Boxer Muhammad Ali and Soldier Idi Amin As International Political Symbols: The Bioeconomics of Sport and War

ALI A. MAZRUI

The University of Michigan

Did Idi Amin join the army because of a lack of alternative economic opportunities for uneducated Kakwa in colonial Uganda? Or was he helped by the prior attractiveness of "tall African specimens" to those who were recruiting for the King's African Rifles?

Why have black people performed better by world standards in athletics than in most other sports and games? Does the explanation lie in the low economic status of blacks? Or is it partly a question of the physical attributes of some black "athletic specimens"?

Did the food culture of the Gurkhas and Punjabis help to make them "martial people" suitable for recruitment into the Indian army? Or were there primarily economic differences between them and the less martial communities of India like, say, the Gujarati?

The sub-discipline of bioeconomics becomes relevant when there is at least the possibility of interplay between economic and biological factors. The division of labor between men and women in most societies in the world is partly a case of bioeconomic calculation. Who shall till the land? Who shall look after the children? Some of these issues were probably resolved on considerations which linked biology to economics. In this essay we shall limit ourselves to issues of sport and warfare in the modern world from an African point of view.

Perhaps more brilliantly than anyone before him, it was the Dutch historian and philologist, Johan Huizinga, who linked play with warfare in human history, and regarded the play element as the dominant force in human culture. Like most theorists who focus on a dominant theme as, in part, an explanation behind world history, Huizinga exposed himself to the inevitable charge of reductionism. In that, he was in the company of Karl Marx with his focus on economics, Jeremy Bentham with his focus on the avoidance of pain, and Sigmund Freud with his focus on sex. But, as with the case of his companions, Johan
Huizinga was putting his finger on an important factor in human behavior. There is indeed an important historical and cultural link between play, warfare, and civilization itself.¹

In this paper we have chosen two significant individuals in the recent history of black people. These are the boxer Muhammad Ali and the Ugandan soldier, Idi Amin Dada. In a boxer we have the symbol of play; in a soldier we have the symbol of violence and war. We hope to relate our examination of these symbols to four categories of social differentiation: class, sex, religion, and race in cultural and social arrangements. Behind all four is technology as an environment for human behavior and human change. Muhammad Ali and Idi Amin become illustrative individuals, encompassing within themselves great social and political meaning.

Let us first examine briefly the parallels and divergencies in their careers, but in a broad historical perspective.

**The Warrior Tradition and Economic Culture**

Although we have categorized Field Marshal Idi Amin mainly in his role as a soldier, we should remember that he was once the heavyweight-boxing champion of Uganda, a title which he held for nine years. In his rise to some degree of significance within the King's African Rifles during the British period in Uganda, Idi Amin certainly combined skills of play with martial qualities. In the words of David Martin:

... he was the type of material the British officers liked in the ranks—physically large at six feet four inches and uneducated. The theory was that material of this type responded better to orders and were braver in battle. He endeared himself to his commanders by becoming the Ugandan heavy-weight boxing champion ... and by taking up rugby, where even if his skills were limited, his weight as a second-row forward was a valuable contribution.²

There was indeed a historic link between physique and the traditional economic culture of the different tribes. There was also a link between economic culture and styles of combat. These later came to affect the balance of ethnic representation in the armed forces after independence.

In the old days African traditional societies which lacked the structures of state organization had of necessity to develop alternative structures of political and military stability. Many evolved the tradition of "neighborhood defense," based on the principle of constructing

settlements in a manner which provided neighborhood self-reliance in military matters.

In addition, a number of societies evolved age-grade systems providing for functional specialization. G. P. Murdock may have exaggerated the Cushite derivative nature of age-grade systems, but he was surely right in seeing the system as being designed to compensate for political decentralization. In the words of Murdock:

The Nilotes unquestionably acquired their age-grade systems through fusion with, or imitation of, the Eastern Cushites. The reason for the spread of these systems must lie in their survival value. They clearly promoted military strength and social integration and thus doubtless served to offset in large measure the disadvantages inherent in a minimal development of political organization.³

The special arrangements of settlements, and the age-grade systems, were in turn connected among the Nilotes to pastoralism as a way of life. In both the Sudan and Uganda pastoralism is often a major, and in some cases the dominant, factor in the economic style of the tribes which have produced soldiers for national armies. The tradition of protecting mobile animals, and the quest for new pastures, might have resulted in certain athletic qualities pertinent to the military profession. Recruitment into colonial armies sometimes equated athletic qualities with martial qualities. The stamina of the man who walks dozens of miles with his cattle, the stamina of the "long distance runner," could easily be seen as relevant also for military performance.

In addition, pastoralism as an economic way of life produces a "world view" of its own which encompasses martial values. In this sense one might even distinguish between personal valor and military honor. Personal valor is invoked when the individual herdsman is protecting his own cattle or his own wives and children against raiders. Military honor in this sense comes into play in collective combat against a collective external enemy.

Pastoralism may sharpen concepts of personal valor—self-defense in the old sense of the rugged and isolated frontier. Each family had to be its own "army," each man his own warrior. On the other hand, societies which combine pastoralism with cultivation, but without a tradition of centralized authority structures, may have concepts which are a little nearer to those of collective military honor.

In more elaborate state systems like those of traditional Buganda and Bunyoro, fighting for the king could become an even bigger measure of valor than fighting to protect one's cattle or one's private settlement. Military service was elaborately interlinked with political organization.

The contrast between the northern tribes and the kingdoms of Uganda struck the foreign observers quite early, though sometimes they misunderstood the implications of what they were observing. Baker wrote in 1874:

The order and organization of Unyoro were a great contrast to the want of cohesion of the northern tribes. Every district throughout the [Nyro] country was governed by a chief, who was responsible to the king for the states of the province. This system was extended to sub-government and a series of lower officials in every district, who were bound to obey the orders of the lord-lieutenant. In the event of war, every governor could appear, together with his contingent of armed men, at short notice. These were the rules of government that had been established for many generations throughout Unyoro.4

By the time the British came to Uganda, Bunyoro was beginning to evolve a kind of standing army around the nucleus of the King's or Mukama's bodyguard. Until King Kaberega, Bunyoro did not traditionally have a permanent standing army. In time of war the chiefs sometimes became military leaders and were responsible for making available able-bodied men under their jurisdiction. Political and military leadership was often completely fused. There were chiefs who gained great national reputations as war leaders—"and crowns (Makondo) had been awarded to successful generals."5 During the reign of Kaberega, the Barusura, or king's bodyguard, developed into an effective military force. Bunyoro was about to institutionalize its warriors and make them a standing army. But the British were at last at hand, and Kaberega's reign signify both the climax of the Nyoro military organization and the beginning of the demilitarization of Bunyoro.

Ganda political culture also emphasized military honor rather than personal valor. During the course of the nineteenth century Buganda was developing a special Royal Guard Corps as the basis of a gradually evolving regular army. The bulk of the army was still recruited from peasant militia, but capacity for mobilizing that army was considerably facilitated by the relative political centralization of the system. Behind it all was an ethos of militarism which had become extra-militant by this period. Once again political and military organization was substantially fused. In the words of Lloyd Fallers:

Organizationally . . . warfare represented the clearest working-out of the pattern toward which the whole polity was moving: an institutional system in which positions of honor were open to challenge, in which ability and diligence were quickly rewarded and failure was quickly punished . . . War was thus the focus of what had perhaps become, in the nineteenth century, the master value in Ganda culture—the aggrandizement of the nation and the king.6

6 L. A. Fallers, assisted by F. K. Kamoga and S. B. K. Musoke, "Social Stratification
These were the organizational factors which made the Bantu kingdom such a striking contrast to the relatively acephalous political arrangements of the northern tribes.

Yet the northern tribes after colonial annexation could still be deemed to produce some of the best individual warriors. Just as the British had made assumptions about extra-martial prowess among the Gurkhas and Punjabis, so they made assumptions about such prowess among the Nilotic and Sudanic peoples of northern Uganda.

Additional cultural factors included the interplay between food culture and physical anthropology. Eastern and western Nilotes and Sudanic tribes produced a disproportionate number of men who were tall and slim. This particular kind of physique was interpreted in the colonial period as additional evidence of military suitability. The "tall and lean" were regarded as "good drill material." Food culture over generations could have influenced the emergence of lean physical specimens, especially among communities which were truly pastoral. Reliance on milk and meat as the staple food, with periods when almost nothing else was added to the diet, had its impact on physical anthropology. Millet among other Nilotes was interpreted by the communities themselves as a diet fundamentally more relevant to physical strength than the matoke (plantain bananas) of some of the Bantu tribes.

But whatever the relevance of food culture for physique, there is little doubt that the recruitment officers of the imperial power in Uganda came to look at Nilotic and Sudanic communities as being physically better "drill material" than most of the people of the Bantu kingdoms. In Ankole the ruling elite was sufficiently pastoral in its origin and culture that specimens of similar physique were available. But as Ankole was a kingdom, and as the new criteria of prestige in colonial Uganda moved away from military symbolism, and since in any case Buganda was an important model for the other kingdoms, Ankole's representation in the Ugandan armed forces was as modest as the representation of the other kingdoms. An ethnic separation of powers seemed to be underway in Uganda. There was a disproportionate presence of the Bantu in administration and the economy. But there was also developing a disproportionate Nilotic and Sudanic presence within the armed forces of the new Uganda.

It was against this background that Amin became a significant military figure. He was a good physical specimen, drawn from a region with more than its share of Uganda's tall people, and less than its share

of the country's rich people. A combination of economic and physical factors had set the stage for a remarkable career.

**Soldier Amin and Boxer Ali**

Idi Amin became, in January 1971, the third president of Uganda. His link with the first president of Uganda was partly connected with sports and partly connected with violence and war. The first president of Uganda was Sir Edward Mutesa, who was also the king of the Baganda. In colonial days, when Mutesa was already king and Amin was a mere soldier, Amin had made an impact on Mutesa through sport. Mutesa had watched Amin box at the palace for royal entertainment. In his own days at Cambridge University in the nineteen-forties Mutesa had himself boxed for his college, Magdalen, at Cambridge. Amin's early interest in other sports also appealed to the aristocratic instincts of King Mutesa. Amin was a rugby player with some skills, and this was a game of great significance in the history of British public schools and in its impact on the British ruling class. Mutesa admired the traditions behind both the public schools and the British aristocracy. In his youthful days in England Mutesa had found that games were his first source of friends. His own interest in boxing, shooting and riding prepared him to appreciate the sporty side of Amin. In Mutesa's own words, "Amin was a comparatively simple, rough character. He had been to the Palace, and I had watched him box, which he did efficiently."

In 1966, after independence, an occasion arose when Idi Amin was given orders by Prime Minister Milton Obote to attack Mutesa's palace. The link between Mutesa and Amin had shifted from the concerns of shared sportsmanship to the concerns of divergent military preparedness. Amin led the attack on the Kabaka's palace. Mutesa was later to observe in his book that "I did not see Colonel Amin [as he then was], but I expect he was in command. Obote remained well away from the scene."

The king's palace fell, Mutesa fled to England where he later died in exile. Amin's fortunes in Uganda improved for a while, until he fell under a political shadow during Obote's rule in 1970. Early in 1971 the former heavyweight-boxing champion of Uganda became the third president of his country. Both Mutesa and Milton Obote had grossly

---


underestimated the skills of this rustic soldier from the countryside. Out of the depths of ridicule and disguised contempt Idi Amin rose to political supremacy.

Also grossly underestimated until he attained the heights was a young black man called Cassius Marcellus Clay, Junior. Before his fight with Sonny Liston, a fight which won him the heavyweight championship of the world, Cassius Clay was regarded as no more than a brash upstart with some skills, but fundamentally of nothing more than middle-range potential success. On the eve of his fight with Sonny Liston, the betting world had made Cassius Clay a seven-to-one underdog. In fact there was, by comparison with other fights before and after, relatively little betting. Large numbers of boxing enthusiasts did not take the bout seriously. With the loud mouth which was later to characterize both Cassius Clay and Idi Amin, the young challenger raved about his impending success, and called Liston "a big ugly bear."

At the end of the sixth round, Liston sank on to his stool, and seemed beaten. He was certainly no longer able or willing to get up. Clay’s trainer, Angelo Dundee, seemed to have been the first to realize that the impossible had in fact happened. He shouted to Cassius that he had won. The grossly underestimated upstart leaped in the air, dancing away, and shouting: "I am the greatest! I am beautiful!" He had attained supremacy in boxing with a degree of conclusiveness and skill as unexpected as those which were to be exhibited by soldier Idi Amin in his attainment of supreme political power in Uganda.

The day following his attainment of victory, Cassius Clay announced his conversion to a faith which established another link between himself and the distant soldier in Uganda. Cassius Clay declared to a somewhat astonished world that he had converted to Islam, and that his name from then on was to be Muhammad Ali. Of course he belonged to a different sect of Islam from the orthodox Suni denomination to which Idi Amin belonged. Ali declared himself the follower of Elijah Muhammad, and a member of the Nation of Islam in the western hemisphere.

Both Ali and Amin were to surprise many people by the apparent seriousness with which they treated their religion. Both seemed loud and unpredictable in many ways, often lighthearted, almost constantly playing the buffoon in certain types of public situations. And yet the young black man from Kentucky, so oriented toward show business and colorful hyperbole in most other forms of public behavior, was nevertheless able to maintain the image of a proud and consistent follower of his version of Islam. Ali prayed every day, and reaffirmed his intention to return one day to the role of minister, propagating the message of Islam in the black ghettos of America.
Idi Amin, similarly irreverent in other spheres, came to be at least devout enough to curtail if not entirely eliminate his drinking habits and, even more surprising, devout enough to observe meticulously the demanding fast of Ramadan. Amin, unlike Ali, had a brutal side to his personality. Even before he attained supreme political power in Uganda, he had known moments of brutal urges and inclinations. He had killed many as a soldier, just as he had defeated many as a boxer. But although in his cruelty, and in some aspects of his flippancy, Idi Amin was hardly the most glorious adherent that East African Islam had ever had, there seemed little doubt that in his earlier days even before he became president he had found new inner resources of devotion, however selective that devotion might have been.

In his religious policies after he assumed supreme authority, Amin displayed a marked distrust of Christian missionaries in Uganda, especially the foreign ones. Although he did not describe Christianity as an imperialist religion, he came close to regarding Christian missionaries as imperial infiltrators in African societies. Amin, because he was the president of a country with more Christians than Muslims, limited himself to a denunciation of the messengers of Christianity without insulting the message of Jesus Christ.

Muhammad Ali, with fewer political constraints in his own career, was blunter in denouncing Christianity as a white man’s religion. He was also more open in declaring his intention to spread the message of Islam to other black people. Amin might have entertained similar ambitions of Islamization, but he was more subject to political restraints in this particular domain than Muhammad Ali was.

The supremacy of the two individuals in their own domains of excellence and power was almost equally vulnerable. In the field of war, Amin was a gunshot away from either an assassination or a coup. In the field of sport, Muhammad Ali was a bell away from defeat by a rival in the boxing ring. The presidency of Amin and the official and unofficial championship of Muhammad Ali were both subject to sudden termination by either a decisive bullet or a decisive blow on the chin.

Yet both individuals also exhibited considerable physical fearlessness. In his historic fight with Sonny Liston for the championship, Muhammad Ali was in trouble in the fifth round. It had happened that in the course of the fourth round, Clay’s gloves became coated with the caustic which had been used to treat Liston’s cuts. Just before going out into the fifth round, Clay, in wiping perspiration from his forehead with his left glove, apparently spread the caustic into his eye. This event almost blinded Clay in the fifth round. He could see his challenger only as a vague shape, but that limited vision, combined with
considerable self-confidence, seemed finally to have enabled Clay to
dance his way through the fifth round, and then assert supremacy in the
sixth.

Physical courage and self-confidence have also been features of Idi
Amin’s career, though there was one occasion when he decided
discretion was the better part of valor and fled from his house on the
suspicion that the soldiers who were approaching him on the night
President Obote was shot at were out to kill him. Partly to obliterat
that incident from people’s memory, and partly manifesting his own
defiant bombast, from then on Amin kept on publicly reaffirming that
he feared no one but God.

Both Amin and Ali have also been, at least until recently, minimalist
in the bodyguard protection they have allowed themselves. Certainly
for quite a while after attaining supreme authority in Uganda, Amin
prided himself on his readiness to drive around and mingle with the
people in a situation of potential danger without surrounding himself
with bodyguards. There were attempts on his life, which later did
influence him to add more protection than he had previously granted
himself. But considering his vulnerability to the revenge of a wide
spectrum of political foes, perhaps Amin has remained relatively
daring and even foolhardy in his attitude to personal security. Once
again this particular form of courage has been a kind of public
exhibitionism.

Muhammad Ali, in his months of training in Zaire prior to the
confrontation with George Foreman, also displayed a similar
exhibitionist self-confidence. There were no guards to determine who
went into the camp, and Muhammad Ali emphasized this to one
newspaper reporter after another. In his own inimitable style: “Ain’t
no guards, anybody can pull a gun. Nobody’s watching [here]—
nobody but Allah. There are no other world figures you can walk up on
like this. Nobody. You walk in my kitchen, walk in my gym. ‘Hey
champ,’ no guards, nobody sayin’: ‘Who are you?’”

This kind of bragging is also another point of comparison between
the personalities of Amin and Ali. It becomes interlinked with colorful
language, and is often used against their respective political or sporting
foes. Amin’s international telegrams are now legion. Their contents
vary from advice to Mrs. Golda Meir during the October war to pull up
her knickers to greetings sent to President Nixon wishing him a speedy
recovery from Watergate. Some of those telegrams betray historical
ignorance or brutal naiveté, such as the one to the Secretary-General

---

3, No. 5, September 6, 1974, p. 55.
of the United Nations applauding "Prime Minister Hitler’s treatment of the Israelis." Other messages, though sent to a political foe with the intention to insult, have the ring of comedy. The classical illustration is his now famous telegram to President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania in August 1972: "I want to assure you that I love you very much and if you had been a woman, I would have considered marrying you although your head is full of grey hair, but as you are a man that possibility does not arise."\(^{10}\)

Muhammad Ali has shown a similar irreverence for his adversaries in the ring, and a comparable imagination in discovering uncomplimentary epithets about them, going all the way back to his description of Sonny Liston as a big ugly woman who had successfully fought her way to the grand opportunity of confronting Muhammad Ali in a battle of the sexes:

> "It was only a nightmare, only a dream,  
> But it tortured me all through the night  
> Six women fought to make love to me  
> And the ugly one carried the fight."\(^{11}\)

But in some ways the most fundamental similarities between Muhammad Ali and Idi Amin are two simple attributes—they are both black and they are both male. These attributes encompass in themselves important issues concerning the roles of race, class and sex in sports and war. Why has heavyweight boxing at the global level been so overwhelmingly dominated by black men in much of this century? Why have those black men been disproportionately from the Black Diaspora in the western hemisphere rather than from the heartland of the black world in Africa? Why has war, as well as much of the sporting world, been dominated by men as against women? And how do these two individuals before us, Muhammad Ali of the United States of America and Idi Amin of Uganda, both of the black world, illustrate some of the major themes involved in the interaction between class, sex, race and culture insofar as they have manifested themselves in play and warfare? We are back here to the whole phenomenon of bioeconomics.

This essay cannot hope to do justice to these questions, but it has been influenced by a profound curiosity arising out of these questions. Behind all the phenomena is the general infrastructure of technological change. Let us now examine certain aspects of these themes more fully.

\(^{10}\) *Uganda Argus* (Kampala), August 23, 1972.

\(^{11}\) Kornbluth, "Muhammad Goes to the Mountain," *New Times*, p. 54.
THE TECHNOLOGIES OF PLAY AND VIOLENCE

Three forms of technology have been particularly important in the transformation of the world in the last two centuries: the technology of production, the technology of destruction, and the technology of communication. The first form of technology concerns issues of livelihood and economic fulfillment, how men and women produce their food and the equipment of their cultural life. The technology of destruction concerns armaments and other forms of equipment for warfare and violence at large. It concerns the techniques and instruments of military defense and military aggression. It concerns the implements of coercion and subjugation. It concerns the capacity to destroy different forms of biological life. As for the technology of communication, this is what the global village is all about. It touches contact within national frontiers and across continents. It encompasses the transistor radio as well as the satellite in space, the power to distribute the printed word as well as the sound of a train passing by in the stillness of the night.

When examining sports and war, we are most directly concerned with the technologies of communication and destruction. Certainly sports at the level of world championships is predicated on instant communication with a large sector of the human race and a capacity to exploit localized drama in a global dimension. There was a time when world championships were global only in terms of those who entered the competition, and even then there was a heavy weighting on the side of the prosperous northern hemisphere. But now the globalization of the competition is not simply in terms of the actual players and candidates in the contests. It is global also in terms of the spectators. More and more of the world is involved in watching what were previously global contests only by the stretch of the imagination. The technology of communication is giving a validity to international sports which the sports previously lacked. This technology is giving weight at long last to the importance of spectators in the globalization of sports as well as to the critical role of the players. The localization of the fight between George Foreman and Muhammad Ali in Kinshasa, Zaire, is in part an attempt to go one stage further in that planetary vision. The time schedule of the bout was again conditioned by that vision. In the words of one commentator:

. . . screw the paltry 150,000 witnesses to the actual event; they're not holding it at three in the morning just so it'll be cool in the stadium. The world's the thing here (3 a.m. translates into 10 p.m. New York time) and megahype's the August song at the training camps. Screw those 16 African Presidents sitting ringside, the hell with the event's "implications," we've got a fight to promote here, got to make sure we don't blow the $15 million white dollars that have been advanced to get the thing off the ground; please,
you writers, give us the story about Boxing and Money getting it on and screw Marshall McLuhan while you’re at it...  

Amin, on the other hand, owes his supremacy to the technology of large-scale destruction of life. Western military technology, introduced in a country which was otherwise technologically underdeveloped, prepared the ground for a major tilt in the balance of power among the contending groups within that society. Had Uganda still been subject to indigenous traditional military technology, based substantially on the spear in that part of the continent, it is far from clear that a member of the relatively small ethnic community of the Kakwa could have established political pre-eminence over the proud and numerous Baganda, let alone over an additional nine million Ugandans. The critical factor in the rise of the smaller tribal communities in Uganda, rather than the traditional kingdoms, has ultimately been technological changes in the means of destruction. Who controls the new machine guns in an African society? Who controls the tanks? Who controls the mechanized battalion of the new African army? These were some of the issues which led to the decline of the proud Baganda, and to the rise of previously weaker communities like the Lango, the Kakwa, and even the Acholi. The technology of destruction, borrowed from an alien civilization, has been as fundamental to the pre-eminence of Idi Amin as the technology of communication, supported by the white man, has been in the fortunes of boxer Muhammad Ali.

What should be noted is that in a fundamental sense the technology of destruction as well as the technology of communication have in western experience relied heavily on the prior triumph of the technology of production. Certainly the industrial revolutions in England, Western Europe, North America, meant industrial pre-eminence before military supremacy. The technologically developed country built its destructive power on the foundations of productive capabilities.

By contrast, in an otherwise technologically underdeveloped country like Uganda, an alien and superior technology of violence could play a part in determining the direction of indigenous productive forces. Given the overall societal technological underdevelopment, control of the means of destruction in an otherwise underdeveloped country has primacy over control of the means of production.  

Similarly, an alien technology of communication in an underdeveloped country could be a major factor in the power equation. That is certainly one reason why every military coup attempts quite early to

12 Ibid., p. 48.
capture the radio station. The significance of the radio station was obscured in Amin’s capture of power from Milton Obote in January 1971. The continuous playing of music on Radio Uganda while much of the country knew of continuous gunfire from the previous night was at best only a negative acknowledgement of the power of the radio station.

By contrast, Milton Obote’s own bid to recapture power from Amin did put a special emphasis on the need to regain the radio station, announce the arrival of pro-Obote troops, and thereby help to rally behind the invading forces from Tanzania any wavering soldiers who were disaffected with Amin but not yet sure of the wisdom of defecting to Obote. A group of exiled Ugandans seeking to restore Obote were to land at Entebbe airport in September 1972. This group was given orders affecting two fundamental tasks. One concerned the products of the technology of destruction—they were to capture the small air-force armory. The other concerned the critical technology of communication—the invaders were to head at full speed into the capital city of Kampala with the specific and fundamental assignment of capturing the radio station.

It is believed that Obote had prerecorded a message to the nation which the attackers were to play. What this tape-recording contained is not known but it would have had a vital psychological impact for it would have given the impression in the early hours of 15 September that it was Obote himself broadcasting from the radio station in Kampala. 14

In this case the two tasks were not implemented simply because the group of invaders who were supposed to arrive at Entebbe airport never made it. The plane was grounded with disastrous punctures at Arusha airport before it could even carry the armed challengers into Uganda. But what the strategy as a whole does bring across is the understandable emphasis by Milton Obote on a combination of adequate utilization of the technology of destruction and efficient utilization of the technology of communication. Both the armory and the radio had to be captured before the full impact of Obote’s challenge to Amin’s rule could be felt nationally, and before adequate support could be obtained within Uganda to rally behind the invaders from Tanzania.

Obote’s idea of playing his voice on Radio Uganda brings us back to the concept of make-believe in human affairs. And make-believe in turn brings us back to interaction between sport and war to which Johan Huizinga drew our attention. Plausibility in make-believe presupposes certain rules and boundaries. Excess and exaggeration could easily undermine verisimilitude. Play itself is an exercise conditioned by rules. Huizinga’s assertion is that civilization as a whole has

14 Martin, General Amin, op. cit., p. 186.
advanced through struggle, and that struggle had, on the whole, to be made subject after a while to certain "rules of the game." The history of the duel in western culture and of the Samurai in Japanese culture might be closely linked both to the history of boxing in the world of sports in the twentieth century and to the Geneva Convention in relation to the treatment of prisoners of war.

Most of the tales we hear of noble battles in beautiful styles are based . . . [on] heroic and romantic fiction. . . . Nevertheless it would be wrong to conclude that this enabling of war by viewing it in the light of ethics and aesthetics is but a "fair seeming," or cruelty in disguise. Even if it were no more than a fiction, these fancies of war as a noble game of honour and virtue have still played an important part in developing civilisation, for it is from them that the idea of chivalry sprang and hence, ultimately, of international law. Of these two factors, chivalry was one of the great stimulants of medieval civilisation, and however constantly the ideal was belied in reality it served as a basis for international law, which is one of the indispensable safeguards for the community of mankind.15

But here an important distinction does arise between the role of Muhammad Ali and the role of Idi Amin. With regard to the rules of war in relation to western technology, an alien cultural environment could easily dilute the effectiveness of those rules. On the other hand, victory on the global stage of sportsmanship has required scrupulous observance of those rules, regardless of whether the culture was alien in derivation or indigenous to the players.

Idi Amin, basically an African peasant from the womb of the countryside, finds himself in possession of the power of western military technology without the rules which have governed the utilization of such power. British training and membership of the King's African Rifles did for a while socialize Idi Amin into the constraints of destructive technology. But the withdrawal of the imperial constraints began to erode the normative foundations of the utilization of destructive technology. The phenomenon of men disappearing in the middle of the night, apparently by order of Field Marshal Amin, the phenomenon of decapitation of political opponents, the phenomenon of utilizing a combination of sorcery and technological brutality for the attainment of political ends, have all been a disturbing but real manifestation of the erosion of the rules of western technology in a culturally inhospitable environment. Had Idi Amin still been conducting battles with the spear, it is conceivable that certain rules of African concepts of masculinity would have had to be invoked as constraints on arbitrary behavior. Taking easy advantage of one's opponent was not regarded as manly in many traditional African cultures. There were rules of chivalry governing the conduct of warriors. But these rules suffered considerable erosion in at least some African countries when soldiers

15 Huizinga, Homo Ludens, op. cit., p. 117.
were equipped with machine guns and tanks, rather than with the individualistic instruments of combat like the spear.

On the other hand, Muhammad Ali, precisely by having aspired to be a world champion, sought to be judged by globally accepted standards. Within the boxing ring there was only one more mobile person—the referee. He was there to observe that the bout was conducted in accordance with the rules. Of course, rules were not always observed in the boxing ring, and Muhammad Ali himself sometimes stretched those rules as he physically held on to adversaries, preventing them from hitting, yet also reducing the free interplay of mobile skills. There are clearly many occasions when the referee's interpretation of rules could help influence the result of the confrontation. In the words of one commentator:

In case you have been living in a cave somewhere, it should be noted for your benefit that the referee can, of course, play a major role in any prize fight. George Foreman is a pusher. It is part of his technique. . . . On the other hand, it must be pointed out that against Ernie Terrell, Ali used his thumb in a manner which has done honor to Trixie's Massage Parlor. And in the second Frazier fight, the indifference of referee Tony Perez enabled Ali to hold Joseph lovingly behind the neck with his left hand while he smote him many right hands above the face and body. Do not kid yourself for a moment. Both Angelo Dundee, who is Ali's man, and Dick Sadler, who is George's man, are much concerned about the identity of the third man in the Kinshasa ring.  

But after we have allowed for considerable flexibility in the role of the referee in the boxing ring, there is no doubt that he does play a significant part in enforcing relatively recognizable rules within an international system. These rules, by the very nature of the quest for a world title, have to be internationally plausible if they are to be commercially credible. Boxing therefore is a closer approximation to Johan Huizinga's description of the role of rules in the evolution of civilization than is the western technology of violence operating in culturally divergent conditions.

Of course, many a westerner in war situations has ignored the rules of the game. That is what My Lai was all about, and that is what the notorious case of Lieutenant Calley in that massacre was all about. But the very fact that he was tried at all, in spite of the countervailing pressures and influences against penalizing him, was an indication that certain rules of the game had arisen concurrently with the evolution of the western technology of destruction. The Geneva Conventions, and the laws of the United States, had been contravened by Calley. The rules of the game were not as yet beyond controversy and contravention, but they had greater reality in the judicial system of the United States than in the mind of Idi Amin.

BIOECONOMICS AND THE CLASS FACTOR

Huizinga grasped quite early that the viability of rules in a situation of war depends in part upon the relative equality of the antagonists.

We can only speak of war as a cultural function so long as it is waged within a sphere whose members regard each other as equals or antagonists with equal rights; in other words its cultural function depends on its play-quality. This condition changes as soon as war is waged outside the sphere of equals, against groups not recognised as human beings and thus deprived of human rights—barbarians, devils, heathens, heretics, and "lesser breeds without the law."17

Clearly Lieutenant Calley in Vietnam departed from observing the rules of the game partly because he did not regard the Vietnamese as equals. The wanton liquidation of unarmed villagers required a process of mental dehumanization on the part of the killers. Napalm bombs also presupposed a process of calculation divorced from the concept of equal humanity. On the one hand, the American judicial system has increasingly sought to approximate this ideal. And the American armed forces, by their internal rules and by their acceptance of the Geneva Conventions, subscribed to some degree of humanitarian constraints in the conduct of war. But these constraints were often honored in the breach under the stress of actual conflict. The enemy before long loses some of his claim to equal humanity, and might easily become "fair game." Biological warfare consists of more than just germ-warfare. There were alternative forms of biological warfare in Vietnam.

Just as a citizen of a superpower could cease to recognize the sporting rules of war, so could a citizen of one of the less privileged sectors of the world. The birth of "terrorism" as a strategy of the weak is, almost by definition, a breakdown of the sporting rules of conflict in the face of inequality. The mighty in the modern world often control the immense resources of the technology of violence, ranging from B-52 bombers to napalm. The weaker and less technological societies grope for alternative methods of retaliation. And in such a context the sporting rules are rapidly eroded.

Idi Amin, confronted partly with this inequality in the international system, has at times banked on his reputation as a soldier without rules to protect himself against external pressures. When he gave the Asians of Uganda three months' notice to leave the country, and then braced himself for an outcry from Britain and later from the international community, his best hope against effective external intervention lay in the fear by the other side that Amin and his "unruly army" would turn on the Asians with devastating tragedy and brutality before the exter-

nal intervention could protect them. When Amin threatened to act against the Asians, or to put them in concentration camps, or even when he threatened to lock up Americans living in Uganda, his reputation as a soldier with relatively few rules recognizable in the west was his best guarantee of negative credibility in international circles. Even his worst threats were believable, given the erosion of the sporting rules of military conduct among Ugandan soldiers.

We are witnessing in this kind of situation some of the implications of the economic and class factors in international relations. The world is indeed divided between the haves and the have-nots, and much of the foundation of affluence in the developed world is basically a case of technological pre-eminence in the fields of production, destructive capability, and communication. Where there is trade in sophisticated armaments to developing countries without the supporting cultural infrastructure of sporting rules, the emergence of Idi Amins is partly a function of lack of balance in global arrangements. Power within developing societies becomes subject to distortion by the consequences of establishing modern armies in pre-modern societies.

The international class system also affects the physical skills necessary for games and sports in dimensions which can be varied and complicated. Here, applying concepts usually associated with the technology of production, we should distinguish between capital-intensive sports and labor-intensive sports. Capital-intensive sports and games are those which presuppose considerable, or at least relative, affluence within individual families from an early age in order that children can attain world standards of competence in the future. Lawn tennis, for example, is a relatively capital-intensive sport. Within western societies, especially in Europe, it has tended to be a game of the middle and upper classes of society, and has seldom fired the imagination of the working class partly because of the necessary monetary outlay required. In the United States, tennis has begun to be distributed, however thinly, across more strata of society. But that is partly because of the relative affluence of even the working class within the United States.

But it is pre-eminently in Third World countries that tennis as a game of the relatively affluent becomes unmistakable in its class implications. It will probably be two or three decades before Black Africa can hope to produce tennis players of world standards. This is because young Africans, constrained by the expense of the tennis racquet and its maintenance, the balls, and the relatively expensive tennis clubs with the necessary courts, cannot possibly be initiated into the game early enough to develop into global competitors. There are economic prerequisites for such physical skills.
By contrast, African countries have already begun to establish a presence in the Olympic Games in the domain of running and jumping. In Mexico City in 1968, finally, African field and track athletes provided the most sensational headlines of all. Again and again, names such as Kipchoge Keino, Amos Biwott, Naftali Temu, Wilson Kiprugut, Mohamed Gammodi and Mamo Wolde (who, as Olympic marathon champion, had become the successor of his training partner and friend Abebe Bikila) were on everybody’s lips.\footnote{See “1896–1968: A Survey of the Olympic Games”, Sport in Africa, Vol. 2, “Africa and the Olympic Games” (Cologne: Deutsche Welle, April 1972), p. 35.}

Racists have sometimes attributed the black man’s relative excellence in “boxing, running and jumping” as further proof that this particular sector of the human race is more brawn than brain, more capable of physical leaps than imaginative flights, better endowed in the achievements of the body than of the mind. The very successes of black people in these particular sports of boxing and athletics are sometimes used to consolidate racist stereotypes.\footnote{See for example Barnett Potter, The Fault, Black Man . . . (Cape Town: Howard Timmins, 1971 edition), pp. 114-5, 36.}

What such racist commentators sometimes fail to grasp is the simple fact that boxing, running and jumping are at best labor-intensive sports from the point of view of early preparation, rather than capital-intensive sports. Because of this, relatively underprivileged young Africans or young black Americans could start early in the direction of strengthening competence in these particular spheres of activity. Running and jumping especially are easy games for children with no toys to join. The absence of alternative modes of play can increase practice in athletic endeavors. As for boxing, fist fights in the ghettos of America, again against a background which precludes expensive toys trains, could provide the beginnings of training. And once a few black people achieve particular stature in those activities, this in turn could help to give additional meaning to the running, jumping, and imitative boxing in the streets of Harlem, or even the villages of Kenya and Uganda.

Of course, before an athlete enters world class competition, a period of capital-intensive training might indeed be needed. The best qualified athletic coaches are expensive. So is the business of promotion, especially in a sport like boxing. But while the later stages of preparation for world standards necessarily presuppose affluence, the early socialization into the skills of running, jumping, and fist-fighting lies within the means of the poor. That might indeed be one reason why it has in fact been in precisely these sports that black people have had a chance to excel.
THE BIOECONOMICS OF RACE

Yet clearly there must be other factors at play. In heavyweight boxing blacks have not only had a chance to excel but have almost monopolized the ultimate prize for much of this century. In the words of Peter Osugo:

Except for the Italian-American, Rocky Marciano, and the Swede, Ingemar Johansson, all world heavyweight champions since 1937 have been Black . . . the story of the Black man’s domination of boxing, the noble art of self-defense where brain and brawn are combined to produce positive results, goes far back to before Joe Louis.20

And yet why have these blacks been overwhelmingly Americans? After all, the great majority of black people by far are in Africa, the ancestral continent. Yet it has been from the ranks of the Black Diaspora that boxing giants have been recruited so far. We may be back to the issue of technological pre-eminence and international stratification. The commercial sophistication of the United States, the techniques of promotion and intensive training, have played their part in ensuring that such a high proportion of black athletic giants have come not from Africa itself but from among the exported Africans.

Yet even that is not the complete story. On the one hand, black Americans by being citizens of the United States, subject to the commercial and economic culture of the United States, and modern beneficiaries of American technological affluence, have been economically the most affluent single group of blacks anywhere in the world. Their standard of living, ranging from possession of cars and television sets to the number of calories available in the diet, places them on a pinnacle of relative advantage compared to the great majority of black people anywhere else in the world. On the other hand, because black Americans experienced some of the harshest forms of slavery in recent times, they have also borne worse scars of humiliation and degradation than those sustained by the majority of blacks left behind in the African continent itself.

Both the relative advantage of affluence which black Americans derive by being Americans, and the background of degradation and subjugation which forms part of their history, have contributed in ways not always easy to grasp and comprehend to their domination of boxing. “In the days of slavery, white planters would sometimes put two or more of the strongest neighborhood slaves into a ring and make them fight it out, for the amusement of white men, until all but one

were pulverized into unconsciousness." When slavery was abolished, and blacks sometimes sought boxing as a sport or a career, the white champions of the day usually refused to fight them. It was not until 1908 that the white heavyweight champion, Tommy Burns, agreed to fight Jack Johnson, a black stevedore. Johnson won and kept the crown for several years.

Yet discrimination in the sporting world in the United States continued. Until World War II, boxing was in fact the only integrated sport in the United States. And even in amateur sports black athletes permitted to emerge into national prominence were few and far between.

Jackie Robinson's debut with the Brooklyn Dodgers in 1947 was an event in American social history almost comparable in importance with President Harry Truman's integration directive to the armed forces the following year. By 1970 the proportion of Blacks in major league baseball and football was three times their percentage of the population; more than half the players in the National Basketball Association were Blacks. The exploits of black athletes have made them heroes in the ghetto and focal points for race pride and identity.

It is this painful predicament of black Americans in terms of being, on the one hand, members of a relatively affluent society in the world, and on the other, a discriminated against and humiliated minority which has sharpened their performance in selective areas of sporting life. They have still not been granted full equality in sports. In the fall of 1974 it was a matter of great national news that a black manager has been appointed in major league baseball. Black head coaches in the National Football League are still a matter for the future. In the more universal games of running and jumping, Africans have started the process of narrowing the gap between their performance and the performance of their exported sons across the seas.

The factor of class in relation to participation in the military by black Americans is an issue that is only now beginning to reveal its potential following the introduction of the principle of a volunteer army. Although black Americans are only one-tenth of the population of the United States, their proportion within the ranks in the army is now approaching one-quarter, with the likelihood of an increase of one percent every year. It is conceivable that before long white America might take action to arrest the "Africanization" of the American military establishment. But whether such action is taken or not, the

disproportionate black presence in the ordinary ranks of the armed forces is one more illustration of their own relative underprivilege. In the absence of many alternative careers, and against the prospect in many cases of actual unemployment, young blacks are trying their luck in their country’s armed forces—for better or for worse. Will they simply become cannon fodder when there is another Vietnam? Or will these blacks acquire greater influence in national affairs precisely by being over-represented in the armed forces? Indeed, will they one day use their military presence to force concessions from the white establishment? If the last of the possibilities were to materialize, control over the technology of destruction by black people might at last mitigate their deprivation as an underprivileged group in the most powerful country in the world.

But meanwhile many black Americans have admired a black soldier far from home—Idi Amin. To some he has been even more of a hero than were domestic blacks like Martin Luther King. Amin’s defiance of western opinion, his readiness to assert who is boss in Uganda, his mischievous telegrams to mighty leaders of the white world, his rough-and-ready rustic image of the modern African warrior, have all combined to fire the imagination of some underprivileged black Americans. American feminist attorney Florynce Kennedy described Amin in February 1977 as “outstanding” and added: “If a black person is in charge of a country, he isn’t really supposed to be in charge.” That thousands of Uganda citizens had reportedly been executed was not important. “Sovereign governments are in the process of killing people all the time.” (Quoted in the Detroit Free Press, Feb. 28, 1977.)

Amin himself seemed also to be evolving into a black nationalist on a trans-Atlantic scale; he once awarded Ugandan citizenship to a number of black Americans and black West Indians, ranging from Stokely Carmichael to lesser known visiting blacks who were attending the Sixth Pan-African Congress in Dar es Salaam in June 1974 and who felt they had to make a pilgrimage to Uganda before their experience in the ancestral continent could be complete.

But the flow of heroism is by no means in one direction. If soldier Idi Amin has acquired many admirers among black Americans, boxer Muhammad Ali has even more admirers in the African continent. If Amin honored black Americans by giving them citizenship, was Ali honoring Africa by challenging Foreman in their shared ancestral continent? Of course, both fighters and their organizers and sponsors had to agree to the venue. Those controlling the technology of communication had to be satisfied that the event was both communicable and profitable. The factor of white control of the media was inevitably conspicuous in such a situation. Conspicuous also were some of the
technological anomalies of contemporary Africa, mixing bush telegraph with a satellite relay station, combing modern hotels with premodern sewage.

... the story has to be shaped and hustled and promoted and these, we know, are the special skills of the white news network. ... With these fighters and that "jungle" location—which just happens to be twenty-five miles from a satellite relay station—and this ultra-heavy white promotion, the Ali-Foreman fight has got to be the single hottest commercial moment in the history of the globe. ... A quarter of the world simultaneously tuned in to one place: the heaviest concentration of human attention ever. The biggest purse, the hugest paycheck of all time: each fighter’s been guaranteed $5 million. If, by a fluke, it lasts a full 15 rounds, that’s still $300,000 a round per man. $100,000 a minute if it goes all the way. Not bad for a night’s work, even by rock and roll standards.23

A combination of black solidarity and commercial viability led to the decision to hold the Ali-Foreman bout in the middle of Africa—the first heavyweight-championship fight to be held within the black continent, in spite of the fact that the heavyweight-boxing profession has been dominated for half a century by blacks. Yet Africans who could watch it live would be virtually limited to the relatively few thousand who could afford to watch it in Zaire itself. The bulk of the spectators, ostensibly a quarter of the human race, would in fact be watching it on television in the affluent northern hemisphere. In reality, only a small proportion of people there would be able to pay the necessary amount to see the live performance. But at least many would later see either the complete fight or large parts of the fight on their ordinary television stations. The great majority of black people have no access to television. The fight between two black men in the middle of Africa would entertain an overwhelmingly white clientele outside of Africa. Issues of class and race once again intertwine. And both factors are not merely domestic, but global. They concern not merely status in any one country but stratification on a world scale.

Yet black people must admire their heroes whatever happens, be they warriors or runners, be they jumpers or boxers. "A [black] man watching a football game on television sees a Negro star take the ball on a long downfield run and as he crosses the goal-line in triumph the viewer is aware of tears in his eyes."24

BIOECONOMICS AND THE RELIGIOUS FACTOR

The black man has sometimes displayed other forms of emotion and rebellion against his predicament. Among the more significant is the

religious version of black assertion. Economic stratification can stimulate both the acquisition of certain types of physical skills and conversion to certain spiritual systems.

Africa is replete with examples of messianic and syncretic movements, ranging from Dini ya Msambwa in East Africa to the religious fervor of Alice Lenshina in Central Africa, from spiritual frenzy in Zaire to spiritual cleansing in the Bantu areas of South Africa. Rebellion against western technological civilization has been one manifestation of black religious assertiveness. A retreat into primordial beliefs, a new possessiveness concerning ancestors, a boycott of certain medicines and modern equipment, a distrust of the white man in all his technological symbolism, have all featured in the religious experience of different African groups scattered across a disturbed continent.25

But there are occasions when a respect for modern technology in Africa co-exists with beliefs in sorcery and magic. As a soldier trained by the British to handle modern implements of destructive technology and selectively socialized into the ethos of a modern army, Idi Amin respects western military technology. He also has a strong belief in its efficacy, and has attempted to obtain weapons which range from new tanks to surface-to-surface ballistic missiles. From Tel Aviv to London, from Paris to Bonn, Amin has attempted to strengthen his technological capability as a military ruler.

On the other hand, the same soldier has shown deep and serious belief in the power of sorcery and magic. When he was a boxer he was capable of attempting to influence the result to come on the following day by seeing a “witch doctor” the day before a match. Sustained physical training for the bout had to be accompanied by adequate insurance with the forces of the invisible and the beyond. Amin was no different from thousands of other Africans participating or interested in sport. Many an African football team has found it necessary to consult those knowledgeable about the spirits and the supernatural before the actual confrontation with the sporting foe on the battlefield.26

After assuming supreme power as president of Uganda, Idi Amin has continued to show a partiality for those who satisfy him as being in communion with the supernatural.

Just before he seized power, a Zambian seer, Dr. Ngombe Francis, who qualified as doctor of medicine from Madagascar University, claims he predicted the overthrow of


the Uganda President, Dr. Obote. Since the coup the wealthy Zambian has been Amin’s personal soothsayer and prophet. A Ghanaian mystic claimed he could raise people from the dead, so he was flown to Uganda and Amin subsequently claimed he talked with a man who had been resurrected.²⁷

The technology of western militarism in Uganda has thus co-existed with and even been reinforced by demonology, religion and dreams. Amin even claimed that it was in a dream that God told him to launch his economic war and expel the Asians of Uganda.²⁸

But in both Amin and Muhammad Ali there is also the Islamic factor. For many years Amin was underprivileged in Ugandan society partly because he was a Muslim, whereas Muhammad Ali became a Muslim much later in his life partly because he had been underprivileged in American society. The causal relationship between class position and religious affiliation were reversed in these two cases.

In Uganda, the triumph of Christianity and of British rule gradually reduced Muslims not only to a relatively small minority as compared to Christians, but also to the status of a clearly underprivileged minority. It had even become possible for one Muganda Christian to say to another Muganda Christian, “I saw two men and a Muslim.” Some degree of dehumanization had gotten under way in the arrogance of an imported version of Christianity.

Little boys begin to acquire certain physical skills partly in response to the economic and stratification system of the society. Just as underprivileged black Americans sometimes became champion boxers, so on occasion underprivileged Muslims in Uganda became champion wrestlers or boxers. As one observer put it some years ago:

Muslims were not only third class Ganda. They did not have, as did their Christian fellow tribesmen, missionaries who could provide them with schools. . . . Because the boys do not go to school, they have been able to practise wrestling all day and to become the champion wrestlers of Buganda. For the same reason, as deliverers of milk, they are now becoming its leading cyclists.²⁹

The Muslim factor in sporting performance in Uganda is not as overwhelming as the black factor in boxing in the United States. Nevertheless there is a relative preponderance of Nilotes over Bantu among some of the leading sporting contenders in Uganda. And within the Bantu sector, those who are relatively underprivileged in broader social status tend to produce greater excellence in sports than those

²⁷ Martin, General Amin, op. cit., p. 16.
²⁸ For interaction between technology and traditional cultures in a wider context consult George M. Foster, Traditional Cultures and the Impact of Technological Change (New York: Harper and Row, 1962).
who could acquire prestige and power through economic and educational qualifications.

As indicated, Muhammad Ali became a Muslim partly because he was already underprivileged in the United States, rather than first being underprivileged because he was a Muslim. Like Idi Amin, Ali has a tendency to look at Christianity as the white man’s religion. Islam might not be pre-eminently a black man’s religion, but it is certainly primarily an Afro-Asian religion. The bulk of the Muslims in the world are part of the Third World. Muhammad Ali keeps on reminding some of his ethnic compatriots in the United States about the “irrelevance” of Christianity for the black man. The religion founded by Elijah Muhammad is by no means completely against technology and its rules. On the contrary, the so-called “Black Muslims” have sometimes moved further toward adopting the technological virtues of discipline, organization, and punctuality, than many other members of their race in the United States. But Muhammed Ali cannot suppress a certain enjoyment at times of those Islamic countries that are still prepared to put more emphasis on the praying mat than on the computer. “Man, I was in Libya, they pray so much, they’re so strict. Last murder in Libya was 42 years ago. That’s ’cause they build mosques like we build factories. You can hear ’em chanting all day. I go over there—whew!—I get a good feeling.”

A strange interplay between faith and fist, science and sorcery, technology and belief, has taken place in the minds and careers of both Idi Amin and Muhammad Ali. Economic underprivilege has affected both physical performance and spiritual experience; both combat and confession have responded to economic stimulus.

THE BIOECONOMICS OF SEX

But apart from being representative of a particular class, a particular race, and a particular religion, Ali and Amin are pre-eminently representatives of a particular sex. In some fundamental sense, they are both he-men.

In African circles, Amin’s masculinity arises partly out of his behavior, partly out of his military profession, partly out of his physical stature, and partly out of a reputation for relative promiscuity and virility. From Kampala to Accra, Amin has at times been described as “a real man!” His behavior implies a readiness fearlessly to confront the most powerful in the world; his profession in the military field implies warrior valor; his physique brings him out as broad and

---

exceptionally tall; his virility was symbolized by the four wives that Islam had permitted him to have. Since then he has cut himself down to only two wives, but with no guarantee that he would remain so restrained for long.

Muhammad Ali, on the other hand, has sometimes had his masculinity compromised by his good looks. For many years he proclaimed, "I am soooo pretty...", but now he is quoted as admitting that much of that self-proclamation was a publicity stunt. He has written poems about his good looks, but in recent times he has been known to assert: "Women are the only ones who are pretty..."[1]

The two fields of athletics and war, indeed of sports generally, have had a decided masculine bias over the years. Among the forms of play, boxing especially has been masculine in the types of contenders it draws, and perhaps in the types of skills it demands. And yet in a way boxing is in an intermediate position between other forms of play and war itself. It has retained its status as a successor to duelling in some sense. There was a time when the duel in medieval western society presupposed a confrontation unto death. Richelieu tried to abolish the duel from French society, yet casualties and fatalities continued from this custom right up to the time of Louis XVI and beyond. But there came a time when the French conceived of the duel less in terms of a fight unto death and more in terms of drawing blood. Whoever drew blood first was the winner—the operation did not require pushing on to the ultimate. Yet, as Johan Huizinga has intimated, this very reduction of the duel from a fatal confrontation to a game demanding merely the wounding of one of the parties risked being taken for a "rather ridiculous effeminization of a stern custom." Huizinga himself prefers to see the duel only as symbolical, and therefore the shedding of blood and not the killing was what really mattered. For Huizinga the "effeminization" of the duel brought it closer to the concept of play.[2]

In general both in sports as a form of play and in warfare itself the female of the species has been given a subsidiary role. It goes back further than Aristotle, but Aristotle captured it when he asserted in the fourth century B.C. that "the author of nature gave man strength of body and intrepidity of mind to enable him to face great hardships, and to woman was given a weak and delicate constitution, accompanied by a natural softness and modest timidity, which fit her for sedentary life" (Physiognomics). Much later a professor of philosophy at Yale observed: "One way of dealing with these disparities between the athletic promise and achievement of men and women is to view women as

truncated males. As such they should be permitted to engage in such
sports as men do . . . but in foreshortened versions."

More recently women have argued that much of their relative
inferiority in sports is, as with many other handicaps sustained by
them, an outcome of conditioning over a long time. If black people
cry in athletics and boxing partly because they have been socially
underprivileged, women have underperformed in athletics and boxing
paradoxically, for the same reason. The black man has asserted
superiority in a selected area of athletic performance in response to
handicaps in other domains; the woman has exhibited inferiority in
some of those same areas partly out of a broader closure imposed by
society on women’s participation in these fields.

In war, women have continued to be, even in Israel, subsidiary to
the main war effort. The warrior tradition in societies which are
culturally vastly different has tended to be, on the whole, dominated by
the male of the species. Both sport and combat have been areas of
masculine monopoly. Muhammad Ali and Idi Amin have been just
sheer rugged symbols of a tradition at once primeval and current.

There might have been a time when the technology of warfare justified
such a division of labor, when wars were fought by muscular power.
But now it no longer needs a masculine hand to press the button of the
B-52 bomber, or to release intercontinental ballistic missiles. Yet the
masculine presence is still overwhelming. Class and sex have pro-
foundly interacted in this particular division of labor. The black man’s
victory and the white woman’s failures have found a moment of
contact in an eternal dialectic.

Two such black men, Amin and Ali, have captured the power and
pathos of class, race, religion, sex and technological imbalance in a
deep and disturbing historical interaction. In so doing they have also
captured an even more primordial linkage—the eternal interplay be-
tween biology and economics in the grand evolution of human culture.

33 Paul Weiss, Sport: A Philosophical Enquiry (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press,
34 Consult for women’s point of view Ann Scott, “Closing The Muscle Gap”, Ms.,