nomenclature.

<sup>307</sup> For the “corporate production” of Filipino identity among Ilokano peasants and their conversion into “human resources for extraction”; see, De Leon, “Sugarcane *Sakadas*,” 51. For additional information on colonial agriculture under Spanish and American rule, see, *ibid.*; Theresa Ventura, “From Small Farms to Progressive Plantations: The Trajectory of Land Reform in the American Colonial Philippines, 1900–1916,” *Agricultural History* 90, no. 4 (2016): 459–83; Carlos Bulosan, *America Is in the Heart: A Personal History*, Kindle (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1973), 22–27, 55–58.

<sup>308</sup> There is little to recommend ‘bantamweight’ as anything but an aleatory term; if it is not random, it is unclear why it should have applied to that weight class (115 to 118 pounds). One might be tempted to consider popular tales of American slaveowners pitting slaves against each other as the genesis of ‘stable(mate),’ but there is little evidence to support that such bouts occurred, save in isolated instances; see, Gorn, *The Manly Art*, 34. Perhaps the demographic realities of the sport have, historically, facilitated the use of this appellation. For fighters self-consciously using ‘bestial’ terms to describe their exploitation; see Wacquant, “Whores, Slaves, and Stallions: Languages of Exploitation and Accommodation among Boxers.” Finally, although it is not a term of art like ‘stable’ or ‘bantamweight,’ in popular parlance, many first-rate fighters have been referred to as ‘thoroughbreds’; for one example, see “Ad for Benny Leonard,” *The Ring*, May 1925.

the hub of the ‘pugilistic economy,’ and regular performance against white opponents in local rings, finally, crystallized these differences into a context-specific identity, just as different racial groups might have been differentiated through the “central node” of the “plantation structure.”<sup>309</sup> Colonial agriculture had produced extreme deprivation in pursuit of capital and would produce yet more capital, albeit tangentially, from the bodies of those deprived: “[a]s bloodily as...wealth [had] concentrated into the hands of...new companies, as swiftly did the peasants and workers become poorer.”<sup>310</sup> Almost as swiftly, in turn, did many of these peasants (or their children) become urban denizens, and almost as bloodily was wealth extracted from their bodies.

Clubs often threw raw novices onto their cards, and even conducted ‘battles royal’ between them, but recruitment was not haphazard, either: boys had plenty of opportunities to show their wares.<sup>311</sup> According to Harry Currie, “[n]o one takes the trouble of teaching them anything at the start, but if a youngster shows any especial aptitude, he is immediately taken in hand and nursed along.”<sup>312</sup> Bailieu’s remarks from the first chapter, if accurate, now take on another light: the haphazard practices and absence of craft he had observed were, perhaps, not

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<sup>309</sup> De Leon, “Sugarcane *Sakadas*,” 56. For the gym as the central node of the ‘pugilistic economy,’ see, Wacquant, *Body & Soul*, 13–14.

<sup>310</sup> Bulosan, *America Is in the Heart*, 24.

<sup>311</sup> The Olympic staged several, some featuring black men, others featuring Filipinos (at least one such bout featured blindfolds), and evidence suggests that fighters were aware of the carnivalesque nature of the contests, reportedly competing with less vigour than usual. See, “Kid Dencio Takes Bantam Weight Crown from Cohen at Carnival Hippodrome,” *Cablenews-American*, February 3, 1918, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19180203-01.1.8>; “Sandow-Aurora Sporting Club Announces Big Smoker Monday,” *Cablenews-American*, December 14, 1918, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19181214-01.1.4>; “Everybody Wants to Fight at Red Cross Benefit Show Tonight,” *Cablenews-American*, December 28, 1918, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19181228-01.1.4>; “Tirol Wins Cup in Main Event at Olympic Red Cross Smoker,” *Cablenews-American*, December 29, 1918, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19181229-01.1.4>. For an account of ‘battles royal’ in the United States, and the different meanings they held for white audiences and black fighters, see, Kaye, *The Pussycat of Prizefighting*, 39–67.

<sup>312</sup> Currie, “Fight Flashes in Manila.” This is consistent with boxing gyms everywhere: Sugden, although writing about junior, amateur fighters, notes that they “receive little formal tuition...and...learn to be boxers by playing at being boxers.” See, Sugden, *Boxing and Society*, 68.

the result negligence, oversight, or ignorance, but an integral component of the business model: little would be done for those who Tait and Churchill knew would not last long.<sup>313</sup> For those few talented enough to make it through more than a handful of vacuumweight bouts, a “gradual grading system,” with remuneration matching experience, ostensibly ensured quality. Currie waxed lyrical about the “slow promotion” of fighters, remarking that “[s]uch a grading system in Australia would certainly be an innovation...”<sup>314</sup> This system limited preliminary (i.e., inexperienced) fighters to four-round bouts and, until 1921, the municipal government had limited all fights in Manila to ten rounds, but whatever effect these restrictions may have had on safety was offset by several factors.<sup>315</sup> First, the Olympic held shows twice weekly and fighters could, if they wished, compete several times a week if they fought elsewhere.<sup>316</sup> Second, gloves were lighter: four or five ounces to Australia’s six, leading Currie to remark that “[t]his is small indeed,” quite telling in an era where professional gloves were lighter and thinner than those worn today.<sup>317</sup> Third, upon the blowing of a whistle ten seconds before the conclusion of each

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<sup>313</sup> “Dencio Training in New Olympic Gym for His Battle with Ingle.” In 1919, Eddie Tait built a new gym whose purpose was, ostensibly, to inculcate proper technique and habits to the youngsters to improve the quality of the bouts; the descriptions of vacuumweight bouts, however, strongly suggest that the gym also existed to ‘separate the wheat from the chaff,’ as it were, to ensure that even the ‘chaff’ would not be wasted.

<sup>314</sup> Harry Currie, “Running the Boxing Game,” *Sydney Sportsman*, April 20, 1926, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article166770270>.

<sup>315</sup> For legalization, see, “Boxing in Philippines,” *Albuquerque Morning Journal*, April 25, 1921. For arrangements prior to legalization, see, “Duarte and Bux May Go 15 Rounds,” *Cablenews-American*, December 16, 1914, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19141216-01.1.6>; “Ordinance No. 383. An Ordinance Regulating Boxing Contests and Exhibitions and Repealing All Previous Ordinances, Resolutions and Regulations Relative to Same Subject,” *Cablenews-American*, April 6, 1918, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19180406-01.1.9>.

<sup>316</sup> “Llew Edwards for World’s Championship.” There are recorded instances of Tait cancelling fight cards if he knew that the only available talent had fought very recently, although this was principally for the benefit of the consumers, not the fighters. See, for example, Antonio H. Escoda, “Tait Holds Dark House Tonight Promises Great Card Next Week,” *Cablenews-American*, September 14, 1918, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19180914-01.1.4>; “May Hold Dark House at the Olympic Next Saturday,” *Cablenews-American*, October 29, 1918, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19181029-01.1.4>.

<sup>317</sup> Currie, “Running the Boxing Game.” The usual minimum weight for gloves in professional contests today is eight ounces, while sparring gloves can go from ten to twenty ounces, depending on the weight of the fighters.

round at the Olympic, fighters were “looked to by the audience to throw caution...to the night air...stand toe to toe, and trade punches furiously”: “[s]ome do, but those blessed with any sense and a desire to keep their wits clear don’t.”<sup>318</sup>

For Churchill, ‘fast’ fighters were just as important as ‘fast’ fights: in an interview with Currie, he admitted that his production methods were ‘offense-first,’ ‘American’ methods.<sup>319</sup> Curried noted that Americans “train fast and fight fast...always striving for that extra ounce of pace...they throw gloves like a machine gun throws bullets”; in the gym, “[they] work a small number of rounds... but...in almost a frenzied hurry.”<sup>320</sup> The referees’ principal function, meanwhile, was to ensure that fighters furnished sufficient action. Art McQueen wrote that “[r]eferees are not lazy. They keep after their fighters and urge them on. It is understood there, as in America, that a dull third man in the ring means that the fighters loaf, and that is no good from a spectacular point of view.”<sup>321</sup> If, as Joyce Carol Oates contends, the “referee is our intermediary...our moral conscience extracted from us so that...‘conscience’ need not be a factor in our experience, nor...in the boxers’ behavior,” then Manila referees were that statement’s ultimate parody: a conduit for, rather than counterweight to, the crowd’s will, and supremely self-aware (and suggestible) performers in their own right.<sup>322</sup> The fact that referees should so frequently be called upon to coax fighters into furnishing more ‘action’ suggests two troubling possibilities: first, that many of the contestants, because of their inexperience, were unwilling to

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<sup>318</sup> Currie. For Churchill’s importing this ‘innovation’ from the United States, see, “Off to Manila,” *The Referee*, December 4, 1918.

<sup>319</sup> Harry Currie, “Why Don’t We Produce Champions?,” *Sydney Sportsman*, July 20, 1926, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article166777117>.

<sup>320</sup> Ibid.

<sup>321</sup> Stephens, “Filipino Stars.”

<sup>322</sup> Oates, *On Boxing*, 47.

engage and, second, that even those more experienced were actively discouraged from using their craft and guile.<sup>323</sup>

Churchill's methods were thus a repudiation of pugilism (or boxing) as an 'art of self-defence' and an admission of its replacement with prizefighting: arguably sport, perhaps art, but surely (and primarily) an American form of entertainment. He and Tait had devised a system to produce fighters upon whom fans could count for action. Reporters, moreover, readily acknowledged the extent to which this truly was a system – a virtual factory – designed to produce fighters, especially following Villa's success: "As these lads were developed they were despatched [from Tait] to Mr. Churchill in America...It was an ideal arrangement, for the Manila Stadium was the *nursery* [emphasis added] from which the Churchill team in the States was replenished."<sup>324</sup> Villa's death, and the need to find another like him, only accelerated a process that, even to reporters, had become ever more akin to an assembly line: a 'successor' to Villa, Ignacio Fernandez, would "tumble" out of the same "chute" as his compatriots, "the greatest piece of fighting machinery to ever leave the Philippine Islands," touted by Churchill as a "greater...Villa," while 'Clever' Sencio Moldez, some time earlier, had been "heralded by ring critics as successor to his compatriot...Villa."<sup>325</sup>

Yet the assembly line flaws were evident. As early as 1919, one unnamed author considered the question in an item, "What's Wrong with Filipino Boxers?," published

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<sup>323</sup> It is possible, however, that referees were exhorting fighters to engage to ensure that fights were not 'fixed.' One item from the *Cablenews-American* suggests that even the more experienced referees had great difficulty enforcing the rules and could be cowed by "gamblers." See, J.A.B., "Echoes from the Ring," *Cablenews-American*, January 15, 1919, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19190115-01.1.4>.

<sup>324</sup> "In Manila," *Sydney Sportsman*, May 1, 1928, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article166759767>.

<sup>325</sup> Moldez was brought in because "Churchill...will not concede the flyweight title" borne by Villa; see, Joe Waterman, "Coast Gossip," *The Ring*, September 1925. For Moldez' 'successorship,' see, Theron Fiske, "In Sunny California," *The Ring*, July 1927; Left Jab, "New York Boxing Notes," *The Ring*, August 1927; "Chance for Sencio to Show Ring Skill," *Washington Evening Star*, February 12, 1926; Currie, "Fight Flashes in Manila"; Joe Waterman, "In The Northwest," *The Ring*, October 1925.

(surprisingly) in *Boxing*, Churchill and Tait's in-house publication. Since 1918, "[a] hundred (or more) Filipino battlers have made their debut...made good as preliminary boys, advanced to semi-finalists – and there they have stopped. Why is this?"<sup>326</sup> The author named a few formerly promising fighters who had long since been discarded, claiming that he "could name twenty-five others" like them, who "came fast, loomed large, then...faded away."<sup>327</sup> But the problem was not the system, it was the material: Filipinos were too stubborn and, more importantly, had not been "endow[ed]...with the brains necessary as the chief asset of a classy boxer."<sup>328</sup> Tait had "labored hard...to advance the boys to the main-event class...given them every opportunity possible but of no avail."<sup>329</sup> Indeed, perhaps Tait had laboured too hard.

In 1925, with the question of the 'fighting brain' reframed and the assembly line process now accelerated, Norris C. Mills, former sports editor of the Manila *Daily Bulletin*, diagnosed the problems of Philippine boxing, at a low ebb compared to "three or four years prior," for *The Ring*. They were due, principally, to the monopoly of "one club in Manila" (the club remained unnamed but we may be certain the Olympic was meant), whose prominence resulted in lower purses, covering "little more than training expenses," and fewer fights for upcoming boxers.<sup>330</sup> Fewer fights, however, had not shielded fighters from unnecessary damage: Harry Currie's laudations of the 'gradual grading system' notwithstanding, Mills noted that "[m]any [good preliminary fighters] have been ruined due to the *management rushing them in the main event class before they were ready* [emphasis added]."<sup>331</sup>

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<sup>326</sup> "What's Wrong with Filipino Boxers?," *Boxing*, September 19, 1919.

<sup>327</sup> Ibid.

<sup>328</sup> "What's Wrong with Filipino Boxers?"

<sup>329</sup> Ibid.

<sup>330</sup> Mills, "Filipino Boxing Invasion Coming."

<sup>331</sup> Ibid.

Churchill and Tait, Inc. produced fighters whom they expected to fight fast and whom fans expected to fade even faster. Several reporters had noted the brevity of many Filipino prizefighters' careers (or, at least, of their physical primes), something which two reporters, decades apart, attributed explicitly to the rapid maturation of Filipino bodies: in 1922, Robert Edgren remarked that "[t]he Filipinos mature at an early age" while, in 1947, *The Ring*'s Ted Carroll observed, grimly, that "[t]he majority of [Filipinos] mature very early, and usually are past their peaks at 21 [sic]."<sup>332</sup> Villa, Cabanela, and Moldez, then, had proved no different, except in their paying the ultimate price.<sup>333</sup> The repeated discursive representation and invocation of the 'Filipino-as-prizefighter' – young, aggressive, preternaturally resilient – coupled with the normal operations of the sport, which did not long suffer individuals in their prime, the specific practices of the Olympic, and the tragic deaths of Cabanela and Villa, finally led Harry Currie to attribute a kind of 'life expectancy' to Filipino fighters: "For a brief space they shine with dazzling brilliance and appear unbeatable" but "their flame flares for but a little while."<sup>334</sup> His article was published exactly one week before Moldez' death.

#### "A Cog in the Wheel of a Gigantic Industry": Prizefighter Agency

In 1925, James Morris, a reader of *The Ring*, bemoaning the sport's "present anarchy," summed up this chapter's central buttress: "Boxing is no longer a sport, it's a business."<sup>335</sup> Morris attributed this transformation to the "evolutionary process, by...[which] I mean a steady

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<sup>332</sup> See, Ted Carroll, "Fighting Filipinos," *The Ring*, November 1947; Edgren, "Sports Through Edgren's Eyes."

<sup>333</sup> One report claimed Cabanela had been "cruelly handled and mismatched in [Australia]...tossed into the ring...without any consideration of weight." See, "Filipinos as Boxers."

<sup>334</sup> Currie, "Fight Flashes in Manila."

<sup>335</sup> James Morris, "Interesting Letter from a Reader," *The Ring*, September 1925.

improvement...just as evident in boxing as in any other field..."<sup>336</sup> Men like George 'Tex' Rickard, the sport's most important promoter (with whom Churchill had established ties), "and all that the men and money behind him typify...[are] bringing to boxing...much-needed directive ability, organization, and discipline."<sup>337</sup> Prizefighters had once been independent craftsmen; now, even the elite, "temperamental champion" would "be taught the lesson of the movie star" who, "[f]rom being all there was to the motion picture industry...has been reduced to the more lowly cog and certainly more useful position of a cog in the wheel of a gigantic industry."<sup>338</sup> Prizefighting's mechanization would be good for "the star, the industry, and the public," impressing upon the fighter that he "is part of an industry that provides relaxation, rest, and recreation for thousands...a service of inestimable value to the community."<sup>339</sup> Rendering of this service, however, "for which he will be adequately rewarded," could not be left to a fighter's whim: "he must not be allowed to arrogate unto himself the right to determine when, where, and under what conditions he shall fight."<sup>340</sup> The continuing consolidation of power in the hands of "corporations like that with Rickard as its nominal head, must exercise a growing influence, almost completely dominating the sport" – Morris then caught himself – "or rather business," concluding that "[a]buse of authority and power seems certain but notwithstanding this, the game, the participants and the fans will benefit....The present anarchy...is...a prelude to a better day."<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>336</sup> James Morris, "Interesting Letter from a Reader."

<sup>337</sup> Ibid.

<sup>338</sup> Ibid. It is telling that Morris compares prizefighting to an industry that is solely entertainment, rather than to another professional sport, hinting also at prizefighting's inherent theatricality.

<sup>339</sup> Ibid.

<sup>340</sup> Ibid.

<sup>341</sup> Ibid.



The “temperamental champion” in question was then-world’s heavyweight champion, Jack Dempsey. If even the sport’s biggest star was no more than a cog whose power should be curtailed for the public good, what of fighters of lesser achievement or ability? It is virtually impossible to know what most fighters, let alone Filipino fighters, thought of the growing mechanization of their sport: these are not the kinds of questions reporters asked boxers, even those who spoke fluent English.<sup>342</sup> It is entirely impossible to know what the ‘average’ Filipino fighter thought of this process, or its effects on the creation and (re)inscription of a context-specific identity unto and into their bodies but, in this final section on agency, we shall see how ‘average’ fighters, collectively, may have leveraged this identity in their favour before turning to Villa and Churchill’s contractual disagreement to consider how Villa, as an elite fighter and earner, could avail himself of strategies unavailable to his peers.<sup>343</sup>

Agency in prizefighting is also connected to the sport’s ethos of sacrifice, which thus far we have construed narrowly, for it is not only about the sacrifice of the body in the ring.<sup>344</sup> For the fighter, sacrifice is, paradoxically, that which creates the commodity-self and ensures that self does not become a *mere* commodity: it is only through nigh-ascetic training that the “body...produc[es] more value than was ‘sunk’ in it” and is made sentient weapon rather than

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<sup>342</sup> For the historically consistent disinterest in prizefighters, save as “tokens of social abnormality,” and their portrayal as (sometimes simultaneously) ‘superhuman’ and ‘subhuman,’ see, Wacquant, “A Fleshpeddler at Work: Power, Pain, and Profit in the Prizefighting Economy,” 4.

<sup>343</sup> For the difference between elite and non-elite fighters, including the former’s ability to travel beyond their local fight scenes, and for information on ‘casual’ fighters, see, Taylor, “The Global Ring?,” 243–44.

<sup>344</sup> The “specific honor of the pugilist consists in refusing to concede and kneel down” but their “occupational ideology” is more than about ‘putting up with pain’: ‘sacrifice’ also entails those which the prizefighter should (or, ideally, must or must be willing to) make at every point of his education, training, and life as a pugilist. See, Wacquant, “The Pugilistic Point of View,” 496; Wacquant, “Pugs at Work: Bodily Capital and Bodily Labour Among Professional Boxers,” 76, 87.

passive target.<sup>345</sup> This dimension of sacrifice, however, remains in constant tension with its obverse, which often demands the spoliation of the performer (the natural outcome of sustained participation, which the former dimension can only delay) despite the performer's efforts (and their development of skills with which) to avoid it; its disavowal, however, often invites castigation. In a sport where wealth disparities, inequity, and limited agency, even at the most elite levels, are commonplace, these opposing yet complementary dimensions of sacrifice afford the illusion of agency to, and bestow near-complete responsibility on, the fighter, in and out of the ring, obscuring the "asymmetric system of positions and transactions...defin[ing] the division of labor in the sport."<sup>346</sup>

Traditionally, then, resistance in prizefighting has been construed as resistance to commodification and hegemonic racial formations through fighters' public assertions of manhood and the (re)appraisal of in-ring performances by their compatriots. As España-Maram has shown, Villa's penchant for revelry and ring prowess made him the "symbol of youth and exuberance" for young, male, working-class Filipinos in California, a transgressive masculine figure who defied the feminization of Filipinos outside the ring and a powerful masculine figure inside it, whose individual victories over white opponents in a martial sport defied the collective racialization and exploitation of Filipino agricultural labourers.<sup>347</sup>

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<sup>345</sup> Wacquant, "Pugs at Work: Bodily Capital and Bodily Labour Among Professional Boxers," 67.

<sup>346</sup> Wacquant, "The Pugilistic Point of View," 494.

<sup>347</sup> España-Maram, *Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles's Little Manila*, 102. For Villa as a 'transgressive' figure, see, also, Gems, *The Athletic Crusade*, 61–62; Runstedtler, "The New Negro's Brown Brother: Black American and Filipino Boxers and the 'Rising Tide of Color,'" 118–19. The sources I have consulted, however, show little evidence of Villa's lifestyle offending white mores. For other historical examples of 'counter-hegemonic' narratives crafted about prizefighter's bodies, see, Arnaldo, Jr., "'Undisputed' Racialised Masculinities," 655–74; Arnaldo, Jr., "'I'm Thankful for Manny': Manny Pacquiao, Pugilistic Nationalism, and the Filipina/o Body," 27–45; Arnaldo, Jr., "Manny 'Pac-Man' Pacquiao, the Transnational Fist, and the Southern California Ringside Community," 102–24; Kramer, *The Blood of Government*, 297–99; Moore, *I Fight for a Living: Boxing and the Battle for Black Manhood, 1880-1915*, 24–43.

‘Counter-hegemonic’ narratives were, for marginalized groups, an important avenue of resistance, but they had little to say about how fighters might have exercised agency within their trade and on its most essential operations, how these symbols of resistance might have, in turn, resisted their *own* exploitation. Rather, ‘counter-hegemonic’ narratives – like those crafted by Filipino labourers about Villa’s refusal to put off the fight in which he aggravated an existing injury that ultimately contributed to his death – have sometimes relied on the willing sacrifice of the fighter’s nigh-superhuman body.<sup>348</sup> Moreover, the liberatory power of these narratives was founded, principally, on notions of masculine power and those features of the male body which supposedly allowed one to exert it. Thus, in the hands of others, Filipino performances were re-invested with existing racial discourses, only under an altered guise: racial difference now ensured success where once it ensured defeat; Filipinos could not but *defeat* white men in the ring *because* of their proximity to nature.<sup>349</sup>

There appears to have been little, discernible public contestation to this new masculine, ‘commodified’ identity for Filipino fighters; this should not suggest, however, that Filipino fans were unwitting dupes, nor that Filipino fighters were unwitting pawns: the consolidation of the ‘Filipino-*as*-prizefighter’ identity occurred through processes of information exchange between actors and through channels over which fighters had little, if any, control.<sup>350</sup> Its nature as an intangible object of discourse (which placed it at every point of production from recruitment to

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<sup>348</sup> See, España-Maram, *Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles’s Little Manila*, 101–3. Villa exacerbated these injuries further by engaging in a days-long, alcohol-fueled revel after the fight.

<sup>349</sup> For a similar discussion with regards to black American fighters in the early-twentieth century, see, Kaye, *The Pussycat of Prizefighting*, 32–36. For a discussion of the implications of these rhetorical moves, mostly but not exclusively in an American context, on the “intellectualization of athletics and athleticization of intellect,” and the “globalization of racial folklore,” see, Hoberman, *Darwin’s Athletes*, 52–60, 115–40. John Sugden also notes the limited use of ‘counter-hegemonic’ narratives and the possibility for their co-optation in and by prizefighting; see, Sugden, *Boxing and Society*, 190–92.

<sup>350</sup> This absence of public contestation, however, may be a function of the sources I consulted.

training to performance to the public and inner lives of fighters) and as an idea developed, reinforced, and crystallized over several years (which made it the final expression of a series of processes) made it that upon which it was hardest to act, and for which results were most difficult to measure. Its existence also likely allowed many Filipino fighters, especially those of lower or middling ability, to earn more than they otherwise would have.<sup>351</sup> Discursive inaction, then, may have belied a tacit acceptance of this identity's revenue-generating power and a shrewd understanding of power, not as something that can be lost or gained, but as a tactical situation in which fighters might exercise agency at other points in the 'pugilistic economy,' where they might be more effective and where their actions, as commodities and as agents, were more significant.<sup>352</sup> Filipino fighters – as did managers, promoters, and reporters – understood, keenly, that boxing may be about craft, but prizefighting is about money.

In the Philippines, sustained opposition to the sport came, not from American reformers or missionaries, but from Filipino elites who prevented entrepreneurs like Tait and Churchill from promoting longer fights and 'mixed bouts.' Before 1918, Filipinos could only fight other Filipinos until Tait obtained special permission to debut them during carnival week in Manila.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>351</sup> The demand for Filipino prizefighters, notably in Australia, was consistent, even long after the so-called 'golden age of the 1920s.' See, for example, "Cables for More Filipinos," *The Daily Telegraph*, July 3, 1937, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article247221365>; "They're A Top-Gear Trio, Declares Manager Marshall," *The Referee*, June 10, 1937, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article127615353>. For an example of fighters capitalizing on the appeal of pre-fabricated ring identities, see, Heiskanen, *The Urban Geography of Boxing*, 85–91.

<sup>352</sup> For resistance as eventful and contingent, see, Foucault, *La volonté de savoir*, 121–27. For similar strategies used by black American fighters in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, principally at an individual level, see, Moore, *I Fight for a Living: Boxing and the Battle for Black Manhood, 1880-1915*, 65–91.

<sup>353</sup> For selected examples, see, "The Filipino Press," *Cablenews-American*, June 14, 1913, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19130614-01.1.4>; "Americans Will Meet Filipinos in Boxing During Carnival Week," *Cablenews-American*, January 9, 1918, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19180109-01.1.4>; "Prominent Filipinos Protest against Boxing," *Cablenews-American*, June 5, 1913, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19130605-01.1.7>.

Fears that they would lead to crowd violence were (mostly) unfounded and fans – Filipino and American – were more eager, appetites now whetted, to see Filipinos and Americans fight each other. Filipino elites, however, would repeatedly threaten to reinstate the prohibition of ‘mixed bouts.’ In March 1918, shortly after their debut, Manila’s City Fathers threatened to ban them anew, whereupon several Filipino fighters, led by Battling Sanchez, presented a petition.<sup>354</sup>

They shrewdly deployed narratives of successful Filipino-American collaboration, claiming that the city’s resolution, rather than draw “closer the ties of friendship that bind Filipino with American scrappers, as it is undoubtedly intended to do, merely serves to weaken the friendship which already exists...”<sup>355</sup> Prohibition was unnecessary, for ‘mixed bouts’ were “not attended by...ill-feeling or disorders among the fans, as was demonstrated...during the Carnival...”<sup>356</sup> It was also prejudicial, for it “limits the opportunities of boxers of both classes [i.e., Filipino and American] to fight,” and they contended that, “should the resolution continue to exist...it will be extremely difficult to arrange matches” (the author observed, “this is the real difficulty which the Filipino scrappers are aiming to eliminate”).<sup>357</sup> Non-elite fighters had often exercised agency in other ways but had almost always done so individually: this episode suggests that Filipino fighters also shared a sense, albeit contingent and transitory, of themselves as a

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<sup>354</sup> “Filipino Boxers Petition Board to Repeal Resolution Prohibiting Mixed Matches,” *Cablenews-American*, March 1, 1918, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19180301-01.1.4>. For selected examples of threats to reinstate the ban on ‘mixed bouts,’ see, “Mayor Will Hold Boxing Ordinance for Several Days,” *Cablenews-American*, March 6, 1918, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19180306-01.1.4>; “Mixed Bouts Threatened with a K.O. by Member Arguelles,” *Cablenews-American*, June 17, 1919, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19190617-01.1.4>.

<sup>355</sup> “Filipino Boxers Petition Board to Repeal Resolution Prohibiting Mixed Matches.”

<sup>356</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>357</sup> *Ibid.* Another issue with ‘mixed bouts’ was that their “prohibition makes the existence of two champions in every class...necessary.”

distinct labouring group with shared interests that could act collectively when they faced an institutional threat.<sup>358</sup>

The article clearly noted “the real difficulty” the fighters were “aiming to eliminate,” but we need not be too cynical, either: fostering amity may indeed have been a genuine objective as well, and evidence suggests that, among prizefighters, relations were amicable, but we must also remember that ‘mixed bouts’ were popular precisely because they allowed promoters, who profited little from ‘amity,’ to appeal to less noble sentiments.<sup>359</sup> Several observers, over the years, had noted how vociferous, restive, and, occasionally, violent, Manila fight crowds – composed of Americans and Filipinos – could become during these contests, evidence that the fighters, as did fans and promoters, knew that the consolidation of friendly ties were not the bouts’ primary purpose or appeal.<sup>360</sup> We may also note that this rare – indeed, unique – instance of collective action was not directed against the sport’s prominent stakeholders, but made in tandem with them, and against those Filipino elites who saw in ‘mixed bouts’ a challenge to their authority and a threat to the precarious state of collaboration upon which they depended.<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>358</sup> Collective action in this instance should not suggest the existence of more systematic, formal, and organized resistance, such as a prizefighters’ union. For an example of a roughly contemporaneous, thoroughly negative reaction to a prizefighter’s union that had recently formed in Cuba, see, Fleischer, Nat. “As We See It.” *The Ring*, September 1925. For examples of individual fighter agency in the Philippines, see, “Eddie Tait May Hold Dark House at Olympic Saturday”; Escoda, “Fans Will Get Their Fill of Good Bouts in Next Three Weeks”; “Manager Tait Up in the Air; Saturday’s Card Not Settled”; “Olympic Card for Saturday Undergoes Slight Change but It’s Good Card Just the Same”; “Sport Comment,” *Cablenews-American*, January 23, 1915, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19150123-01.1.6>.

<sup>359</sup> More accurately, they profited from just enough, but not too much, ‘amity.’

<sup>360</sup> This level of crowd restiveness was even acknowledged by Villa himself in *The Ring*. See, Baker, “Boxing: Doings in Manila - Chat with Bailieu”; Currie, “Running the Boxing Game”; Pancho Villa, “My Hardest Fight,” *The Ring*, April 1925. We may also note that the recurring invocation of the common features of Filipino fighters appears to have begun shortly after the inauguration of ‘mixed bouts’: there is virtually no evidence of it before, but this may be a function of selection bias with the sources; more data are needed to confirm these conclusions.

<sup>361</sup> For examples, see, “Prominent Filipinos Protest against Boxing”; “Trozo Club Faced Trial Last Night,” *Cablenews-American*, June 8, 1913, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19130608-01.1.7>; “The Filipino Press,” June 14, 1913; “Filipino Press,” *Cablenews-American*, June 15, 1913, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19130615-01.1.5>; “The Filipino Press,” *Cablenews-American*, June

Although fighters could sometimes act collectively, more often, agency remained limited to the individual and depended largely on the individual: elite fighters like Cabanela and Villa could avail themselves of strategies unimaginable to their peers.<sup>362</sup> Like many elite fighters who became elite earners, Villa did not escape the fiscal wrangling that attends large sums. While his position in pugilism's hierarchy often rendered him beholden to Churchill, his status as an elite fighter endowed him, at other times, with unparalleled agency.<sup>363</sup> A reporter once wrote that Villa "acquired [his] fancy...boxing from...Cabanela": as we shall see, Villa may have learned something about conducting business from Cabanela, too.<sup>364</sup>

In October 1922, an upcoming Villa bout was cancelled by the New York State Athletic Commission (NYSAC).<sup>365</sup> It was then revealed that Churchill's contracts with Villa and Elinio Flores had entitled the manager to fifty percent of each's earnings, instead of the maximum one-third allowed by the NYSAC.<sup>366</sup> Villa would not be permitted to fight until the amount was refunded.<sup>367</sup> By December, the situation, unresolved, threatened to derail upcoming Villa bouts in

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18, 1913, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19130618-01.1.4>; "How Chief of Secret Service Green Regards Boxing Matter," *Cablenews-American*, June 25, 1913, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19130625-01.1.7>; "Filipino Press," *Cablenews-American*, December 19, 1916, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19161219-01.1.6>; "City May Have a Boxing Commission," *Cablenews-American*, December 28, 1916, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19161228-01.1.1>.

<sup>362</sup> For example, when Cabanela chose to go on his honeymoon, Tait's hands were tied; when average fighter Kid Danding did the same, Tait was unforgiving. See, Escoda, "Tait Holds Dark House Tonight Promises Great Card Next Week"; "Iron Bux Picked to Beat Jones in Olympic Main Event Tonight," *Cablenews-American*, June 28, 1919, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=cana19190628-01.1.4>.

<sup>363</sup> For a contextual and contingent understanding of power, see, Foucault, *La volonté de savoir*, 121-7.

<sup>364</sup> Rice, "Pancho Villa's Great Win."

<sup>365</sup> "Villa-Mason Bout Ordered Cancelled," *New York Times*, October 12, 1922, sec. Sports.

<sup>366</sup> Charles F. Mathison, "Pancho Villa Is Ordered to Box in His Own Class," *New York Herald*, November 21, 1922.

<sup>367</sup> *Ibid.*

New York, even though Churchill had been summoned by the commission and ordered to emend the contract.<sup>368</sup> At his hearing, he engaged in a remarkable act of dissembling to salvage Flores' imminent contest, claiming that "he would not have time...to arrange for a substitute contract."<sup>369</sup> Churchill, whom everyone, including himself, had acknowledged as the manager of Villa and Flores, now claimed that he "simply acted as an agent for the Olympic"; it was the club that had "advanced [money] for the trip...and...for incidental expenses..."<sup>370</sup> He could not, without its permission, have a new contract drawn up in time, claiming the distance to Manila was too great.<sup>371</sup> Churchill had had ample time to make changes: the commission had given him since "early last Summer [sic] to comply," subsequently contacting him "two or three times," receiving no reply until the day before his appearance.<sup>372</sup> Barring a "substantial excuse" from Churchill, the NYSAC would not budge.<sup>373</sup> Flores and Villa were eventually allowed to fight but, because Churchill's financial backers had declined to revise the contracts, the commission withheld payment until they were emended.<sup>374</sup> Two more Churchill run-ins with the NYSAC over the next two years, both leading to Villa's suspension in New York, likely contributed to the abrupt end, in September 1924, of Villa's American sojourn.<sup>375</sup> Three days after his third suspension was announced, a rumour emerged that Villa was returning home to risk his title

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<sup>368</sup> Mathison, "Pancho Villa Is Ordered to Box in His Own Class."

<sup>369</sup> "Churchill Must Sign New Contract," *New York Times*, December 13, 1922, sec. Sports.

<sup>370</sup> Ibid.

<sup>371</sup> Ibid.

<sup>372</sup> Ibid.

<sup>373</sup> Ibid.

<sup>374</sup> "Insists on Change in Boxing Contract," *New York Times*, December 25, 1922, sec. Sports.

<sup>375</sup> For these two subsequent episodes, see, "Boxing Body Bans Garden, Fighter, and 2 Managers," *Washington Post*, February 14, 1924, sec. SPORTS; "State Boxing Board Disciplines Garden," *New York Times*, February 14, 1924, sec. SPORTS; "Villa Will Leave to Fight on Coast," *New York Times*, March 2, 1924, sec. SPORTS.



against Sencio Moldez.<sup>376</sup> He sailed for the Philippines in late October; Churchill was not with him.<sup>377</sup>

The next few months were fraught with uncertainty. Reports were few but they hinted at friction.<sup>378</sup> On 26 December, an attempt by Churchill to have Villa fight an American opponent in the Philippines was snuffed when he was “advised” (the language suggests an intermediary, rather than Villa himself) that arrangements for the Moldez bout, promoted by Filipino businessman Vicente Mendoza Syquia, had been finalized.<sup>379</sup> As that fight underwent several postponements, Churchill awkwardly tried to cobble together contests for Villa stateside, but each attempt foundered because he had “delayed definitely committing himself pending [Villa’s]...return.”<sup>380</sup> Fighter and manager were still communicating but the pugilist was in no hurry to return: in March 1925, he informed a disapproving Churchill “of his intention of remaining in the Philippines until...May.”<sup>381</sup> The manager, denying “that there existed any friction between” them, had replied by cabling “instructions [to Villa] to sail for [the United States]...next month, or at the earliest possible date, if Villa seeks to engage in any important outdoor match this coming season.”<sup>382</sup>

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<sup>376</sup> “Sencio Beats Joe Dillon,” *New York Times*, September 22, 1924, sec. SPORTS.

<sup>377</sup> “Villa’s Home Trip Delayed,” *New York Times*, October 12, 1924, sec. SPORTS.

<sup>378</sup> See, “Personal Pars about Boxers,” *The Referee*, October 29, 1924, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article136614455>; “Biff Briefs,” *Sydney Sportsman*, November 4, 1924, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article167184713>; “Villa’s Home Trip Delayed.”

<sup>379</sup> “Villa to Defend Title Jan. 17 Against Kid Sencio in Manila,” *New York Times*, December 27, 1924, sec. SPORTS.

<sup>380</sup> See, “Rickard Arranges First Stadium Card,” *New York Times*, March 5, 1925, sec. SPORTS; “Rosenberg-Villa May Meet in Ring,” *New York Times*, March 24, 1925, sec. SPORTS.

<sup>381</sup> “Rosenberg-Villa May Meet in Ring.”

<sup>382</sup> *Ibid.*

In April 1925, a month before the Moldez bout, Villa offered the last word in the *Manila Tribune*.<sup>383</sup> He began: ““It seems that certain scribes are tying [sic] to give me lessons of gratitude.””<sup>384</sup> This had happened before. When news of Churchill’s illegal contract broke, one American reporter had nearly praised Churchill for taking a mere half of Villa’s earnings: ““It may be all right to protect preliminary boxers. But in the case of Villa, it is quite different.””<sup>385</sup> Churchill had ““built [Villa]...by careful handling”” while Villa ““pockets the other 50 per cent. [sic] clear.””<sup>386</sup> Indeed, ““[t]aking a risk of [the] kind [Churchill had] certainly entitles him to a big percentage and he is surely not overstepping himself when he takes 50 per cent. [sic] for his company’s end...How many men would have taken the chance with a team of unknown boxers, and Filipino boxers at that...as...Churchill did?””<sup>387</sup> After all, before Churchill had saved him, Villa had been ““simply an outcast.””<sup>388</sup>

Villa assured the *Tribune* that Churchill was still his manager and that, “in signing...with...Syquia...I don’t violate any of the terms of my contract with Churchill...I don’t mean to break with...[him].” He asserted that “nobody can measure...the gratitude and admiration I have for [him]...[Churchill] has done for me what no other manager could have done...I could have...never attained the glory that have [sic] crowned me...were it not for...[his]

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<sup>383</sup> It is one of the rare instances of Villa’s own voice, rarer still for its likely being unmediated (or, at least, less mediated than others) due to its publication in a Philippine paper. The only other first-person account as extensive as this one is “My Hardest Fight,” from *The Ring*, but the authenticity of its phrasing – strewn with colloquial Americanisms and written as though it were a theatrical monologue – is questionable: it is written in a way that suggests spoken English, rather than conveys it.

<sup>384</sup> “Give To Mr. Churchill What Legally Belongs To Him - Villa,” *Tribune*, April 10, 1925.

<sup>385</sup> “Gleanings from Afar,” *Sporting Globe*, April 4, 1923, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article184806178>.

<sup>386</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>387</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>388</sup> *Ibid.*

sacrifices...”<sup>389</sup> As the man who had “made [Villa] a world’s champion,” Churchill would be entitled to his share of the earnings from the Moldez fight, and “even more than that.”<sup>390</sup> With his closing remarks, however, Villa showed that he keenly understood the role that race and class had played in determining his place in prizefighting’s hierarchy – “I am not a rich man...I know how much I owe Mr. Churchill” – while evincing his awareness of the agentic possibilities his elite status conferred upon him, hinting that he had learned, bitterly, from his earlier experiences with Churchill: “I won’t take away from him what he is entitled to,” hastening to add, “*at least what legally belongs to him* [emphasis added].”<sup>391</sup> True, without Churchill, there would likely have been no world’s flyweight champion Pancho Villa; now, without Villa, there would surely be no Frank Churchill, manager of the world’s flyweight champion.

It is unclear precisely what transpired between the two: any or all of the incidents related above, and perhaps several others, may have pushed Villa – to many, an innovator inside the ring – to try something new outside of it, too.<sup>392</sup> The *Tribune* had reported that Villa’s contract with Churchill had been set to expire on 16 October 1925 and the fighter, for whom Stewart Tait had booked passage on the *S.S. President Jefferson* to return to Churchill, had had every intention to “jump his contract...by staying [in Manila] longer should he be interfered with in [the Moldez] bout...[U]nless he is given a free hand...he will not leave...it is understood from friends of the

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<sup>389</sup> “Gleanings from Afar.”

<sup>390</sup> Ibid.

<sup>391</sup> “Give To Mr. Churchill What Legally Belongs To Him - Villa.”

<sup>392</sup> For examples of his in-ring innovativeness and originality, see, Rice, “Pancho Villa’s Great Win.” For other, possible explanations, see, “Rickard Planning Two Title Bouts,” *New York Times*, May 19, 1925, sec. SPORTS; “‘Puncho’ Pancho Passes On”; “Pancho Villa on Way Back to Manila, P.I.,” *The Labor Daily*, November 26, 1924, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article239884133>; Frank G. Menke, “Flyweight Championship of America,” *The Referee*, March 7, 1923, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article128112136>; “His Income Taxed Twice,” *New York Times*, December 6, 1924, sec. AMUSEMENTS HOTELS AND RESTAURANTS.

champion.”<sup>393</sup> Their professional relationship would not be sundered by Villa’s holiday, however; it would end, brutally, with Villa’s death after returning to fight once more under Churchill’s auspices. It is unknown whether Villa’s trip led to better contractual terms upon his return but, if nothing else, we may recall that Churchill had often attempted, unsuccessfully, to bring a world’s title bout – any world’s title bout – to the Philippines: the Villa-Moldez fight was the first world’s championship contest staged there.<sup>394</sup> That it was not promoted by Churchill, possessor of “one of the largest boxing stables,” the man who had made “no secret of...his ambition...to corner all of the titles in the lighter weight classes with his importations from the Orient,” but by a Filipino businessman, and that Villa, the “boy who,” according to Carroll Alcott, “was formerly a bootblack on the Luneta and who lived like the squirrels in the trees,” helped secure its occurrence was, perhaps, precisely the point.<sup>395</sup>

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<sup>393</sup> “Villa May Jump Contract with Frank Churchill,” *Tribune*, April 4, 1925, <https://gpa.eastview.com/crl/sean/?a=d&d=trma19250404-01.1.3>.

<sup>394</sup> “Pancho Villa Will Defend Title This Week,” *The Omaha Morning Bee*, January 25, 1925.

<sup>395</sup> “Glick to Make Bid at Garden Tonight,” *New York Times*, November 14, 1927, sec. SPORTS; “Sarmiento Aspires to Bout with Lynch,” *The Globe*, December 28, 1923; Alcott, “Boxing in Philippines Got Big Impetus with Villa’s Victory Over Jimmy Wilde.”

## Conclusion

We began with ghosts; we shall conclude with one, too. In late 1942 and early 1943, around the time Runyon published his column on Sarmiento, Villa, and Churchill, the *Manila Tribune*'s readers would have seen advertisements for the upcoming ring debut of Pancho Villa, Jr., son of the late champion.<sup>396</sup> Villa, Jr., if he read the *Tribune*, may have chanced upon something else, an ad for a double bill of championship fight films, one featuring his late father, and a Lupe Vélez picture at the Radio Theatre, featuring a "personal invitation," courtesy of the management: "Pancho Villa, Jr., this is your chance to see your beloved father. FREE [sic] admission for YOU [sic] upon presentation of credentials."<sup>397</sup> It is unknown if he ever took up the offer to cast his eyes – at no charge – on the flickering ghost of a father he had scarcely, perhaps never, known.

When Runyon published his column, Villa had been dead for nearly twenty years, from existing injuries aggravated during a fight he had refused to put off; Churchill had been dead for ten.<sup>398</sup> Villa's earnings (as had those of some of his peers) had not even outlived him: his return stateside, like Sarmiento's, had been to replenish his fortune. "[F]riends" stated that he had "spent his ring earnings so lavishly that he was almost penniless before he engaged in his last contest" under Churchill's auspices who, after Villa's death, became Sarmiento's "financial

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<sup>396</sup> See, "Ad for Boxing at the Rizal Memorial Tennis Stadium," *Tribune*, December 25, 1942; "Pancho Villa, Jr. To Make Debut," *Tribune*, January 1, 1943. Cabanela's son also fought as a professional; see, "Cabanela Jr. to Meet Little Tommy at Rizal," *Tribune*, September 18, 1937, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article249677327>; "Sports of All Sorts," *Tribune*, May 21, 1938, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article249863355>.

<sup>397</sup> "Ad for Radio Theatre," *Tribune*, January 19, 1943.

<sup>398</sup> Several explanations emerged about why Villa chose to fight that night, but each involved some element of the twin ethic of individualism and sacrifice that also coloured, explained, and justified the deaths of Cabanela and Moldez. See, "Sports: Inside Stuff," *Variety* (Los Angeles, United States: Penske Business Corporation, July 15, 1925); Nat Fleischer, "As We See It," *The Ring*, September 1925; "Pancho Villa Dies on Operating Table," *New York Times*, July 15, 1925, sec. SPORTS; España-Maram, *Creating Masculinity in Los Angeles's Little Manila*, 102–3; Dorgan, "Grim Reaper Removes Two Fistic Stars"; Fair Play, "Villa's Death May Give Genaro Ring Title," *Washington Evening Star*, July 15, 1925.

mentor.”<sup>399</sup> The extent of Churchill’s assistance in the depletion of Villa’s (or anyone else’s) earnings is unknown. Lack of financial ‘discipline,’ however, soon became yet another hallmark of Filipino pugilistic identity.<sup>400</sup> In 1936, Tod Morgan, a former member of Churchill’s ‘stable,’ provided uncommon access to (if not quite uncommon insight into) the spending habits of Churchill’s Filipino fighters.<sup>401</sup> Villa’s alleged profligacy was a trait shared by almost all his compatriots: in Morgan’s accounts, Churchill was the put-upon manager who had kept Villa from buying a car for a showgirl and given stern lectures to ‘stablemate’ Johnny Hill about the evils of horse-racing.<sup>402</sup> Morgan noted that “[m]ost of...the little colored chaps ended up broke, but they took it very lightly, using the same remark that Pete Sarmiento did. ‘Me had good time; me not sorry now,’”<sup>403</sup> concluding that Sarmiento, as had his compatriots, “realized that if he had remained in the Islands he would probably have been eating coconuts and bananas.”<sup>404</sup>

Morgan’s interview was the final loop in the discursive legerdemain deployed about Filipino prizefighters. The sport prized individualism. but fighters’ successes were never wholly their own: they could be attributed to ‘natural’ (thus, uncultivated) Filipino ability or to handlers who appropriated the colonial state’s ‘inclusionary racist’ narratives. Fighters’ ‘failures,’ however, were always their own: neither the tutelary project, however fictive its role, nor the sport, had failed them, for both had grafted and (re)produced potent, exculpatory discourses that

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<sup>399</sup> Tod Morgan, “Natives’ Furious Finance,” *The Labor Daily*, April 22, 1936, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article237773231>. “Financial mentor” is from “Filipino Boxers Are Popular with the Fans in West.”

<sup>400</sup> Numbers for Villa’s career ring earnings range from \$115,000 to over \$200,000; when he died, there remained anywhere between \$6,000 to \$10,000. See, Frank G. Menke, “The Big Money Won by Boxers in New York,” *The Referee*, December 26, 1923, <http://nla.gov.au/nla.news-article128110747>; Henry L. Farrell, “Frankie Genaro to Succeed Pancho Villa to Ring Title,” *Seattle Star*, July 15, 1925; “Dempsey to Take Chance on Motion-Picture Nose,” *The Globe*, July 17, 1925; Francis Albertanti, “In Our Question Box,” *The Ring*, October 1925.

<sup>401</sup> Morgan, “Natives’ Furious Finance.”

<sup>402</sup> Ibid.

<sup>403</sup> Ibid.

<sup>404</sup> Ibid.

ensured ‘failure’ was always individualized and complicity, always absolved. Pugilistic profligacy, like pugilistic indiscipline, was commonplace but what were, in other cases, individual proclivities became, for Filipinos, yet another inescapably collective feature that ensured their success – or explained their ‘failure.’<sup>405</sup> As in every other sphere of interaction, Filipino prizefighting ‘progress’ had been, according to Joe Waterman, helped immeasurably by their contact with Americans, measured by benchmarks which, unlike the state’s, were real, immutable, and, thanks to Villa, had been reached.<sup>406</sup> Yet, despite their reality and immutability, they had proven just as illusory as other benchmarks: in attributing Filipino ring success to an ‘innate’ predisposition to fighting wrought by ‘proximity to nature,’ they had ‘colonized’ the Philippine past as an endless, undifferentiated, primeval night of Darwinian struggle; in linking ‘progress’ to Filipino physicality, they had colonized the future by suggesting that other, less corporeal benchmarks were still, and perhaps forever, out of reach. The tragic demise of an elite few, the unglamorous post-ring life or destitution of several others, and the complete anonymity of most – these most visible exemplars of Philippine nationhood, drawn from the nation’s humblest classes – at the conclusion of, or even during, their careers may have suggested that Filipino ‘capacity’ would remain a problem of American government for years to come. Their fate sealed – dead, broke, or anonymous – they could no longer be redeemed in the present, or the future.

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<sup>405</sup> For ‘financial discipline’ as a tool of colonial rule in the Philippines, see, Allan E.S. Lumba, *Monetary Authorities: Capitalism and Decolonization in the American Colonial Philippines* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2022).

<sup>406</sup> Waterman, “Evolution of the Filipino Boxer.”

By the late 1940s, Churchill and Tait's operations had ceased but the memory of the 'Filipino-as-prizefighter' commodity and its features – so painstakingly cultivated and so often invoked – had outlived them.<sup>407</sup> In 1947, the disappointing first-round knockout of Filipino Flash Sebastian by then-world's welterweight champion 'Sugar' Ray Robinson compelled *The Ring's* Ted Carroll to reconsider the history of Filipino prizefighters. The Philippines were no longer producing as many fighters as before, nor any of Villa's or Cabanela's calibre, but Carroll exhorted readers, "in view of previous achievements," to "retain a healthy respect for fighting Filipinos": Sebastian had proved the exception rather than the rule, for most Filipino fighters, Carroll noted, were fast, aggressive, and known crowd-pleasers.<sup>408</sup> Over the decades, these qualities would be transformed into a less overtly racializing discourse about 'heart,' a change one begins to see during the Second World War. What had once been 'racial' features quickly became the 'national' features of a brave ally: nation, not phenotype, determined a group's inherent (or inherited) tenacity.<sup>409</sup> Submerged, these features would gradually lose importance over the decades, but they have not entirely disappeared; indeed, their continued saliency is illustrated by boxing writer Nigel Collins' 2013 article on Philippine boxing.<sup>410</sup>

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<sup>407</sup> See, "In Manila"; "Cradle of P. I. Boxing Game May Be Memory Soon."

<sup>408</sup> Carroll, "Fighting Filipinos."

<sup>409</sup> This change from 'racial tenacity' to 'cultural tenacity' is one that might be mapped for virtually any group that has produced prizefighters: a group's 'martial culture,' although a holdover of older racial discourses and a product of that group's continuing socioeconomic disadvantage or marginalization, is seldom acknowledged as such. Rather, socioeconomic disadvantage or marginalization furnish the ideal conditions in which to produce individual fighters but rarely considered as the progenitor of a group's 'fighting culture,' providing instead a convenient adjunct or catalyst to what is, allegedly, a cultural inheritance from time immemorial. For examples of this change for Filipinos, see, Elliot Metcalf, "On The Lam...!" *Tacoma Times*, December 20, 1941; Lewis F. Atchison, "Filipinos Die in Ring, Too, Rather Than Surrender," *Washington Evening Star*, March 8, 1942; Runyon, "The Brighter Side: Filipino Fighter Loves His War Job."

<sup>410</sup> The diminished importance of Filipinos' 'fighting culture' in prizefighting discourse is likely attributable to the lessened prominence of Filipinos in the sport until the mid-1980s: between the 1940s and 1990s, there were several notable, world-class Filipino fighters, but none as prominent as Villa had been or as Pacquiao would become. Moreover, the most famous Filipino prizefighter between the 1940s and 1980s was Gabriel 'Flash' Elorde, whose style was nothing like the swarming, aggressive style of several of many of his predecessors, or of Pacquiao.



The article begins with Collins' recollection of his eleven-day visit to the Philippines in 2004 where, accompanied by then-president Gloria Macapagal-Arroyo, he awarded Manny Pacquiao, the country's greatest and most famous prizefighter, with *The Ring's* world's featherweight championship at Malacañang Palace.<sup>411</sup> Collins' *dépaysement* is equalled only by his delight at the pageantry and the welcome he receives: "[s]portswriters are not considered dignitaries in the Western world, but I was treated like visiting royalty," echoing, almost a century later, the boxing 'travelogues' of his predecessors, who had also waxed poetic about their treatment.<sup>412</sup> Collins revels in his (by his own admission) undeserved role as a 'dignitary' throughout the "weeklong extravaganza" – its scale reminiscent of the farewell given to Cabanela or the celebrations of Villa's triumph – as "virtually every move I made became headline news," attention he attributes to "the Filipinos' abiding love of boxing."<sup>413</sup>

As Collins ponders whether Filipino star Nonito Donaire would measure up to his forebears, he locates the source of this "abiding love" in 'tradition': "there is no doubt [Donaire] is from the same tradition of fighting men" as his predecessors, one which, Collins claims, goes back to legendary chieftain Lapu Lapu's resistance to the Spanish.<sup>414</sup> Prizefighting may be an American import, but Filipinos possess an "*inherent fighting spirit* [emphasis added]," even if "most outsiders have forgotten what proud warriors Filipinos were before being subjugated by

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<sup>411</sup> Nigel Collins, "History Defines Love of Boxing in Philippines," ESPN.com, April 10, 2013, [https://www.espn.com/boxing/story/\\_/id/9155189/history-defines-love-affair-boxing-philippines](https://www.espn.com/boxing/story/_/id/9155189/history-defines-love-affair-boxing-philippines).

<sup>412</sup> Ibid. For earlier boxing 'travelogues' praising the treatment received in the Philippines, see, Baker, "Boxing: Doings in Manilla - Chat with Bailieu"; "Harry Holmes and Tracey Back"; Corbett, "The Boxing World," October 15, 1919.

<sup>413</sup> Collins, "History Defines Love of Boxing in Philippines."

<sup>414</sup> Ibid. In fairness to Collins: Filipino authors Joaquin Jay Gonzalez III and Angelo Merino, who co-wrote *From Pancho to Pacquiao: Philippine Boxing In and Out of the Ring* whilst working in academia – Gonzalez as an associate professor of politics at the University of San Francisco and Merino as an adjunct professor for courses at the same institution – have made a similar claim, even preposterously suggesting that, "[g]enetically, from Pancho to Pacquiao, Filipino boxers must have inherited their distinct speed (*bilis*) and power (*lakas*) from the cunning Lapu Lapu." See, Gonzalez III and Merino, *From Pancho to Pacquiao*, 2.

modern weapons wielded by imperialists,” indeed, before “nature’s weapons,” as W.F. Corbett had put it almost a century earlier, were made useless.<sup>415</sup> The story of Philippine boxing, then, is almost one of ‘primitiveness’ lost and ‘primitiveness’ reclaimed in the prize ring, for even “[c]enturies of oppression under the thumb of foreign rulers did not take away” this ‘inherent spirit,’ an inheritance from ‘pre-modernity,’ which “instead has been sharpened by the kind of desperation that leads to a *what-have-we-got-to-lose mentality* so noticeable in *most of* [the Philippines’] *boxers* [emphasis added].”<sup>416</sup>

Collins then turns, as had many of his predecessors in the sporting press, to a non-Filipino ‘expert,’ Ted Lerner, “an American journalist who has lived in the Philippines almost 19 [sic] years,” for added insight.<sup>417</sup> Although ““not every...[Filipino]...boxer is on the level of Pacquiao,”” says Lerner, ““there is an earthy grittiness about Filipino boxers...they always fight with their hearts on full display.””<sup>418</sup> Lerner concludes that because prizefighting ““has a long and proud history in the Philippines...is deeply ingrained in Filipino culture...and fighters intrinsically know it, the Philippines was, is, and always will be a serious boxing country that produces exciting, world-class fighters.””<sup>419</sup> For Collins, the conclusion is simpler: “with an annual per capita income of \$2,500, there is no shortage of recruits” – in short, “the future of

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<sup>415</sup> Collins, “History Defines Love of Boxing in Philippines.”

<sup>416</sup> Ibid.

<sup>417</sup> Ibid. No Filipinos, however, were asked what boxing meant to the Philippines and to Filipinos. For examples of white ‘experts’ of Philippine prizefighting (and Filipino prizefighters) from the 1920s, see, Mills, “Filipino Boxing Invasion Coming”; Goldner, “Filipinos Too Game, Says Critic Who Analyzes Causes Behind Sencio’s Death”; Alcott, “Boxing in Philippines Got Big Impetus with Villa’s Victory Over Jimmy Wilde.”

<sup>418</sup> Collins, “History Defines Love of Boxing in Philippines.”

<sup>419</sup> Ibid. Lerner also claims the sport has “deep meaning and significance” in the country, but fails to explain how or why this is so.

Philippine boxing looks promising.”<sup>420</sup> The future of Filipinos and the Philippines, however, remains unclear.

One may ask why, in a sport so inequitable and exploitative, one should focus on discourse and identities with little relevance outside of it. I hope to have shown that prizefighting discourse and prizefighting identities matter because one need not scratch too hard to uncover their deeply troubling roots, their stubborn persistence in only slightly altered guises, or their open concealment of global economic inequities and imperial legacies. Collins’ claim that “[c]enturies of oppression” has not quelled Filipinos’ inherent martial temper and his use of national income as a barometer for prizefighting’s Philippine future is an act of double historical elision: empire is acknowledged but its effects are ambiguous and appear divorced, through the caesura of national independence, from neocolonial relations.<sup>421</sup> ‘Inherent’ Filipino martial prowess manifested in the ring, meanwhile, exists before and outside of time or history, something retained despite empire, rather than produced by it, the would-be victim of and bulwark against imperialism, rather than its effect.<sup>422</sup> Finally, Lerner’s portrayal of the

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<sup>420</sup> Collins, “History Defines Love of Boxing in Philippines.”

<sup>421</sup> For an overview of the integration of the Philippines into a global capitalist economy from the Spanish colonial period to the present, the deepening of its dependence on an export economy under U.S. rule, and the continuation of these conditions post-independence, see, Philip F. Kelly, *Landscapes of Globalization: Human Geographies of Economic Change in the Philippines* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 16–46. For other succinct summaries with a focus on the impacts of these developments on labour migration, see, James A. Tyner, *The Philippines: Mobilities, Identities, Globalization* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 17–49; James A. Tyner, *Made in the Philippines* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 27–52. For an account of currency devaluation, wage reduction, and World Bank and IMF policies in the Philippines further deepening its dependence on an export-oriented economy, see, Robin Broad, *Unequal Alliance: The World Bank, The International Monetary Fund, and The Philippines* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 13–35, 54–93, 105–26, 180, 195–96. For an account of monetary policies during the American colonial period, see, Lumba, *Monetary Authorities*. For an example of the elision of imperial effects in popular culture, see, Amy Kaplan, “‘Left Alone with America’: The Absence of Empire in the Study of American Culture,” in *Cultures of United States Imperialism*, ed. Amy Kaplan and Donald E. Pease (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 18–19.

<sup>422</sup> I do not contend that groups, nations, or cultures do not or cannot have martial traditions, simply that notions of their *inherence*, especially in prizefighting, are constructions.

Philippines as a perennial producer of prizefighters obscures an imperial history that was deeply constitutive of its transformation into a virtual market for bodies for the prize ring.<sup>423</sup>

Prizefighting identities – and their histories – support John Hoberman’s contention that, despite pretensions to the contrary, “interracial sport is a neocolonialist enterprise, both as an economic operation and as a cultural time capsule in which the colonial ideology of race lives on...[it is] a merciless labor market that offers limited opportunities to large numbers of financially desperate athletes.”<sup>424</sup> Prizefighting identities matter because they are not surface projections, they are ways of thinking and doing which, crystallized and institutionalized through business practices, become incredibly productive matrices through which identities become reified.<sup>425</sup> They matter precisely because, their limited impact on the ‘outside’ world notwithstanding, they continue to confine some of the more politically disenfranchised and financially vulnerable individuals of any society – already engaged in a dangerous practice – to their bodies or, more aptly, to a specific and damningly immutable vision of their bodies as an envelope both more powerful and less vulnerable than others, a vision that masks its degeneration to all but (and, sometimes, even to) its possessor, making its ultimate destruction all the more tragic.<sup>426</sup>

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<sup>423</sup> “First World and Third World poverty have become merged in the shadow of First World opportunity and affluence to produce a maximum yield for the professional ring...boxing is the cultural product of a global political economy which determines considerable social inequalities. [Its] subculture grows where poverty stands in the shadow of affluence.” See, Sugden, *Boxing and Society*, 188, 195.

<sup>424</sup> Hoberman, *Darwin’s Athletes*, 120. This ought not to suggest that interracial sports should not exist, simply that these effects are not unintended.

<sup>425</sup> “Power-knowledge relations are not self-evident modes of distribution, they are transformative matrices.” (« Les relations de pouvoir-savoir ne sont pas des formes données de répartition, ce sont des matrices de transformation. ») See, Foucault, *La volonté de savoir*, 131.

<sup>426</sup> Even in the pugilistic realm, there are none so credulous to claim that prizefighting does not draw from and exploit socioeconomic disadvantage: prizefighting identities lionize and naturalize (in the dual sense of accepting it as an inalterable reality and in making the prizefighter its ‘natural’ product) it, and turn it into a competitive advantage; they do not obscure exploitation, but render its target (the fighter) virtually impervious to it. In these

Yet the dangers inherent to prizefighting, the origins of its identities, or the reasons undergirding their reproduction should not, perforce, lead us to condemn it or to seek its abolition, as some have; they ought to, however, give us pause about two things.<sup>427</sup> First, they should compel us to re-envision the sport's notion of 'sacrifice': as soon as one steps into a prize ring, one already gives more of oneself than most would ever dare give in a lifetime. We might, knowing it is inextricably linked to notions of bodies that are purportedly 'designed' for it, reconceive of 'sacrifice' as neither more nor less than one is willing to give at any time, however little that may be or unsatisfactory that may prove to the sport's followers, and even to many of its practitioners: if nothing else, it would, at least, allow for a notion of sacrifice that does not depend on the possibility of children never knowing their parents.<sup>428</sup> Second, we might

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formulations, the fighter's very presence in the ring suggests they have risen above conditions far more damaging, dangerous, and inequitable than those they might face in combat.

<sup>427</sup> For this view, see, especially, Sammons, *Beyond the Ring*, 250–51; Sugden, *Boxing and Society*, 195–96. Arguments for the sport's abolition fail to consider that the desire for social prestige may exist irrespective of one's socioeconomic circumstances and have historically revolved around the violation of "the bourgeois sense of the sacredness of the individual self and of [their] corporeal envelope," often depicting, moreover, the practitioner as unwitting or unaware, something which ethnographic research has categorically disproven. The sport's illusory promises of fortune and social prestige are powerful precisely because they are founded in reality: the craft of boxing truly does allow individuals to fashion an entirely new physical and social being and has indeed, at the risk of sounding mawkish, given purpose and value to the lives of many (a claim, however, made too liberally with little, if any, statistical evidence to support its extensiveness). The business of prizefighting, as "both [the] product and [the] progenitor" of "the boxing subculture," finds in this reality the self-justification for its renewal in society (although its appeal would likely neither suffer nor gain from ceasing to lamely deploy these justifications, for its appeal has precious little to do with them). Most boxers never become, nor even attempt to become, professionals and are likelier spared the most devastating consequences of the trade (which cannot be made any less dangerous if it is to remain the same trade); those who consent to becoming professionals, however, need not also consent to manufactured identities (which, in the Philippines, were wrought, partly, through the recruitment and encouragement of impressionable youth whose own consent, if not nonexistent, cannot but have been vitiated by dint of their age and social circumstances) that have lionized their socioeconomic circumstances, heroized their willing submission to punishment, normalized, dampened, or trivialized its effects, and crystallized it in specific bodies. Prizefighting openly recognizes its exploitation of disadvantage, but it need not revel in the identities, which are imperial legacies, that simultaneously obscure, celebrate, and naturalize it: we need not ban prizefighting, but we might ban its inane fantasies. For the passages cited in this footnote, see, Wacquant, "Pugs at Work: Bodily Capital and Bodily Labour Among Professional Boxers," 91; Sugden, *Boxing and Society*, 80.

<sup>428</sup> Ring deaths, of course, are rather infrequent, and neither they, nor the chronic health issues stemming from the sport, are always the result of this sacrificial ethos: it is simply that one should not encourage attitudes (which, admittedly, have dwindled, and which many fighters, past and present, have bravely refused to adhere to), identities, and postures that increase their likelihood. One may readily critique this stance as naïve because many properly

reconsider the appeal of, and need for, widely applicable, context-specific identities – lucrative and attractive (often, even to those to whom they apply) as they may be – into which individuals might be funneled and against which they are measured. Although these identities have provided opportunities for groups to craft ‘counter-hegemonic’ narratives, their origins preclude their alteration into anything but an extension, however masked, of earlier discourse. ‘Counter-hegemonic’ narratives are laden with liberatory potential but can also lead to (or, more aptly, validate) the confinement of a particular kind of pugilistic ‘soul’ to the body. Those who are invested with (and often compelled to embody) these ‘counter-hegemonic’ narratives may indeed feel (or be depicted) as though they have nothing to lose; in truth, haunted by empire’s ghosts and bound by imperial legacies, bartering with what is often their sole possession, their “bodily capital,” they stand to lose everything.

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trained fighters have effectively suppressed the instinct for self-preservation that would normally compel them to yield. For examples of this ‘reengineering,’ see, Oates, *On Boxing*, 108; Wacquant, “Pugs at Work: Bodily Capital and Bodily Labour Among Professional Boxers,” 82–89; Wacquant, *Body & Soul*, 94–95.

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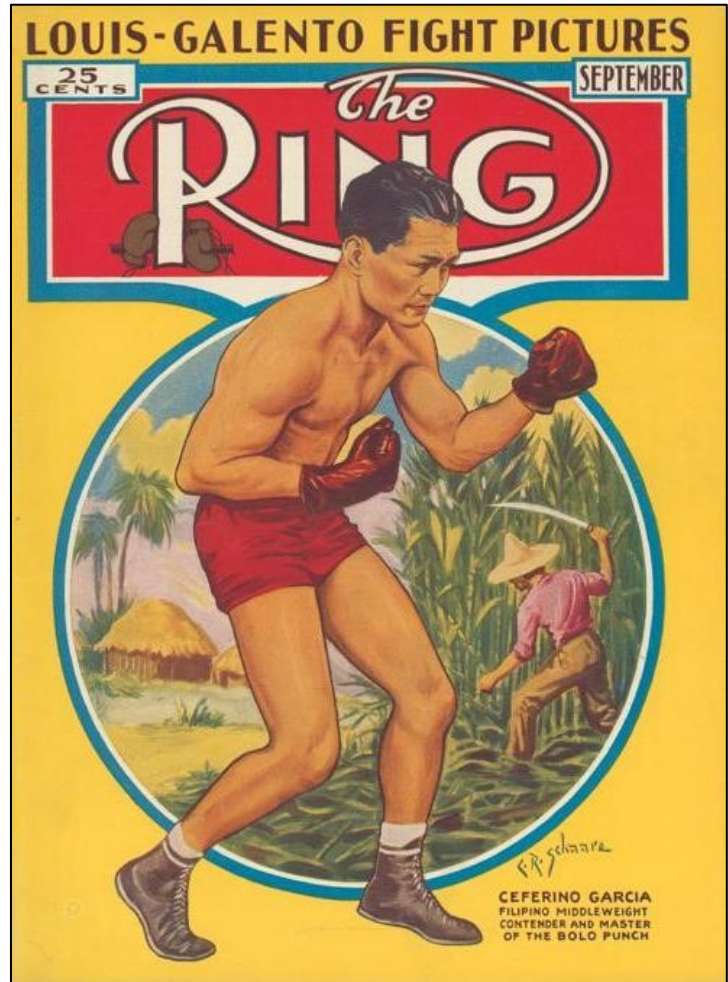
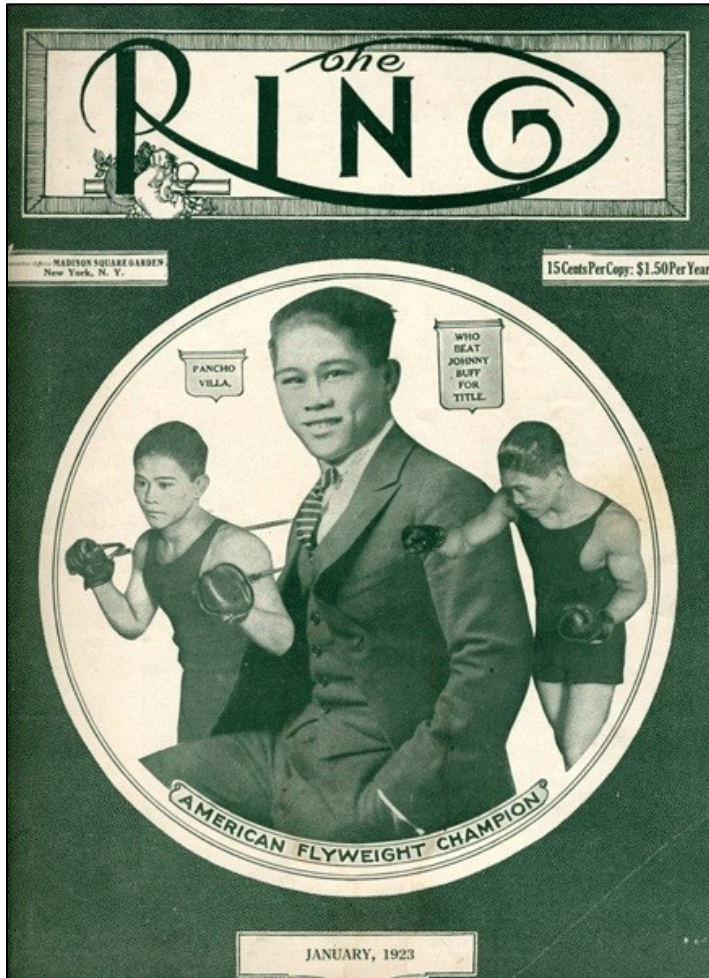
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## Visual Appendix

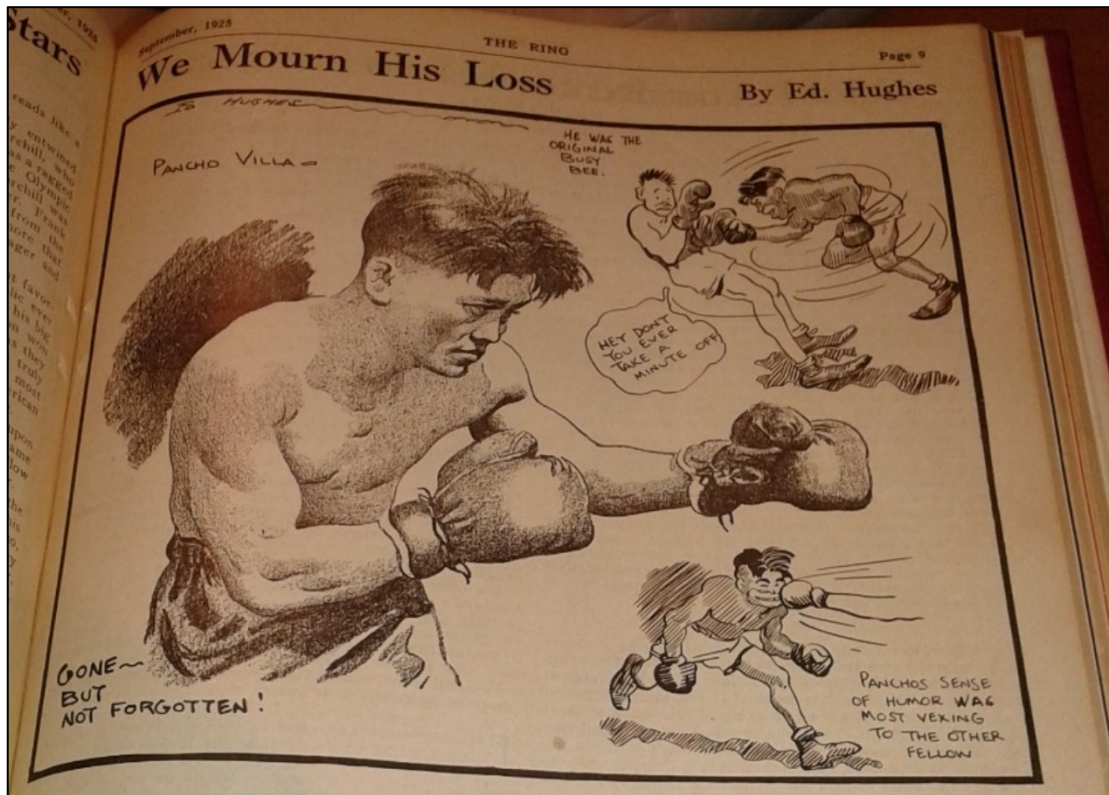
Here, the reader will find visual artefacts encountered during research that were not the object of direct or sustained scrutiny in this thesis. The reader may peruse, at their leisure, advertisements and cartoons, and gaze, finally, after all the distortions, exaggerations, and fabrications, upon the faces – bright, smiling – of three young men who met a dark end.

### I. *The Ring*



Pancho Villa on the cover of the January 1923 edition of *The Ring*, a few short months after he claimed the American flyweight crown. The magazine was inaugurated in 1922; its covers remained quite staid until the 1930s, after which lavish, full-colour illustrations were the norm (see example on the right). This image was taken from *Boxrec.com* (<https://boxrec.com/wiki/images/5/52/23Jan.jpg>).

Ceferino Garcia, NYSAC world's middleweight champion 1939-1940, and inventor of the 'bolo punch,' also used by Cuban fighter Kid Gavilán, whose swinging motion suggested the arc of a cane worker's machete. Garcia was the rare fighter who met his greatest success more than ten years after the start of his career; he (and his longevity, contrasted with the alleged 'rapid maturation' of most Filipinos) are mentioned in Ted Carroll's article, "Fighting Filipinos," cited in the conclusion to this thesis. Garcia also reportedly worked as a bodyguard for Mae West. *The Ring*, September 1939. This image was taken from *Boxrec.com* (<https://boxrec.com/wiki/images/5/51/39Sep.jpg>).



Cartoon published in the September 1925 issue of *The Ring*, following Villa's death in July of that year. The larger likeness stands in stark contrast to the racialized distortions presented by the two smaller ones.



December, 1925 THE RING Page 7

# Life is a battle!



**L**IFE is a battle. The strongest man wins. It's fight, fight, fight, from the cradle to the grave. In industry, in business, in the professions, it's a struggle of brains and brawn.

Are you properly equipped for the fray? Have you the strength? Have you the body that's fit to carry on the fight? Have you the nerve, the mental energy, the fighting spirit—to forge ahead?

My friend, you may think you're licked. You may be trudging through life with a beaten, hang-dog look. You may be frail and sickly. Tired—oh! so tired! Weak and cringing! Broken-down in body—shattered in spirit. But so long as you have the frame and bones that God gave you, and a heart in which there flickers what is perhaps the last dying spark of ambition to go ahead—I beg of you not to throw up the sponge.

Let me take you in hand. Let me give you a new glorious body for that half-dead bulk you're toting around. Let me put flesh and good old muscle on those skinny bones. Let me put the fire of youth in your heart—a spring in your step—a sparkle in your eye—a song in your throat.

These marvels of physical re-education have been performed for my students. Let me help you do the same for yourself. Read these carefully. I am receiving many other letters like these every day.

**Booth Field**—"The exercises are wonderful and I feel 100% better. My friends all envy me now. In substance your directions."  
—Edna Hughes, 2513 Madison St., Cincinnati, O.

**Shoes Better!**—"Your lessons are just what I want. I am better an immediate betterment in my weight, sleep and digestion through the exercises."  
—Frank V. Parsons, 1843 Jefferson Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

"I feel like a new man."  
—George Statter, 55 Adams Ave., Chicago, Ill.

**Patent All Goals**—"The idea of my men are all gone from me. I never again know what I mean."  
—E. Conchito, 111 E. 210 St., N. Y. City.

**Welder New Field**—"My hands are getting very much better and my mind is now very good and my muscles are coming on."  
—R. K. Haskick, Adams, Texas.

**Stiffness Gone**—"The exercises and work is all gone from my side and I feel a lot better already."  
—Eugene Schreiber, Tipton, Iowa.

**Limbared Up!**—"I never felt so limbered up in all my life. I see an I'm going to get a lot of good out of your methods."  
—H. Phillips, 12 Elmwa Ave., West, Mich.

**Gained Weight**—"I have gained about 5 pounds in weight already and sleep full of joy."  
—Martha Roberts, 261 Nassau Ave., Brooklyn, N. Y.

**Back Breakdown!**—"I wish you could see my back now. I don't have that lumbago feeling any more. My back is getting better and my muscles are as hard as iron."  
—George A. Wagner, 267 W. Front St., Reading, Pa.

your breast. Let me put the spirit of fight in you—the spirit that never takes the count of ten. If my career has taught me anything, it has taught me how to stick until I won; how to offset adversity; how to be down but not out; how to combat severest opposition and come through with flying colors. It has disclosed the secrets of mastering the human body. Remember that though I was once frail and weak, it was I alone who discovered ways of training my body into what has been called the finest example of a perfect physical machine—and the Championship of the World.

Enroll as a student in my course and let me disclose these secrets to you; let me show you how to overcome the physical defects that are pulling you down. I will gladly send you my free booklet on request. Mail the coupon below. There is no obligation. But send it today. Now, this minute.

**BENNY LEONARD'S HOME COURSE OF PROMOTING PHYSICAL FITNESS (& BOXING)**

*Benny Leonard*  
Undeclared Lightweight Champion of the World.  
123 West 31st Street, Dept. 10-D, New York City

Mail this now for my free booklet. No obligation. (Coupon)

**BENNY LEONARD, 123 W. 31st St., N. Y., Dept. 10-D**

Please send me your booklet, "Now I Can Tell You," which describes your home course of teaching physical fitness and boxing by mail, in which I am interested. I enclose 10c (postage or coin) to cover mailing, etc. This places me under no obligation.

I am interested particularly in the following, marked X—

<input type="checkbox"/> Boxing Instruction	<input type="checkbox"/> Increased Pzy in My Present Job	<input type="checkbox"/> Rheumatism
<input type="checkbox"/> General Physical Fitness	<input type="checkbox"/> Reducing Weight	<input type="checkbox"/> Hay Fever
<input type="checkbox"/> Big Muscles	<input type="checkbox"/> Gaining Weight	<input type="checkbox"/> Stomach Trouble
<input type="checkbox"/> Strength	<input type="checkbox"/> Better Health	<input type="checkbox"/> Short Wind
<input type="checkbox"/> Getting a Better Job	<input type="checkbox"/> Constipation	<input type="checkbox"/> Nervousness
		<input type="checkbox"/> Pimples

Name ..... Age .....

Street ..... City .....

This image (December 1925), and the one below it (October 1925), were part of a series of advertisements – each one unique – published in *The Ring* magazine throughout the year 1925, for recently retired world's lightweight champion Benny Leonard's home fitness course. The advertisements illustrate the confluence of social Darwinism with the new masculine creed of physical fitness and martial vigour. This one begins, "LIFE [sic] is a battle. The strongest man wins. It's fight, fight, fight, from the cradle to the grave. In industry, in business, in the professions, it's a struggle of brains and brawn." Leonard positions himself as *sui generis* and wholly replicable, reminding sceptical readers that "I was once frail and weak," that "it was I alone who discovered ways of training my body," but that he is now willing to "disclose these secrets" to them.

THE RING Page 9

# KNOCK HIS BLOCK OFF!

Somebody has got you scared  
**Knock His Block Off!**  
 Somebody makes a fool out of  
 you—lullies you—makes you the  
 laughing stock of your friends.  
**Knock His Block Off!**  
 "Old Man Sickness" has laid you  
 out—Or "Old Man Hard Luck,"  
 or "Old Man Down-in-the-Rut,"  
**Knock HIS Block Off, Too!**  
 Right and left—at the office and  
 factory—in your home—with the  
 boys—you would be a better and  
 happier man—if you only were  
 able to "knock the block off" of the  
 man or the thing that stands in  
 your way. **AND YOU CAN!**  
 Men enroll in my course of per-  
 sonal physical instruction, because  
 they want to "KNOCK SOME-  
 BODY'S BLOCK OFF!"—either  
 actually or figuratively.  
 They're learning How to Fight—  
 not only with their fists—but the  
 bigger battle, the Battle of Life.  
 They're learning **HOW TO USE  
 THEIR BODIES.**  
 They're getting PEP, PUNCH,  
 PERSONALITY. It's all just a  
 matter of having PHYSICAL  
 VIGOR AND FITNESS.  
 You will always be the underdog  
 —both in business and with your  
 fellowmen—unless you fix up that  
 body of yours with **POWER** and  
 red-blooded **HEALTH.**

My unusual System of Promot-  
 ing Physical Fitness is giving men  
 new bodies for old. I am taking  
 result of renewed pep and vitality,  
 the singing, tingling body, which  
 my physical culture course has  
 given them.  
 My instruction is being pro-  
 claimed the world over as the only  
 one of its kind—there is no other  
 one like it. Because my situation  
 is unique. I achieved the **Light-  
 weight Championship of the World**  
 as a result of first **BUILDING  
 BODILY PERFECTION FOR  
 MYSELF.** I discovered very un-  
 usual secrets in getting strength,  
 muscle and health.  
 Remember—that I didn't always  
 have the perfect body I now have  
 —once I was skinny and weak.  
 What I did with myself I can do  
 for **YOU.**  
 It is impossible to tell you all  
 about my methods, here. If you'll  
 just send me your name and  
 address on the little slip printed  
 below, I will send you free of  
 charge, my wonderful booklet,  
 "Now I Can Tell You," which tells  
 you just why you should enroll  
 under my personal instruction.  
 Let me send you this free booklet.  
 Write for it **NOW—THIS  
 MINUTE.** There is no obligation.

*Benny Leonard*  
 Undated Lightweight Champion of the World  
 123 W. 31st St., Dept. 10-O, N. Y. C.

## BENNY LEONARD'S

### HOME COURSE OF MUSCLE AND BODY BUILDING (AND BOXING)

**SEND THIS COUPON AT ONCE FOR MY FREE BOOKLET, "Now I Can Tell You." No obligation.**

*Benny Leonard*  
 123 W. 31st St., N. Y. C.

**BENNY LEONARD,**  
 Dept. 10-O, 123 W. 31st St., N. Y. C.

Please send me your booklet, "Now I Can Tell You," which describes your home course of teaching physical fitness by mail, in which I am interested. I enclose 10c (refund in coin) to cover mailing, etc. This places me under no obligation. I am interested particularly in the following, marked X—

Boxing instruction <input type="checkbox"/>	Reducing Weight <input type="checkbox"/>
General Physical Fitness <input type="checkbox"/>	Better Health <input type="checkbox"/>
Big Muscles <input type="checkbox"/>	Castigation <input type="checkbox"/>
Getting a Better Job <input type="checkbox"/>	Rheumatism <input type="checkbox"/>
Increased Pay in My Present Job <input type="checkbox"/>	Short Wind <input type="checkbox"/>
Gaining Weight <input type="checkbox"/>	Nervousness <input type="checkbox"/>
	Pimples <input type="checkbox"/>

Name .....

Street .....

City .....

Age .....

The clipping at the left shows how newspapers in leading cities are featuring Benny Leonard Talks in their daily columns. This one is from the Chicago-Herald-Examiner.

The man the world looks up to as physical culture authority is the man you should engage privately, as instructor.

My morning mail is filled with hundreds of letters like this: sent to me, unsolicited, by pupils who are marveling at what benefits my lessons are bringing them. Ask me to show you more.

*Geo. C. Hoger*

123 W. 31st St., N. Y. C.

Benny Leonard's solution to all adversity: "Knock [Its] Block Off!" He adds, "You will always be the underdog – both in business and with your fellowmen – unless you fix up that body of yours with POWER [sic]..." His home training course, which used some boxing techniques, was also promoted by *The Ring's* editor-in-chief, Nat Fleischer, who intimated the biopolitical significance with which some had invested boxing and prizefighting when, in his editorial for April 1925, he exclaimed that if people adhered to this regimen, "the number of pale-faced, sallow-cheeked, dyspeptic individuals should be greatly diminished."





## II. The Olympic Athletic Club

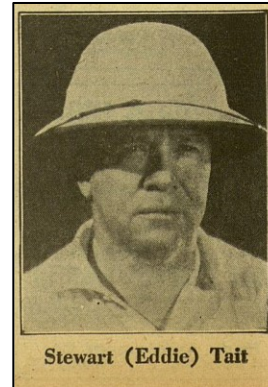
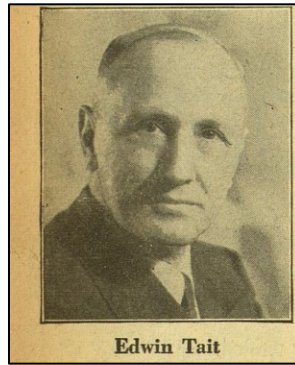
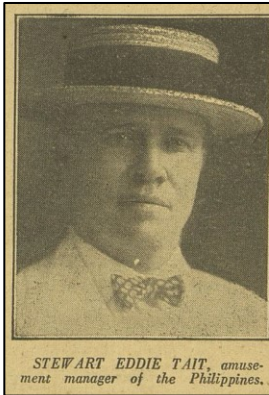


*THEM WERE THE DAYS.—A picture of ring stars of yesteryear taken on the steps of the old Olympic Club in Palomar years ago when boxing here was at its zenith. Arrows points to Rufe Turner, the man with educated elbows, at the extreme right, second row. At the extreme left, same row, is smiling Sammy Good, king of the San Francisco four rounders. Iron Box, former lightweight champion, is at the extreme right, front row. Frank A. Churchill the man, who with Stewart Eddie Tait, put the Philippines on the boxing map of the world, is shown with a straw hat on. On his left is "Salustiano" Doyle, sports editor. It was at this "institution" of the Philippine boxing that Dencio Cabanela, Francisco Flores, Francisco Labra, Paul Gyn, Silvino Jamito, Carlitos Garcia, received their A B C's of the manly art.*

Group photo of Olympic Athletic Club officials and fighters. The man at whom the arrow is pointing was Rufe Turner, a black American boxer who fought in the Philippines and, later, served as a trainer. The caption's reference to him as the "man with educated elbows" refers to a defensive technique, involving his elbows, which he had allegedly developed. Churchill is the man with the straw hat and white suit.

Manila *Tribune*, 3 March 1937 (the picture, however, is much older).





Portraits of the Tait brothers. The first portrait on the left is of Stewart Tait, from 5 May 1928, while the centre portrait and that on the right are of Edwin and Stewart Tait, respectively, from 25 March 1944. All three were published in *The Billboard* magazine, in articles whose primary focus was the brothers' carnival promotion, illustrating the extent to which both were ensconced in the entertainment industry (and not merely, or even primarily, prizefighting).

January, 1929 THE RING Page 11

**SPEEDY DADO**  
"That Marvelous Filipino"  
Flyweight

**TOD MORGAN**  
World 136-Pound Champion

**SPUG MYERS**  
135-140 POUNDS

**ARMANDO SANTIAGO**  
138-135 POUNDS

**SULLY MONTGOMERY**  
HEAVYWEIGHT

**FILIPINO JOHNNY HILL**  
126-130 POUNDS

**JACK SILVER**  
140-145 POUNDS

**NORMAN WILSON**  
140 POUNDS

**IGNACIO FERNANDEZ**  
the Filipino Featherweight

**FRANK CHURCHILL**

**RUSS WHALEN,**  
"Speed Marvel," 135-140 Pounds

**CHURCHILL ENTERPRISES**  
CHICAGO

NEW YORK  
Publicity Building  
47th Street and Broadway

Main Office:  
GARRICK BUILDING  
Dearborn 6023; Night, Superior 2531

LOS ANGELES  
Broadway Arcade  
Tucker 6718

An advertisement for 'Churchill Enterprises,' published in the January 1929 edition of *The Ring*. Churchill is pictured at bottom right; Speedy Dado, one of the more prominent members of the Churchill 'stable' in the late 1920s, is shown at top left while Ignacio Fernandez, one of Villa's 'successors,' is shown at top right.

**OLYMPIC STADIUM**  
 Personal Direction  
 EDWIN TAIT

**LADIES' NIGHT**  
 Ladies when accompanied by escort admitted free to balcony

**Kid Keenan**  
 VS.  
**Apache Torres**  
 Bantams

**Pancho Villa**  
 VS.  
**Baguio Bearcat**  
 Paperweights

10 Other Bouts

**TONIGHT**

**FIGHT, FUN, FURY**

ASSESSMENTS:  
 Regulars P2.00  
 Associates 1.00  
 Transeuntes 0.50  
 Obreros 0.20

**Olympic Stadium**  
 Direction: Edwin Tait

**LADIES' NIGHT**  
 Ladies admitted free to balcony when accompanied by escort

**Velgas Fernandez**  
 VS.  
**Terrible Terio**  
 (a slug-fest--that's all)

**Little Cortez**  
 VS.  
**Kid Joe**  
 vacuumweight contest

Battle Royal 5 Heavy Punchers  
 Ten (10) Other Bouts

**TONIGHT**

**FIGHT, FUN, FURY**

ASSESSMENT:  
 REGULAR P2.00  
 ASSOCIATE 1.00  
 TRANSEUNTE 0.50  
 OBRERO 0.20

**Olympic Stadium**  
 Direction: Edwin Tait

**LADIES' NIGHT**  
 Ladies admitted free to balcony when accompanied by escort

**BEN TRACEY**  
 VS.  
**BIG MANUEL**  
 Lightweights.

**JIMMIE WILD**  
 VS.  
**KID CORTEZ**  
 Vacuumweights

**STIFF IRINEO**  
 VS.  
 1. Young Basilio  
 2. Cadio Cruz  
 3. Kid Pascual  
 4. Max Alcantara  
 2 rounds each

10 OTHER BOUTS

**TONIGHT**

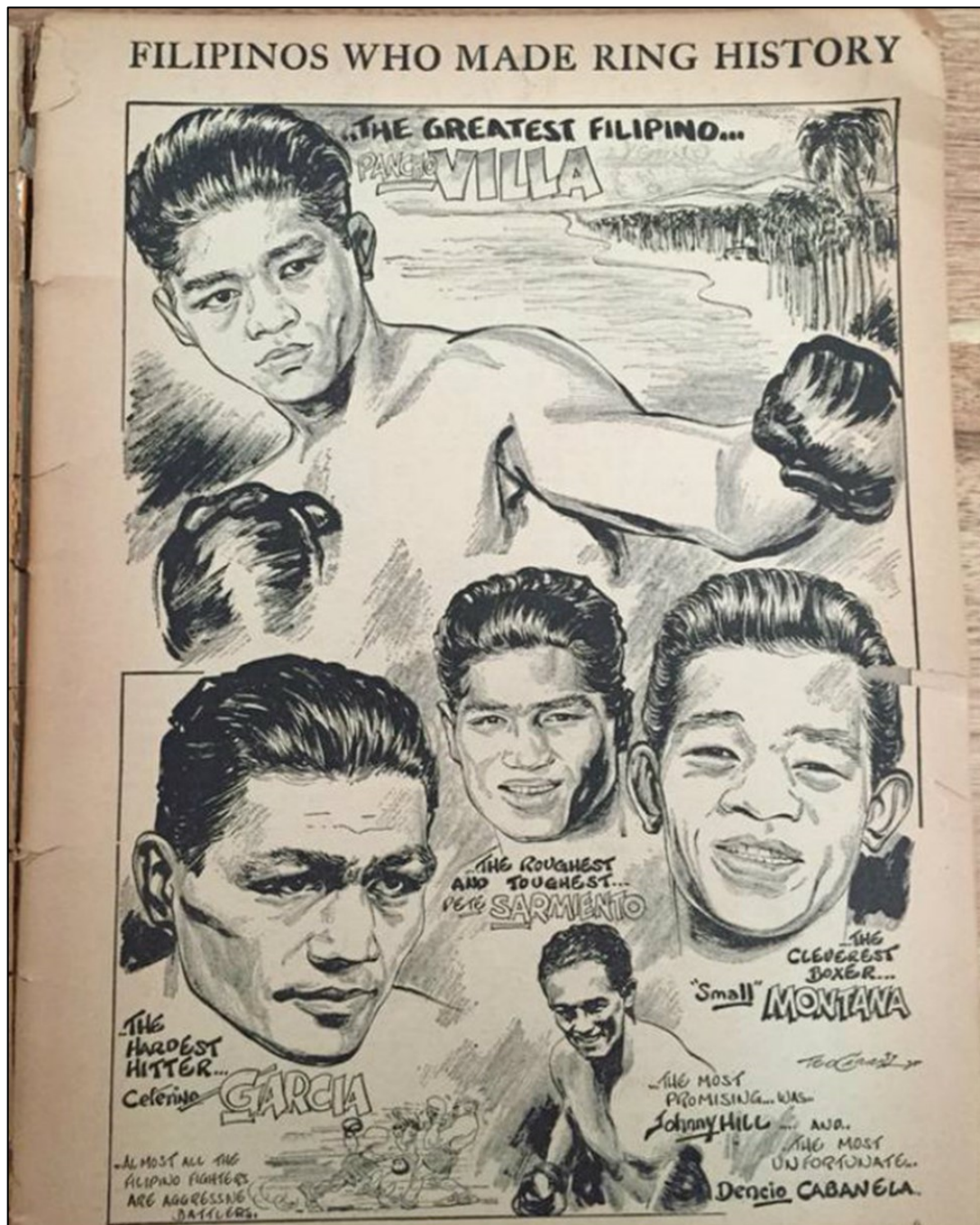
**FIGHT, FUN, FURY**

ASSESSMENT:  
 Regular P2.00  
 Associates 1.00  
 Transeuntes 0.50  
 Obreros 0.20

Advertisements for upcoming fight cards at the Olympic printed in the *Cablenews-American*. The one on the left (26 November 1919) announces an upcoming 'vacuumweight' bout between Villa and opponent Baguio Bearcat as a 'paperweight' bout. The advertisement at centre (15 October 1919) announces a 'vacuumweight' bout and a 'battle royal,' while that on the right (29 October 1919) announces a 'vacuumweight' bout and an unusual exhibition where one Stiff Irineo will take on four fighters for two rounds apiece. On "ladies' night," women accompanied by an escort were given free admission to the balcony, simultaneously showcasing the efforts made by promoters to 'clean up' the sport and appeal to a broader base, and its fundamentally 'masculine' nature (hinting, also, that, despite these efforts, it was not safe or desirable for women to attend unescorted). The tagline "Fight, Fun, Fury" appeared on almost every advertisement.



### III. Cartoons

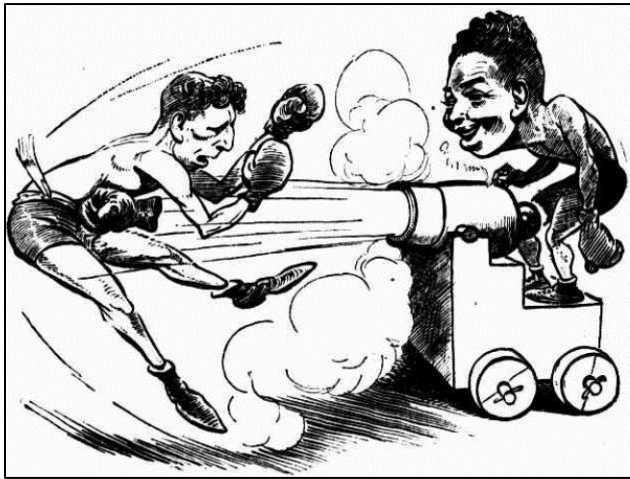


Cartoon by Ted Carroll commemorating prominent Filipino fighters of the 1920s. Published in *The Ring*, ca. 1938. This image was taken from *Rappler.com* (<https://www.rappler.com/sports/105082-ring-magazine-philippine-boxing/>).



Cartoon by Ted Carroll from the November 1947 issue of *The Ring*, accompanying his article, "Fighting Filipinos," mentioned in the conclusion to this thesis.





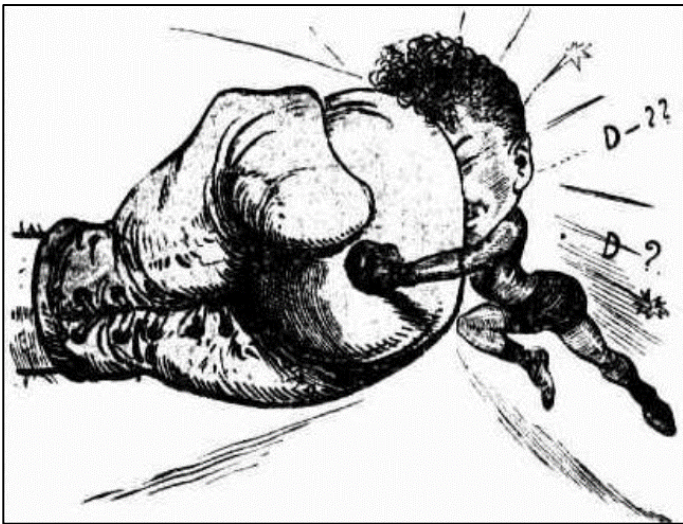
(Left) Cartoon making light of Joe Symonds' claim that Cabanela won on a low blow.

*Sydney Sportsman*, 4 May 1921.



(Above) "Poetic Justice." 'Poetic justice' is that which was exacted when Cabanela, who is shown trying to catch Symonds with a net, finally caught up with an opponent unwilling to 'slug it out.'

*Smith's Weekly*, 7 May 1921.

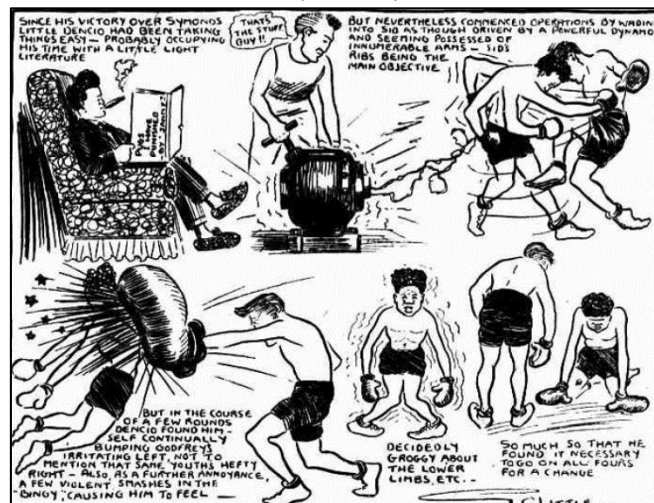


(Above) "Godfrey's Great Left." This is the left hand with which Cabanela was hit repeatedly in the bout in which he experienced his second collapse.

*Sydney Sportsman*, 18 May 1921.

(Right) Cartoon making light of Cabanela's reportedly poor training habits – and the ensuing consequences. The first caption reads, "Since his victory over Symonds little Dencio had been taking things easy – probably occupying his time with a little light literature."

*Sydney Sportsman*, 18 May 1921.



**PANCHO VILLA IS A FINISHER** . . . . . By Edgren



(Above) "Pancho Villa Is a Finisher." A cartoon by Robert Edgren dissecting some of Villa's techniques. The fighter portrayed at bottom right is one of the Flores brothers, presumably Elino, who had accompanied Villa to the United States. The cartoon's focus on Villa's technical mastery stands in jarring contrast to the article (also by Edgren) that accompanied it: the article begins, "Pancho Villa was brought up, like his ancestors for thousands of years back, in the Philippine jungles. Perhaps that is why Pancho shows the fighting characteristics of all denizens of the wild...Wild animals, brought up where every day is a new fight for existence...develop quickness that is unknown in civilization."

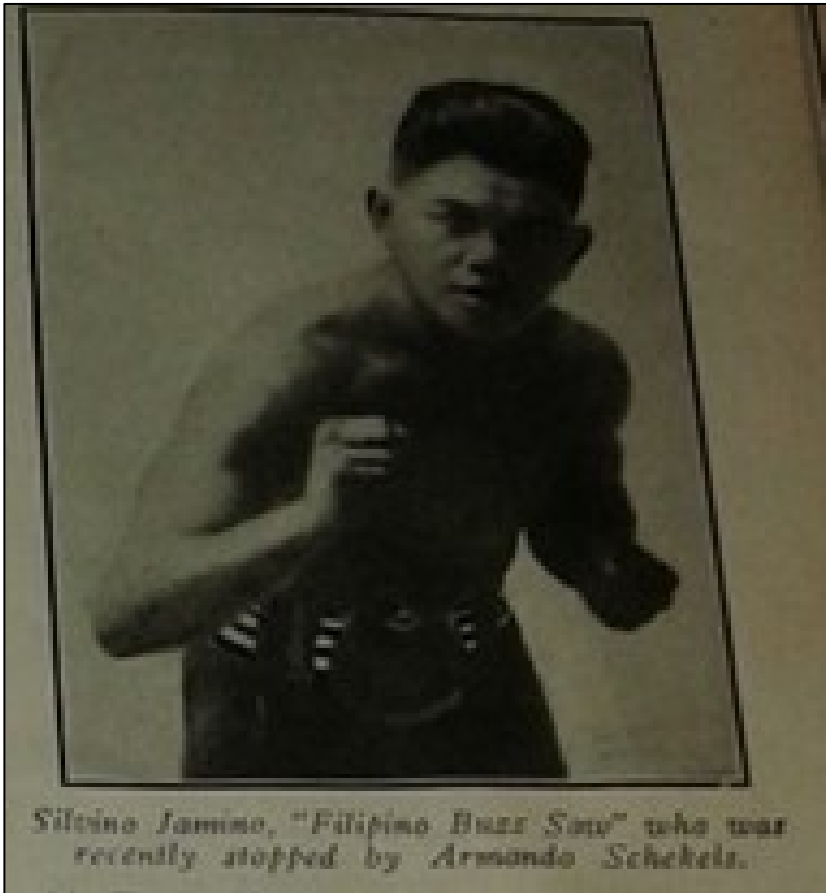
*Tulsa Daily World*, 8 October 1922.

(Right) Cartoon of 'Clever' Sencio Moldez, published the day of his death.

*Indianapolis Times*, 20 April 1926.



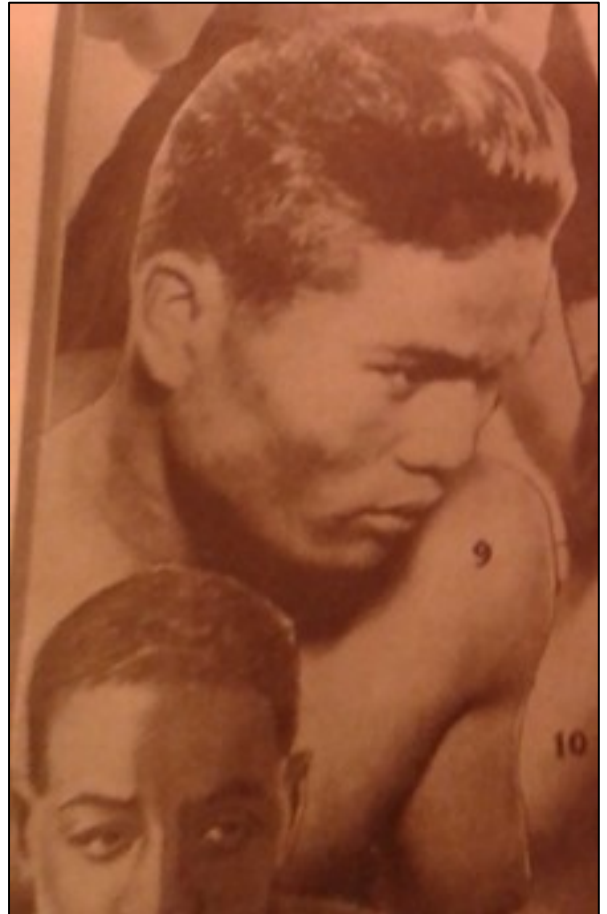
#### IV. Filipino Fighters



*Silvano Jamino, "Filipino Buzz Saw" who was recently stopped by Armando Schekela.*

Silvano Jamito, the journeyman Filipino fighter who mentored Cabanela and likely the first Filipino fighter to compete in Australia. After the conclusion of his career, which lasted into the late 1920s, he had reportedly become a streetcar driver in New York.

*The Ring*, November 1928.

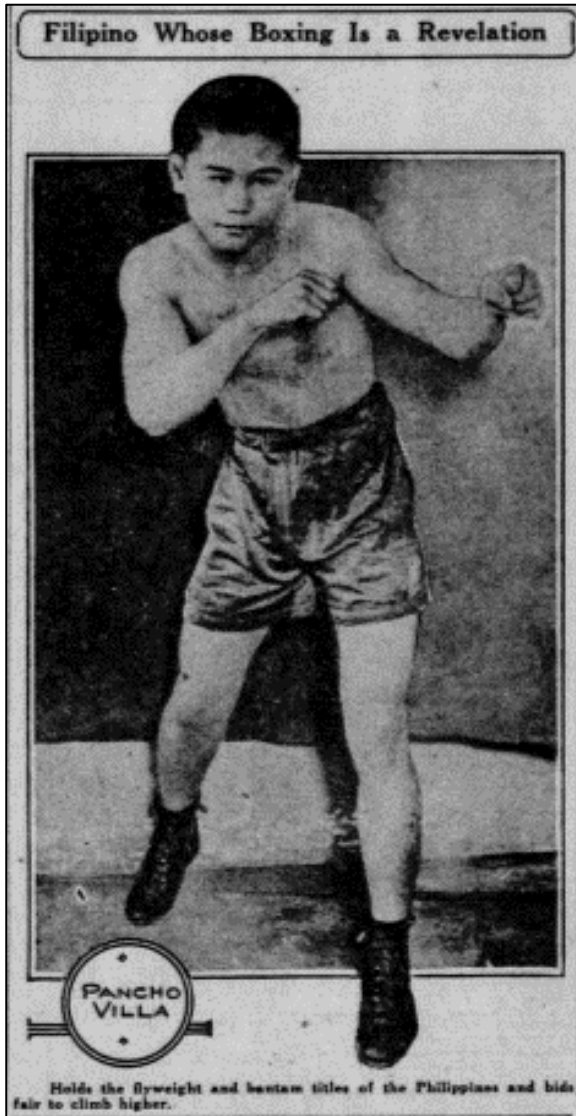


Pete Sarmiento, another of Villa's 'successors,' an excellent fighter in his own right, who was working in a California shipyard at the outbreak of the Second World War.

*The Ring*, January 1926.



V. Fathers and Sons




(Above) Pancho Villa, *New York Herald*, 20 August 1922.

## Pancho Villa, Jr. To Make Debut

Pancho Villa, Jr., son of Pancho Villa, the immortal Filipino world's flyweight champion, will make his ring debut in a four-round bout with Little Jurich in the Manila Sporting Enterprises boxing program at the Jose Rizal Stadium on January 5. Panchito has been undergoing intensive training in anticipation of a keen battle ahead of him. Jurich has an impressive record to his credit.

Clashing in the 10-round main event are Star Misamis and Ben Jimenez. A ding-dong scrap is in the offing as both lads are well matched.



(Above) Pancho Villa, Jr., *Manila Tribune*, 1 January 1943.

**RADIO**  
THEATRE  
*Comfortably Cool*

NOW SHOWING  
SHOW STARTS AT 10:00 A. M.  
Thurs—12:19-2:23-4:27 & 6:31 P. M.

**"BOOM TOWN"**  
Clark GABLE—Claudette COLBERT  
Spencer TRACY—Hedy LAMARR

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EXTENDED TODAY ONLY!

**GRAND** AIR CONDITIONED

SHOW STARTS AT 10:00 A. M.

LUCY VELEZ  
in **"The GIRL FROM MEXICO"**  
with DONALD WOODS  
& LEON ERROL  
also

**LATE PANCHO VILLA**  
and  
OTHER  
WORLD  
CHAMPIONS.  
SEE "KNOCKOUTS"

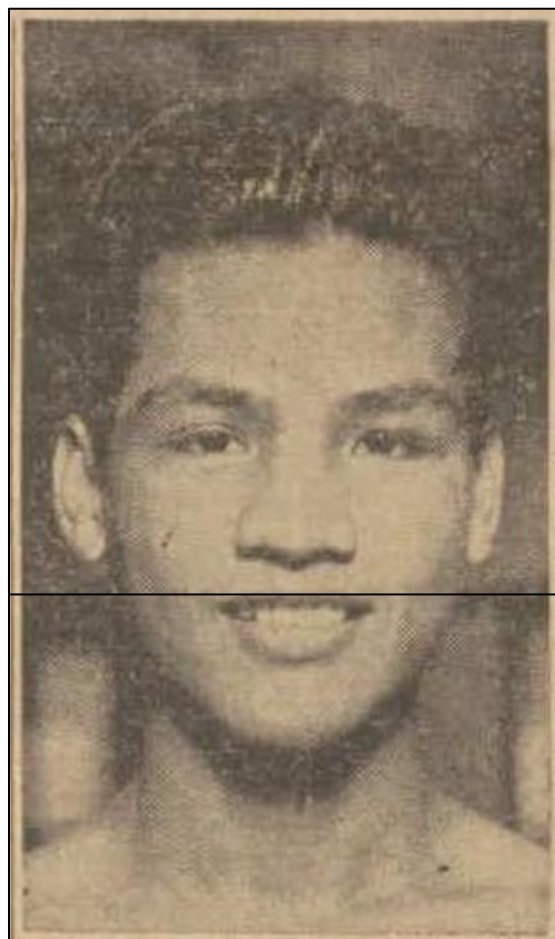
Prices: 25¢ & 35¢ ALL DAY  
PERSONAL INVITATION:  
PANCHO VILLA, Jr., this is your chance to see your beloved father. FREE admission for YOU upon presentation of credentials.  
The Management.

(Left) Ad for Radio Theatre mentioned in the conclusion of this thesis.

*Manila Tribune*, 19 January 1943.

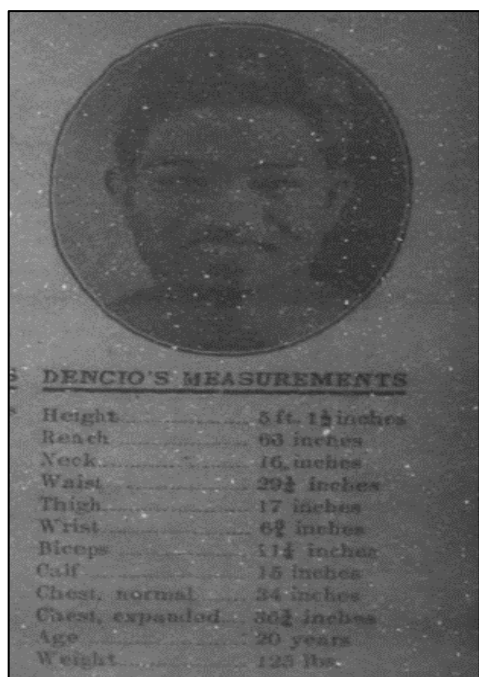


Dencio Cabanela, *Cablenews-American*,  
26 November 1919.



Dencio Cabanela, Jr., *Manila Tribune*, 18 September 1937.

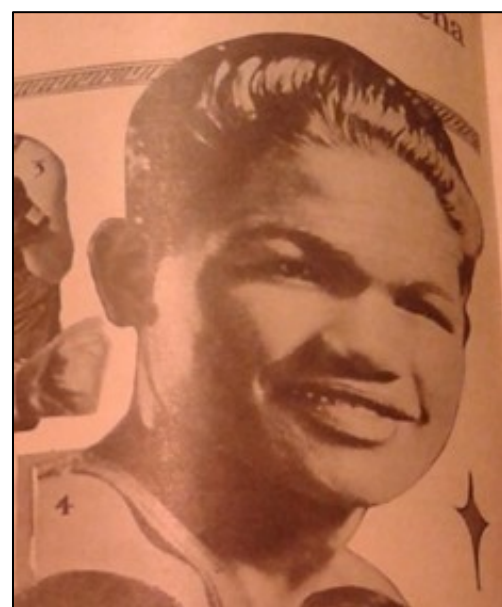
VI. Three Faces



Gaudencio Cabanela  
 October 1900 – 3 July 1921  
*Boxing*, 19 September 1919.



Francisco Guilledo  
 1 August 1901 – 14 July 1925  
*The Ring*, October 1928.



Inocencio Moldez  
 1905 – 20 April 1926  
*The Ring*, January 1926.