MARTIAL ARTS STUDIES

MATT LONG AND NATHAN RITCHIE

RUMBLE REPLAYED: AN ANALYSIS OF THE CULTURAL MEMORY OF THE RUMBLE IN THE JUNGLE

ABSTRACT

This paper explores the build-up and aftermath of the marking of the 50th anniversary of the iconic 'Rumble in the Jungle' World Heavyweight Boxing title fight, which took place on 30 October 1974, in Kinshasa, Zaire. The event and wider spectacle of 'Zaire 74' as musical festival and celebration of African culture has been referred to as the greatest in sport of the entire twentieth century.

Through the methodological practices of sensory autoethnography in immersive theatre on the one hand and thematic analysis of journalistic discourses about the anniversary on the other, this paper uses the bridging concepts of 'cultural memory' and 'memory commodification' to explore both orthodox and revisionist accounts of 'Zaire 74'.

Through an appreciation of how the 'Ali legend' is continually remembered and rebranded, this paper forges an understanding of wider neocolonial discourses which reinforce binaries that are useful in sustaining a racially divided world.

CONTRIBUTORS

Matt Long is Programme Lead (SSE) for Criminology, Sociology and Social Policy at Loughborough University. He is also an unlicensed boxer who currently holds the Burton Boxing Promotions Masters Cruiserweight Title.

M.S.Long@lboro.ac.uk

Nathan Ritchie is a Lecturer in Media and Sociology at Loughborough University. He has published work in memory studies, political communication and media history. Nathan specialises in longitudinal analysis with a focus on changes and continuities in media coverage over time.

N.Ritchie@lboro.ac.uk

KEYWORDS

boxing; cultural memory; immersive theatre; memory commodification; Muhammad Ali; neocolonialism; sensory autoethnography; thematic analysis

Accepted for publication on 13 September 2026

CC BY-NC-ND

Long, M. & Ritchie, N. (2026). Rumble replayed: An analysis of the cultural memory of the Rumble in the Jungle. *Martial Arts Studies,* 22, 37–48. https://doi.org/10.18573/mas.392

INTRODUCTION

This research examines the 50th anniversary of the 'Rumble in the Jungle' boxing match between George Foreman and Muhammad Ali. It situates the fight within the theoretical context of cultural memory by analysing two diverse forms of memory work: an immersive theatre experience and online news articles. How the boxing match is remembered speaks not only to the memory of sports, but more broadly to the social, political and historical dimensions of cultural memory. The study aims to investigate changes and continuities in the myths surrounding what has been described by the World Boxing Association as 'one of the most legendary fights in boxing history' (Cova, 2025).

Many famous boxing fights have been imbued with social and cultural meaning, perhaps none more so than Muhammad Ali's fights, which reflect the extent to which boxing narratives can emerge from contemporaneous social issues. These themes are varied, and the most obvious in Ali's career include race relations (vs. Ernie Terrell), but also others including good versus evil (e.g. vs. Liston), religion (e.g. vs. Floyd Patterson), ageing (e.g. vs. Larry Holmes), masculinity ideals (e.g. vs. George Chuvalo) and political resistance and war (e.g. vs. Oscar Bonavena) and many more (Smith, 2017). These tried-and-tested narratives, which are often consciously exploited by promoters and fighters to sell fights, operate as a type of moral theatre and a political proxy by which various social themes engage with the public sphere. This makes boxing particularly fertile ground for analysing how sporting events are remembered over time and which 'myths' persist – the term 'myth' here referring to ideologies in narrative form (Lincoln, 1999) – and which are challenged or elided in commemorative memory work. Arguably, the Rumble in the Jungle encompassed the wide variety of social narratives discussed above. As Foreman himself noted, the fans inside the stadium on 30 October 1974 saw a morality drama playing out: 'Ali was good, I was evil' (Foreman & Engel, 2000, p. 117). Themes ranged across politics, race, masculinity and age. Boxing is a sport filled with 'legends and myths that permeate the sport' and fights like the Rumble in the Jungle are a mixture of the 'real and representation' in which the relationship between the 'authentic' and 'real' is often opaque (Woodward, 2011, p. 489).

In addition to its focus on boxing and cultural memory, this study provides a methodological contribution that draws on diverse memory forms by various so-called 'memory agents'. Here we make the admittedly crude ontological distinction between 'physical' and 'digital' memory work. Firstly, we provide an autoethnographic account of an immersive theatre experience titled 'Rumble in the Jungle: Rematch' which took place in 2023 in the Surrey Quays area of London. This event was created in partnership with Muhammad Ali Enterprises LLC and represents both a form of official memory work and a novel means to research a sensorial immersive form of memory production. Secondly, we analyse online news articles to examine contemporary journalistic memory work, in what has been called 'anniversary journalism' (Zelizer, 2008). This offers another vantage point to understand how the cultural memory of the Rumble in the Jungle is mobilised for audiences.

First, we introduce the concept of cultural memory, explaining this within the context of sporting events. Second, we discuss dominant narratives of the Rumble in the Jungle and how these contribute to a collective memory of the event. Third, we provide necessary context behind the research design. Finally, we provide findings from our research and discuss these within the context of cultural memory.

CULTURAL MEMORY

Schwartz (1991, p. 302) defines collective memory as 'a metaphor that reformulates society's retention and loss of information about its past in the familiar terms of remembering and forgetting'. Whilst collective memory is the broader concept, cultural memory is a term which transposes a cognitive process to the cultural realm – with individuals actualising and imbuing collective memories with meaning (Erll, 2010). Cultural memory can be found in the available symbols and representations of the past such as newspapers, art, music, theatre and film, and through any other medium in which the past can be reproduced in the present (Olick, 2007).

Memory is performed through institutions such as the state, education and the media and contributes to a shared identity and experience for communities, small and large. Sport is one such cultural arena of memory work that intersects with political, social and cultural dimensions. The interweaving of athletic performance with broader social contexts is a hallmark of sporting events deemed worthy of commemoration by the media (Ammann, 2010). Key sporting events that are commemorated are often laced with wider social and cultural meaning, such as Jesse Owens's sprinting and jumping feats in the 1936 Olympics in Berlin, which have symbolised defiance against the Nazi regime, and Tommie Smith's and John Carlos's Black Power salute at the Mexico 1968 Olympics amidst the Civil Rights movement. With more specific reference to boxing, we can point to Joe Louis's knockout of German Max Schmeling in 1938, or Barry McGuigan's 1985 victory over Eusebio Pedroza, which was seen to symbolise the possibility of shared identity across sectarian and national divisions during the Troubles in Northern Ireland. Each of these events symbolise something broader than the athletic performance itself and are understood and remembered as a cultural moment with historical significance. Not all sporting events achieve this status, and various factors including the magnitude of the event, how contemporaneous events align with narratives around the event and indeed the outcome of the contest itself all play a role in whether a sporting event is remembered or not.

These events and others are also open and malleable to change over time. The relationship between the past and present informs how groups collectively remember events. As the novelist Marcel

Proust noted, our recollection of the past is not necessarily a reflection of how things were (cited in Zelizer & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, 2014, p. 1). Connerton (2008, p. 3) has argued that representations of the past 'commonly legitimate a present social order'. This presentist approach underlines the relationship between cultural memory and the wider discursive and socio-cultural processes at play when shaping the recollection of events (Ritchie, 2022). However, Schwartz (1991) necessarily complicates this purely presentist approach, arguing that the past is not entirely malleable according to present values and socio-political forces. He argues instead that to ensure rational linkage between the past and present there must be some resemblance to the past in terms of how certain figures, establishments and events are depicted. Borrowing inspiration from Heraclitus's famous analogy, Coser has stated that 'we may indeed never step into the same river twice, but it still has persistent characteristics that are not shared by any other river' (See Halbwachs, 2020, p. 240).

These are important qualifiers which add nuance to the view that cultural memories found in newspapers, film, social media and biographies can be simply re-imagined to fit the needs of the present, or that these media products unproblematically reflect the views of the collective. However, it stands that just as the most common ideas about Muhammad Ali are shaped by the culture 'that produced and consumed him', how he is remembered (and, by extension, the Rumble in the Jungle match, too) is significantly influenced by the prevailing narratives, social values and norms of the time in which this remembering takes place (Ezra, 2009). Furthermore, like in other memory arenas, there has been an increasing tendency to deconstruct univocal narratives in favour of pointing to the contradictions and flaws of boxing heroes (Woodward, 2011). In this study, we investigate how memories of the fight are remembered during its 50th anniversary, seeking to understand the myths that have persisted over time and those that have been backgrounded or, to use Connerton's (2008) term, 'forgotten'. Before this, we will provide a discussion of the prevailing narratives at the time of the event and thereafter.

THE RUMBLE IN THE JUNGLE

The Rumble in the Jungle boxing match between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman has been recognised as one of the greatest sporting showcases of the twentieth century. The momentous fight promoted by controversial promoter Don King took place on 30 October 1974, after a month's delay following a cut above Foreman's right eye forced it to be postponed. In various accounts, the delay was seen as significant as it meant the fighters would stay in Kinshasa, Zaire (the present-day Democratic Republic of Congo) a month longer than scheduled (Erenberg, 2019, p. 126). In the award-winning documentary *When We Were Kings* (Gast, 1996) the postponement was framed as favouring Ali, who had been embraced in the city, with fans chanting 'Ali bomaye!' (Ali, kill him!) and enthusiastically greeting the popular civil rights activist wherever he went. Foreman, on the other hand, is framed as menacing, unapproachable and representing 'White America'. The latter was ostensibly symbolised by Foreman waving the U.S. flag when celebrating Olympic glory in 1968 – as opposed to the Black Power salute by sprinters Tommie Smith and John Carlos, along with other athletes who participated in the protest – and arriving in Kinshasa with his German Shepherd 'Digo'. Though seemingly innocuous, the citizens of Kinshasa looked dimly on the latter offence, owing to the German Shepherd having been used by Belgian colonial forces to police indigenous Africans, leading Ali to brand Foreman 'a Belgium [sic]'.

This polarity between the anti-establishment freedom fighter Ali and the liberal and patriotic Foreman, who had benefitted from Lyndon B. Johnson's domestic reform agenda, was the sub-text of the fight (Erenberg, 2019, p. 3). While it is irrefutable that Ali had positioned himself against the U.S. state and therefore was a *bona fide* civil rights leader and, with his refusal to enter the draft, a 'third-world hero', he had also 'toed the line' when he won the gold medal in Rome, just as Foreman had done eight years later in Mexico City. In 1960, on being asked by a Soviet reporter how he felt about returning to U.S. segregation following his gold medal triumph, Ali (then Cassius Clay) replied, 'We've got qualified people working on that problem, and I'm not worried about that outcome' (Erenberg, 2019, p. 12). Ali's later conversion to Islam, and his membership of the Nation of Islam, soon moved the then-heavyweight-champion to a more virulent position against the U.S. Government, opposing the traditional role of perceived subservience that other champions including Joe Louis and Floyd Patterson had come to represent, at least to Ali. As Erenberg (2018, p. 23) has noted, Ali 'represented a younger generation of black Americans who were no longer willing to placate whites.' More broadly, Ali's conversion and his defiance against the U.S. government, it is argued, made him a 'Pan-African hero.' Ali's status as 'hero' elevated him to a level beyond that of mere global sports celebrity. Whilst the notions of 'hero' and 'celebrity' are intertwined because Ali was both, he became the former because he was judged to embody a particular value system which was contested around the Vietnam War (See Marqusee, 1998, p. 163). While multifarious views on Ali's actions were held in the community, many African Americans undoubtedly associated his perceived ill treatment by the authorities with their own struggle against persecution based on their race.

Foreman and Ali's fighting styles also sharply contrasted with one another and symbolised opposing views of masculinity. It has been claimed that Ali brought to boxing a different type of male identity characterised by his ability to outmanoeuvre his opponents and use his feet to 'dance' away from his adversaries (Erenberg, 2019, p. 15). He was not perceived to possess the knockout power that other champions had – such as Sonny Liston and Joe Louis. Foreman, on the other hand, represented the traditional form of masculinity through his fighting style. His brute strength and ability to incapacitate and overpower his opponent appeared to fit the archetype that the heavyweight boxing champion was the 'baddest man on the planet', a moniker that would later become synonymous with Mike Tyson. But this

may be doing a disservice to both Foreman's skills and previous heavyweight champions. For example, there had been skilled boxers that had outclassed the 'raw power' of fighters in the past including Gene Tunney, Archie Moore and Jersey Joe Walcott. These fighters had used their intelligence, range, feints and combinations, indicating that Ali reignited a lineage of boxing rather than inventing it, as he is often credited as doing. While it is true that Foreman possessed immense power, his distance control, short-range punches and jab were all part of a package that allowed him to achieve an amateur Olympic gold medal and later become the oldest heavyweight champion in heavyweight boxing history.

The above shows a tendency to exaggerate differences by oversimplifying the assets of both fighters. However, one clear distinction between the two was their attitude towards the media. Foreman would later become a master salesman and be criticised for performing in front of the cameras by others, such as the opponent he defeated to become the oldest world heavyweight champion, Michael Moorer. But at the time of his fight against Ali his reticence to engage with the media appeared indicative of the menacing demeanour he wished to project as champion. On the other hand, in 1974 Ali had mastered the art of public relations leveraging it to his advantage during fights to attract media attention (Erenberg, 2019, p. 15).

When We Were Kings (1996) and other documentaries and books, including most famously Norman Mailer's *The Fight* (1975), have played a significant role in shaping the cultural memory of the Rumble in the Jungle. The redemptive narrative has largely prevailed in these texts, with Ali returning as champion and overcoming the behemoth Foreman after two defeats following his suspension from boxing because of his refusal to enter the draft. The fight itself appeared to suit this narrative, with Ali outsmarting the younger and stronger champion by laying back on the ropes and tiring Foreman out by absorbing his heaviest shots before knocking him down and forcing the 10-count, a strategy later dubbed the 'rope-the-dope'. The fight was framed in familiar biblical terms as 'David versus Goliath', with Ali playing the role of David (the underdog) overcoming the brutish Goliath by his smarts. As Ezra (2009, p. 155) has noted in his revisionist history of Ali, 'Most observers simply cannot resist the temptation to let Ali's brilliant strategic victory over a seemingly impossible foe – in Africa, no less – pass without attaching to it some kind of biblical significance'. The hero is a central feature of boxing culture (Woodward, 2011) and in these depictions it is Ali who plays this role.

Yet while many sports pundits at the time predicted a defeat for Ali, he possessed many of the physical and mental attributes required to beat the heavy-hitting Foreman. Ali was the more experienced of the two, and he had been in more challenging fights, going the distance 14 times compared to Foreman's three. Despite the experience gap, Ali was only 32 years old and would compete for another 7 years. He had faster hands and, despite not having to use it against Foreman, some of the best footwork skill in heavyweight history. He had also fought and overcome heavy hitters before Foreman such as Sonny Liston, Cleveland Williams and Joe Frazier. Despite these sport-related explanations – which admittedly are easier to identify in hindsight – much of the narrative around Ali's victory has looked to other, non-boxing reasons. For example, in *When We Were Kings* Norman Mailer alluded to 'black magic' possessing Foreman (Gast, 1996). At other times, commentators have pointed to flaws in Foreman's character as a potential explanation, and these were later reinforced by Foreman himself when he became a Baptist minister and constructed his own redemptive narrative by returning from a ten-year retirement to win the world championship at the age of 45 (see Foreman & Engel, 2000).

Undoubtedly, Ali fought a smart fight on the night and through his own gifts of self-publicity was able to frame the fight as a heroic feat. Indeed, despite later victories (and tragic losses) many see the fight as the zenith of Ali's career. The film *Ali* starring Will Smith, for example, concludes with Ali's arms outstretched in glory following an epic battle with Foreman (Mann, 2001). However, the drama of the fight and Ali's triumph masks and obscures the broader socio-political dynamics behind the fight.

Ali wished to be remembered not only as a boxer but also 'a social, political and religious figure' (Hauser, 2016, p. 103). There is little doubt that Ali transcended boxing and has been remembered as more than a sportsman, a status which he cultivated himself. However, Ali's participation in the Rumble in the Jungle has raised scepticism about the humanitarian image he projected post-career, notably being a UN 'Messenger of Peace' in September 1998. Revisionist historians have criticised Ali for legitimising the dictatorship of Zaire's corrupt leader Mobutu Sese Seko (Smith, 2017). This is to a degree acknowledged in *When We Were Kings* (Gast, 1996), where the leader is described as a tyrant responsible for the imprisoning and killings of criminals and political rivals, but there is little reflection in it on Ali's role in endorsing the regime through his participation in the bout.

In contemporary discourse, this phenomenon has been labelled as 'sportswashing', a term we use to describe a 'phenomenon whereby political leaders use sports to appear important or legitimate on the world stage while stoking nationalism and deflecting attention from chronic social problems and human-rights woes on the home front' (Boykoff, 2022, p. 342). It should be noted that sportswashing is a relatively new term which brings together previously established concepts such as sports propaganda, public diplomacy, soft power and place branding (Skey, 2023). We use this term because of its avowedly critical connotations and because it enables comparisons between contemporary sporting spectacles and earlier events that performed similar political functions. The Rumble in the Jungle was staged under the patronage of Mobutu Sese Seko's authoritarian regime, which sought to use the event to reach a global audience, promote Zaire internationally and reinforce Mobutu's domestic and international legitimacy. The fight also formed part of the regime's wider programme of *authenticité*

(Project Authenticity), through which Mobutu sought to construct a distinctive postcolonial national identity around his own political authority.

Arguably Ali's most famous bouts occurred in regimes looking to deflect from, to put it in the words of his famous doctor Ferdie Pacheco, 'unhappy populaces' (Farred, 1995, p. 84). As Farred (1995) has argued, 'By staging Ali's bouts, these leaders [Ferdinand Marcos and Mobutu Sese Seko] secured the kind of cultural and ideological sanction – and a measure of quiescence – that could not be culled from any other international figure' (p. 53). This raises questions about Ali's political function in Zaire, and subsequently in his bout with Joe Frazier in the Philippines, labelled the 'Thrilla in Manilla'. Although Ali has frequently been represented as a postcolonial icon, his participation in events that conferred legitimacy upon authoritarian regimes (or had the potential to, at least), together with the financial incentives underpinning that participation, unsettles any straightforwardly celebratory interpretation.

As Said (1993, p. xxv) has claimed, 'no one today is purely one thing'. The aim of our paper, therefore, is neither a cynical tearing down of Ali's legacy nor necessarily to reduce his involvement to complicity with authoritarian power. We also do not assume that the event is remembered identically across different contexts or, as Coser (1992) argues, that audiences constitute a single, undifferentiated group mind. Memories are relational and contested, and individuals may resist dominant forms of remembrance, even when that resistance is structured by narratives it opposes (Andrews, 2002). Rather, we examine two forms of cultural memory in order to identify which narratives predominate and consider the consequences for contemporary understandings of the event.

METHODOLOGY

Two distinct datasets were examined to understand the cultural memory of the Rumble in the Jungle during its 50th anniversary. The first vital angle covers an autoethnography of an immersive theatre experience – namely The Rumble in the Jungle Rematch, which occurred in 2023 in the Surrey Quays area of London. Ethical approval was granted to use this autoethnography by the Loughborough University Ethics Committee (Project ID 19909). Second, an analysis of key themes in coverage of online news articles provided insights into the key themes in journalistic coverage of the anniversary.

Mixed methods have grown in popularity in recent decades. Much of the methodological literature has focused on mixing qualitative and quantitative approaches (Morse, 2009). However, many of the strengths that can be gleaned from combining paradigms can also be found *within* paradigms, such as offsetting the weaknesses of one method over the other, and triangulating findings (Bryman, 2016, p. 641). We use a combination of autoethnography and thematic analysis to analyse two distinct datasets, one which considers how memory is embodied through experiencing an immersive theatre production and another how journalists remember the fight. Together, this provides two unique vantage points in which we can identify commonalities and/or differences across two mnemonic forms.

Autoethnography

While ethnography as a method has its roots in spending prolonged periods of time with tribes in the South Pacific (Malinowski, 1922), the method has since evolved into an exploration of a much broader range of experiences such as urban centres, workplaces and sports – including boxing (Hoeber & Kerwin, 2013; Wacquant, 2004; Woodward, 2008). More recent ethnographic research has considered the range of sensory experiences available to the research, moving away from privileging the visual – the so-called 'ocular-centric' approach – towards senses such as taste or smell and paying attention to a broad domain of affects (Pink, 2015). Boxing events are constituted by an interlinking of the boxers, their staff, including trainers, promoters and cut men, the spectators, and various boxing objects including the gloves, the ropes and other boxing apparatus. As Woodward (2011, p. 492) notes, boxing is 'sensory through the organization of light, movement and matter'. Thus, the recreation of a boxing event and its observation are understood through these sensations, in effect, through atmospheres built on mnemonics that symbolise a time, setting and feeling.

In the same decade as the Rumble in the Jungle, autoethnography grew in popularity as a method that situates the lived experience of the writer at the heart of its practice (See for instance Heider, 1975; Goldschmidt, 1977). Autoethnography carries with it the many practices of ethnography – for example observation, field notes, reflexivity – but focuses on how the individual (the researcher) experiences the field. The current study is described as autoethnographic because the lead author's personal history, memories and bodily investment in boxing is central to the analysis. The study therefore not only explains what occurred at the event, but how the event is understood and experienced through the author's existing memories of Muhammad Ali, George Foreman and the Rumble in the Jungle. From this point. in order to emphasise the affective and embodied experience of the event, this paper will use the first-person pronouns which refer to the lead author, Matt Long, to describe both the positionality and later the autoethnographic experiences of the event.

Positionality

At 55, and a lifelong boxing fan, I have memories as a child of Muhammad Ali and George Foreman whilst they were boxing. I also have experiences of fighting as an active white collar / unlicensed boxer and like many Ali fans have bought memorabilia and consumed various of the documentaries and books that have contributed to the very mythologies which we are examining. Indeed, one of my earliest childhood memories involved being sat

next to my late father as he shed a tear in late 1980 when Ali was badly beaten and retired on his stool in a failed attempt to win the World Heavyweight Championship, for an unprecedented fourth time, against a Larry Holmes who was in his prime. (This fight was notably represented in the documentary *Muhammad and Larry* which depicts Ali as fighting the realities of time and his emerging Parkinson syndrome [Kaplan & Maysles, 2006]). I came from a working-class household, and adored Ali based on the stories my father would tell me about how he saw the then 'Cassius Clay' at Nottingham ice rink holding up a placard of a number 5 as a predictive nod to the round in which he would knock out 'Our 'Enry' Cooper just days later. He would recall how the contender, as he was at the time, was roundly booed for his brashness as the so-called 'Louisville Lip', before confessing a feeling that he could not help being in part hypnotised by the young man's charismatic appeal. My father would go on to more than once share the tale about how my grandfather proverbially went 'one better' by securing a ticket to the Wembley fight itself.

The above being said, as a former volunteer chaplain both in a hospital and University context, a regular churchgoer and a white-collar boxer who started in his 40s, I am also a fan of George Foreman, having been inspired by one of his autobiographies *God in my Corner* where he intertwined his Christian faith as a practising Minister with his boxing career (Foreman & Abraham, 2007). I periodically followed some of his weekly online sermons. As well as my attraction to his religion, my affinity to Foreman was based on the fact that he boxed competitively well into his late 40s, once again holding the 'Greatest Prize in Sport' in the mid-1990s at a time when he was the oldest world champion in history, regardless of weight division. I recall several coaches telling me to 'pack in' my own unlicensed boxing in my forties as boxing was a 'young man's game', as well as the time when a teenage boxer refused to spar with me at my local gym because he didn't want to 'beat up Grandads'! When asserting my right to box competitively, albeit at an unpaid and unlicensed level leagues below Foreman himself, I would always cite 'Big George' as my inspiration for continuing my participation.

As well as the variables of religious orientation and age, it's worth noting that when male researchers have conducted ethnographies of sports such as boxing, their 'maleness' is often not scrutinised (Wheaton, 2002). So, my social capital as a white, middle-class, middle-aged male gave me a particular subjective experience of my consumed theatre experience which would have been materially different from that of my female partner who accompanied me to the event.

In this sense my personal perspectives of the immersive theatre experience at Rematch are unashamedly value-centred rather than claiming to be value-free (Ellis et al., 2011). That said, I share a cultural memory with what could be loosely conceived as the Muhammad Ali fandom community, which we infer would be the primary audience for the event. The event itself took place in a warehouse converted into an immersive theatre in Canada Water, London. I attended the event, which lasted several hours, on 16 September 2023. Special attention was paid to the spatial, material and sensorial elements and the individuals who made up the immersive theatre experience. The individuals were not only the actors playing familiar characters of the Rumble in the Jungle but also the collective audience who were encouraged to get 'in on the fun' by 'wearing your classiest 1970s inspired outfit to enhance your time travel experience.' This is very much in line with the ethos of immersive experience, which aims to 'to make the audience the centre of a theatrical experience' (Biggin, 2017, p. 3).

Analysing online news reporting of the Rumble in the Jungle

The second stage of the research involved conducting a thematic analysis of online news websites. Thematic analysis involves the searching of selected datasets to find repetitive patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Perhaps the most popular form of textual analysis, its methodology has since been revised and corrected (Braun & Clarke, 2019), but its core principles remain unchanged. The six-step process which begins at familiarisation with the data and encompasses coding and theme-naming conventions provides a useful and systematic analytical framework, and its theoretical flexibility allows it to accommodate a diverse range of critical perspectives, including cultural memory.

Analysis proceeded with immersion in the news data and also involved initial discussion between the researchers. The two researchers then independently coded the news articles in a shared document to draw out comparisons. A total of 73 codes were identified (data depository available at https://doi.org/10.17028/rd.lboro.33110768) and used as building blocks for a discussion aiming to reflexively identify themes, which were developed based on their prominence in reporting. After this, the researchers compared the themes that were developed with the findings from the autoethnography and from this developed three overarching themes: (1) David versus Goliath: Ali as Parable; (2) Amnesia: The Enduring Impact of Sportswashing; and (3) Nostalgia: Memory Commodification.

A Google news search using the term 'Rumble in the Jungle' and filtered by location to include the U.S. yielded 49 available news articles between 2024 and 2025 which were then open coded. These articles were journalistic pieces from a range of international publishers rather than specialist boxing magazines. To be included in the sample, all articles had to focus centrally on the Rumble in the Jungle, so those articles with only fleeting mentions of the fight were discarded. Together, the sample provides a comprehensive overview of reporting about the Rumble in the Jungle, providing insights into how journalists mobilised memories of the fight during its 50th anniversary.

RESULTS

David versus Goliath: Ali as parable

Both the immersive theatre experience and reporting of the event position the fight as far more than a sporting contest. In media discourse, Ali is framed as being at a significant disadvantage owing to his age. Ali entering the ring a 4-1 underdog serves as a broader metaphor for his eventual triumph over adversity. In one article the fight stands as allegory for overcoming one's challenges in life more generally: 'His triumph in Kinshasa stands as a reminder that with the right mindset, preparations, and courage, even the most insurmountable challenges can be overcome' (Callahan, 2024). The article continues by interpreting the outcome of the fight as 'a victory for Muhammad Ali, not just as a boxer but as a symbol of resistance, perseverance, and excellence'. In other articles, this transcendence narrative contains quasi-mythical overtones, such as a passage in an article by sports news website *Marca* (2024) which quoted George Foreman, stating 'He [Ali] is bigger than boxing. To put him in the best boxer [category] would be too small for him. He was a hero'. In another article in the *Republican Herald* (2024), Ron Devlin quoted Hall of Fame boxing journalist Ron Borges in stating, 'The victory raised Ali to the level of supernatural'.

This mythic narrative was not confined to commemorative journalism but also materially staged within the immersive theatre experience. This was most profound when I was invited to line up in Ali's entourage on fight night and physically reach for his robe, which elicited a moment of embodied reverence centred on the material signs of Ali. Ali, played by Kimane Juneau, reached out to fist bump me, to which I nervously obliged after he told me, 'Don't leave me hangin' brother!' In these instances, Ali's fist and robe function as mnemonics of memory – signs that represent the referent of the robe and boxing glove used in the fight. The outreached fist of Ali and the obliging yet nervous 'on the spot' participant recreate this representation of awe and deference towards the cultural 'icon'. At the same time, the rather casual 'don't leave me hangin'!' speaks to a paradox that is common across the establishment of quasi-mythical figures, which combines both lifting the character to ephemeral heights and at the same time emphasising the 'common touch'.

In the programme for the event, we see this myth making in text form. In a feature called 'Ali's Training Vignette' by author Davis Miller, who wrote *The Tao of Muhammad Ali* (1997), the writer states, 'When faced with what seemed impossible, Ali has often proved himself to be a magician'. Another feature consists of quotes from famous figures at the time of the original event casting their predictions that Ali would lose. These include Red Smith of the *New York Times* stating, 'Ali's chance of winning is as remote as Zaire', American footballer Jim Brown claiming that 'if Ali wins the fight's been fixed' and *Observer* journalist Hugh McIlvanney's line, 'I know a way to beat Foreman, but it involves shelling him for three days and sending in the artillery'. While these quotes are indicative of a widespread feeling at the time that Ali would lose the bout, they also serve to remind audiences of the insurmountable task before Ali and to set up a 'hero's journey' (Kelsey et al., 2023) arc in which his ultimate victory becomes quasi-mythic.

Bringing the two datasets together, this theme running through both of them reveals the continuation of the 'David versus Goliath' story that was central to the event at the time and has been fundamental to narratives around the fight before and thereafter. Describing Ali as more than a boxer – a prominent feature throughout both datasets – elevates his win beyond boxing to represent a broader representation of a victory for a view on civil rights, certain human values and a morality play about the confrontation between good and evil. At the same time, it reveals how myths can become concretised over time. It has the effect of transforming historically situated events and imbuing them with a sense of naturalness. As Barthes (1957/2012) in his pioneering work *Mythologies* notes, 'Myth has the task of giving an historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal' (p. 142). In other words, the David versus Goliath narrative has over time taken on a certainty with various other interpretations sidelined in favour of this hegemonic narrative.

Amnesia: The enduring impact of sportswashing

A second running theme through the forms of memory work we examined was simplification and political erasure. Within the immersive theatre experience, a momentary rupture occurred when a Congolese character confronted me about Mobutu Sese Seko's regime and alleged executions beneath the stadium. The interaction produced a moment of unease and a moment for pause, a reminder of the troubling political underbelly that Mobutu and promoter Don King sought to mask in their promotion of the fight. For that moment the participants in the show were forced to confront this troubled legacy and were morally obliged to reflect. However, this challenge to the nostalgic spectacle of the event was fleeting and contained within the larger narrative of festivity and carnival. Indeed, by the time the fight started, criticism was again suspended and there was no further reflection on these issues, mirroring the way that at the time and across the years dissent has been backgrounded. It is the showcase of the choreographed performance of the fight that takes centre-stage and it is the fight itself that leaves the lasting imprint on the audience.

Similarly, in the programme for the event, there was little contemplation on the broader socio-political dynamics of the fight. Not until page 64 is Mobutu Sese Seko mentioned in any meaningful way. In the feature in which this finally happens, the writer of the Rematch theatre experience Tristan Fynn-Aiduenu and cultural advisor to the show Madeleine Laini discuss the importance of 'portraying Congo authentically as a character'. Mobutu is framed as someone who wanted to use 'this moment as a way to really cement his authority and put Congo at centre-stage'. Even here, however, there is little reflection on Mobutu's kleptocratic authoritarianism, meaning the more troubling parts

of his legacy are left unchallenged. These attempts to move beyond what are characterised as simplistic Western portrayals of Mobutu are informed by attempts to add complexity and depth to the historical period. However, it could be argued that through spatially containing the troubling legacy of Mobutu, and by extension that of all those involved in organising the fight, it serves to contain and re-narrativise the violence of the regime towards a more palatable and acceptable understanding. The questions 'Should this fight have happened?' or 'Should Ali have participated in the bout?' are downplayed in favour of providing more understanding of Mobutu's Pan-African vision.

Similar euphemism is exhibited in anniversary journalism. In some articles, Mobutu's dictatorship was described in muted language or not at all, with one Reuters article understatedly describing Zaire as being known for its 'periodic bouts of instability' (Kasongo & Nyemba, 2024). Only in Emmet Livingstone's (2024) piece for the National Public Radio website did we find serious contemplation on Mobutu's legacy. Livingstone described Mobutu's rule as 'brutal and corrupt' before arguing that the country has 'not fully recovered' from decades of wars. Even in this article, which undeniably provides further depth than others on Mobutu's regime, there is no reflection on how Ali's participation had a legitimising effect on the despotic rule. Neither does the immersive theatre experience reflect upon Ali's participation. Instead, the fleeting mentions of Mobutu's regime are treated as distinct from any moral obligation on Ali not to be involved.

In a similar fashion to previous depictions of the Rumble in the Jungle, it is the confrontation within the boxing match that serves as a morality platform, not the broader socio-political dynamics. This, it could be argued, is the essence of 'sportswashing' in which the material realities of an authoritarian regime are relegated in favour of focusing on an idealised morality play – the boxing match between Muhammad Ali and George Foreman. The villain at the centre of the morality play is George Foreman, who is described by famous promoter Lou Dibella for *Newsweek* as a 'perfect menacing contender' (Croucher, 2024). In the Rematch '74 programme, Davis Miller and Craig Mortali describe Foreman in these terms: 'As he steps toward the bag, Foreman is not wearing a hood, but he seems hooded. An invisible hood. He is a dark monk. A druid'. In a later paragraph he is described as a 'human metronome'. These vivid metaphors intensify Foreman's role as threatening antagonist and at the same time elevate Ali as heroic protagonist. This therefore intensifies the drama of what Ezra (2009, p. 154) called the 'passion play'.

Nostalgia: Memory commodification

While the previous themes have focused on the broader cultural and ideological elements of the memory work, underpinning it all is the commercial dynamics at play. The immersive production was structured around tiered consumer choice, from Press Corps to VIP access. I opted for the Press Corps which gave me privileged access to the training camps of both fighters. Later, I purchased a T-shirt which depicted Ali's back to the ropes with Foreman attacking him. The picture was in black-and-white to evoke a sense of the past (though a past which did not exist given that the original match was broadcast around the world in colour) and contrasted with the text reading 'London 2023. I was there!' The T-shirt was an imitation of one worn by Don King back in 1974, whose attire simply read 'I was there'. In this sense, the T-shirt was a 'hyper-real' (Baudrillard, 1983) parody (punctuated with an exclamation mark) of one which was 'authentic' back in 1974. The immersive production also reproduced aspects of exoticisation through sensory cues such as African music, food and market stalls. I could smell the cuisine of Zaire, taste it as a paying customer and touch and feel the clothing left out on the washing line. These sensory mnemonics worked to transport the audience in space, place and time, but also commercialise a sense of authentic 'Africanness' through foods associated with non-Western cuisines.

In the programme we see this clash between memory work and commercialisation. There is an array of products including a QR code for signed and numbered fine prints of Ali, promotion of an Ali book called *Approaching Ali* and below this even an advert for the independent brewery Shepherd Neame. However, at the core of the event is indubitably an appeal to nostalgia through commodification. In this sense, it could be adequately described as a 'nostalgia business' in which signs of the past wrapped up in familiarity, emotion and collective remembering are exploited for commercial value (Niemeyer & Keightley, 2020). This is done in various ways in the immersive theatre experience. For example, the fight was the main event of the show and featured a choreographed performance alongside screens that projected a video recording of the fight itself. My attention was split between the choreographic performance and the video copy of the fight. Overlapping, the two combined the artifice of the performance with the seeming authenticity of the archival footage transporting the audience back in time – an amalgamation of signs which links the present and past. In this sense it is the visual that provides authority and authenticity, and when combining this with a physical re-enactment, the audience is encouraged to link the two signs of the actual fight together in a feeling of nostalgic warmth which is transferred to the performance.

We also see nostalgic narratives in anniversary journalism of the event. The Rumble in the Jungle is described as the 'zenith of boxing' or as a 'golden age of boxing'. In a *Newsweek* article (Croucher, 2024), for example, boxing promoter Lou Dibella remarks on the singularity of the event: 'There was something singular that used to exist about the heavyweight champion of the world. That mystique is gone'. The article goes on to lament the emergence of so-called 'YouTuber boxing', referring to the involvement of young content creators who have diversified into the sport, by stating, 'It's another symbol of boxing's fall from grace'. In another report from Reuters (Kasongo & Nyemba, 2024) a Congolese boxing coach is interviewed who states, 'The fight of the century … is a great memory for us'. This use of so-called vernacular intergenerational memories can also be seen in an NPR

report (Livingstone, 2024) in which a Congolese boxing champion Landry Matete credits the Rumble in the Jungle as his inspiration for getting into the sport. The use of this testimony provides a legitimacy to claims that the fight (1) had a positive impact in Zaire and (2) a continuing legacy that benefitted the Congolese. At the same time, it frames events both positively and through a nostalgic lens. In other words, this event is symbolic of a past that cannot be recaptured. Both are central to official narratives of the Rumble in the Jungle and at the same time play off a feeling of nostalgia which legitimises the continuing revisiting and remembrance of the fight.

DISCUSSION

Our findings reveal the predominant themes in memory work across an official immersive theatre production and anniversary reporting. Combined, the memory work is characterised by four 'S's: stasis, sanitisation, simplification and silence. The narrative arc of the fight was uniform across our datasets, revealing how over time contestation over the fight and Ali have become flattened. Both Roland Barthes (1957/2012) and Pierre Nora (1989) have argued that over time myths and collective memories can become naturalised or ritualised.

The commodification of the Rumble in the Jungle and by extension Ali is nothing new. Especially after his return from suspension, Ali endorsed a litany of companies ranging from Chevrolet, Under Armour, Pizza Hut, Adidas, Wheaties, Coca-Cola, Gatorade, Toyota and perhaps most infamously 'Champ Burgers'. Muhammad Ali Enterprises LLC, which partnered with the immersive theatre experience, operates as a marketing and media services company. The company's services have included global licencing, merchandising, television, film and internet projects. The company operated during Ali's final years and has continued to play a role in shaping the commercial industry (and commercial memory) of Ali since his death. The company relies heavily on nostalgia, which can create positive emotional responses and influence consumer behaviour and loyalty (Hamilton & Wagner, 2014). Just as consumers often remember the past selectively and positively, we also found that the production of the Rumble in the Jungle memory work focused mainly on positive elements that elided much of the troubling legacy of the fight. As Andon and Houck (2011) have noted, nostalgia is not the product of the past, but a present-day construction of it. In this sense, the event reflects the presentist, late-capitalist logics of commercial culture as much as it represents the fight itself.

This, we argue, has material implications for how the fight continues to be remembered. The elision of critical thought on Ali's participation in the bout, or in Foreman's case how a boxer from an underprivileged background was demonised through animalistic metaphors and a narrow conception of 'blackness', results in a stasis that solidifies conventional narratives. In this regard, we see how pre-packaged narratives prevail because they are familiar, predictable, calculable and profitable, rather than challenging, unsettling, revisionist and thus deemed less profitable to the wider brand of Ali. In the year 2023, the year the immersive theatre experience took place, Cristiano Ronaldo signed for Al-Nassr football club and Tyson Fury fought Francis Ngannou as part of the annual Riyadh Season, which is the centrepiece of Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 Programme. The Rumble in the Jungle is a clear historic point of reference for sportswashing, opening a historical case study to critique unfolding developments, yet we only saw rare reflections on this across our datasets. Conversely, our data partially reflects that sportswashing has long-lasting effects: while Mobutu's positive nation branding exercise ultimately collapsed, the continued re-direction of public attention persists, aided by commercial logics.

Instead of critical reflection, familiar tropes and understandings of the events are rife. Ali's transcendence, his underdog status and how he overcame insurmountable odds to defeat a 'menacing brute' prevail. These are universalising narratives that deify Ali but also sanitise his image. During his career Ali functioned as a floating signifier whose meaning was contested across political and cultural discourses. The immersive theatre experience and journalistic remembering of the Rumble in the Jungle is indicative of how commercialisation and heritage production have stabilised his image. The radical political antagonisms that once defined Ali have been replaced by universal principles of courage, justice and sporting greatness. These depictions were something that Pennington (2024) also identified in her analysis of the coverage of Ali immediately after his death, in which he was characterised as a 'celebrity for all'. This process did not only occur after Ali's death in 2016 but even before this was a part of his own conscious reshaping of the Ali 'brand' that moved his image away from civil rights champion to universal humanitarian figure typified in his role as a 'global symbol of peace, justice and humanitarianism' during the London 2012 Olympics. However, this transformation reduces the interpretive flexibility of Ali's legacy, rendering it a predictable and commercially usable symbol which arguably appeals to 'all' but no one at the same time – an empty signifier.

Empty signifiers have the power to unite exactly because their meaning is vague and can accommodate various projections and interpretations (Laclau, 1996). However, we support previous critiques that have highlighted the argument that the foregrounding of 'Ali as deity' and a more general focus on his charisma and self-styled narrative has the potential to obscure the powerful influence of figures behind the Rumble in the Jungle like Don King and Mobutu Sese Seko. Recognising this influence raises more troubled histories of nation-making, cut-throat capitalism and sportswashing (Ezra, 2009). Both of the forms of memory work we examined relied heavily on framing Ali's performance and presumed 'Africanness' as symbolising a mythic hero's journey that, in turn, was a victory for Africa.

CONCLUSION

Channelling Barthes, Paul Bowman (2016, p. 169) warns against martial arts studies descending into 'the simple denunciation of falsity in the name of truth'. Instead, he advocates an appreciation of the 'complex roles, pleasures and very real consequences of so-called falsities'. Following this approach, this article does not simply identify factual inaccuracies in cultural memories of Ali and the Rumble in the Jungle. Instead, it examines forms of selective remembering and forgetting that reproduce familiar narratives and marginalises elements that disrupt a linear and celebratory interpretation of the event. We argue that this selectivity has real consequences for how the Rumble in the Jungle has come to be remembered and subsequently communicated to contemporary audiences.

We stop short of judging this process as inherently 'good or bad'. Heroic narratives can perform important cultural functions. Through sustaining an image of Ali as the fight's moral protagonist and relegating more troubling figures and contexts to secondary importance, a re-usable and potentially inspiring image can continue to be projected. Selective forgetting can stabilise and preserve the coherency of a narrative that at its core is a familiar tale of underdog triumph. Others may argue the event deserves to be celebrated even if it was marred by familiar boxing politics – an aspect of the sport that existed long before and long after the Rumble in the Jungle. Nevertheless, by drawing attention to contradictions and omissions within this hegemonic memory of Ali and the fight, we necessarily complicate the teleological narratives through which the event has commonly been understood. In this regard, we contribute to the revisionist scholarship that has drawn attention to how these dominant narratives prevail over alternative readings of the event (Erenberg, 2019; Ezra, 2009).

This research extends these revisionist approaches through both its theoretical and methodological approach. We move the discussion on from exclusively focusing on a Barthesian construction of myth to investigating the dynamics of forgetting and remembering within a cultural memory framework. Methodologically, we examined two contrasting forms of memory work – a theatre production and online journalism – marking a departure from research that tends to focus on a single memory form. We found similar themes across both forms of memory work. This suggests that the hegemonic narratives surrounding the fight are not confined to more overtly curated forms of memory such as theatre production but extend to journalistic remembering. Above all, our work demonstrates the usefulness of cultural memory to analyse sporting events. Future research should investigate memories of the fight diachronically to examine how memories of the fight have evolved or, indeed, stabilised over time. Although this article examines two memory forms, many other sites of memory work could be investigated including biographies, films, visual art and social media posts. Future research should focus on how themes and motifs from the fight continue to persist on visual social media platforms addressing newer audiences.

Declaration of competing interests

The authors affirm that they had no competing interests relevant to the work underpinning this manuscript.

Declaration of artificial intelligence use

The authors affirm that no artificial intelligence applications were used in the preparation of this manuscript.

Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are available at https://doi.org/10.17028/rd.lboro.33110768

REFERENCES

Ammann, I. (2010). Gedenktagsjournalismus: Bedeutung und Funktion in der Erinnerungskultur [Remembrance day journalism: Meaning and function in the culture of remembrance]. In: K. Arnold, W. Hömberg & S. Kinnebrock (Eds.) *Geschichtsjournalismus: Zwischen Information und Inszenierung* (pp. 153–167). LIT Verlag.

Andon, S. P., & Houck, D. W. (2011). Spectacularized sport: Understanding the invention of a nostalgic, commodified sporting event. *International Journal of Sport Communication, 4*(1), 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1123/ijsc.4.1.1

Andrews, M. (2002). Counter-narratives and the power to oppose. *Narrative Inquiry, 12*(1), 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1075/ni.12.1.02and

Barthes, R. (2012). *Mythologies* (R. Howard, Trans.). Hill and Wang. (Original work published 1957)

Baudrillard, J. (1983). *Simulations*. Semiotexte.

Biggin, R. (2017). *Immersive theatre and audience experience: Space, game and story in the work of Punchdrunk*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-62039-8

Bowman, P. (2016). *Mythologies of martial arts*. Rowman & Littlefield International. https://doi.org/10.5040/9798881812393

Boykoff, J. (2022). Toward a theory of sportswashing: Mega-events, soft power, and political conflict. *Sociology of Sport Journal, 39*(4), 342–351. https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.2022-0095

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77–101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2019). Reflecting on reflexive thematic analysis. *Qualitative Research in Sport, Exercise and Health, 11*(4), 589–597. https://doi.org/10.1080/2159676X.2019.1628806

Bryman, A. (2016). *Social research methods* (5th Ed.). Oxford University Press.

Callahan, Y. (2024, October 30). *The Rumble in the Jungle: Muhammad Ali's legendary victory that transcended boxing.* Bet.com. https://web.archive.org/web/20241030150009/https://www.bet.com/article/ufjuz2/the-rumble-in-the-jungle-muhammad-alis-legendary-victory-that-transcended-boxing

Connerton, P. (2008). Seven types of forgetting. *Memory Studies, 1*(1), 59–71. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698007083889

Coser, L. A. (1992). Introduction: Maurice Halbwachs 1877–1945. In M. Halbwachs, *On collective memory* (L. A. Coser, Ed. & Trans.; pp. 1–34). University of Chicago Press.

Cova, J . (2025, October 28). *51 years since Ali vs. Foreman: The Rumble that shook the world.* WBA. https://www.wbaboxing.com/boxing-news/51-years-since-ali-vs-foreman-the-rumble-that-shook-the-world

Croucher, S. (2024, October 30). *Has boxing declined since glory days of Rumble in the Jungle?* Newsweek. https://www.newsweek.com/has-boxing-declined-since-glory-days-rumble-jungle-1977157

Ellis, C., Adams, T. E., & Bochner, A. P. (2011). Autoethnography: An overview. *Historical Social Research, 36*(4), 273–290. https://doi.org/10.12759/hsr.36.2011.4.273-290

Erenberg, L. A. (2019). *The rumble in the jungle: Muhammad Ali and George Foreman on the global stage*. University of Chicago Press. https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226059570.001.0001

Erll, A. (2010). Literature, film and the mediality of cultural memory. In A. Erll & A. Nünning (Eds.), *A Companion to Cultural Memory Studies* (pp. 389–398). De Gruyter. https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110207262.6.389

Ezra, M. (2009). *Muhammad Ali: The making of an icon*. Temple University Press.

Farred, G. (1995). What's my name? Muhammad Ali, postcolonial pugilist. *Dispositio 20*(47), 37–58.

Foreman, G., & Abraham, K. (2007). *God in my corner: A spiritual memoir*. Thomas Nelson.

Foreman, G., & Engel, J. (2000). *By George: The autobiography of George Foreman*. Touchstone.

Gast, L. (Director). (1996). *When We Were Kings* [Film]. Polygram Filmed Entertainment.

Goldschmidt, W. (1977). Anthropology and the coming crisis: An autoethnographic appraisal. *American Anthropologist, 79*(2), 293–308. https://doi.org/10.1525/aa.1977.79.2.02a00060

Halbwachs, M. (2020). *On collective memory*. University of Chicago Press. https://doi.org/10.7208/chicago/9780226774497.001.0001

Hamilton, K., & Wagner, B. A. (2014). Commercialised nostalgia: Staging consumer experiences in small businesses. *European Journal of Marketing, 48*(5/6), 813–832. https://doi.org/10.1108/EJM-05-2012-0325

Hauser, T. (2016). *Muhammad Ali: A tribute to the greatest*. Pegasus Books.

Heider, K. G. (1975). What do people do? Dani Auto-Ethnography, *Journal of Anthropological Research, 31*(1), 3–17. https://doi.org/10.1086/jar.31.1.3629504

Hoeber, L., & Kerwin, S. (2013). Exploring the experiences of female sport fans: A collaborative self-ethnography. *Sport Management Review, 16*(3), 326–336. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.smr.2012.12.002

Kaplan, B., & Maysles, A. (Directors). (2006). *Muhammad and Larry*. Maysles Films.

Kasongo, A. A., & Nyemba, B. (2024, October 28). *Congo gears up for 50th anniversary of boxing's 'Rumble in the Jungle'*. Reuters. https://www.reuters.com/world/africa/congo-gears-up-50th-anniversary-boxings-rumble-jungle-2024-10-28/

Kelsey, D., Yannopoulou, N., Whittle, A., Heath, T., Golossenko, A., & Soares, A. M. (2023). The (army) hero with a thousand faces: A discourse-mythological approach to theorising archetypal blending in contemporary advertising. *Marketing Theory, 23*(1), 141–162. https://doi.org/10.1177/14705931221141732

Laclau, E. (1996). *Emancipation(s)*. Verso.

Lincoln, B. (1999). *Theorizing myth: Narrative, ideology, and scholarship*. University of Chicago Press.

Livingstone, E. (2024, October 31). *'Rumble in the Jungle' inspired generations of boxers in Congo*. NPR. https://www.npr.org/2024/10/31/nx-s1-5170923/boxing-africa-congo-muhammad-ali-rumble-in-the-jungle-50th-anniversary

Mailer, N. (1975). *The fight*. Little, Brown and Company.

Malinowski, B. (1922). *Argonauts of the western Pacific: An account of native enterprise and adventure in the archipelagoes of Melanesian New Guinea*. Routledge & Kegan Paul.

Mann, M. (Director). (2001). *Ali* [Film]. Columbia Pictures; Peters Entertainment; Forward Pass; Overbrook Films.

Marca. (2024, October 31). *George Foreman recalls 50th anniversary of 'Rumble in the Jungle'*. MARCA. https://www.marca.com/en/boxing/2024/10/31/67238accca4741f41a8b458d.html

Marqusee, M. (1998). *Redemption song: Muhammad Ali and the spirit of the sixties*. Verso.

Miller, D. (1997). *The tao of Muhammad Ali*. Vintage.

Morse J. M. (2009). Mixing qualitative methods. *Qualitative Health Research, 19*(11), 1523–1524. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732309349360

Niemeyer, K., & Keightley, E. (2020). The commodification of time and memory: Online communities and the dynamics of commercially produced nostalgia. *New Media & Society, 22*(9), 1639–1662. https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444820914869

Nora, P. (1989). Between memory and history: Les lieux de mémoire. *Representations, 26*, 7–24. https://doi.org/10.2307/2928520

Olick, J. K. (2007). From usable pasts to the return of the repressed. *The Hedgehog Review, 9*(2), 19–32.

Pennington, R. (2024). Mourning the greatest: 'Unforgivably black' and peacefully Muslim Muhammad Ali. *Popular Communication, 22*(2), 80–94. https://doi.org/10.1080/15405702.2024.2343690

Pink, S. (2015). *Doing sensory ethnography* (2nd ed.). SAGE Publications. https://doi.org/10.4135/9781473917057

Republican Herald (2024, October 19). *Fighter's Heaven marks 50th anniversary of Rumble in the Jungle*. https://www.republicanherald.com/2024/10/19/fighters-heaven-marks-50th-anniversary-of-the-rumble-in-the-jungle/

Ritchie, N. (2022). *An analysis of the British press representation of the Partition of India*. [Doctoral dissertation, Loughborough University]. Loughborough University Research Repository. https://doi.org/10.26174/thesis.lboro.21581799.v1

Said, E. W. (1993). *Culture and imperialism*. Vintage.

Schwartz, B. (1991). Iconography and collective memory: Lincoln's image in the American mind. *The Sociological Quarterly, 32*(3), 301–319. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1533-8525.1991.tb00161.x

Skey, M. (2023). Sportswashing: Media headline or analytic concept? *International Review for the Sociology of Sport, 58*(5), 749–764. https://doi.org/10.1177/10126902221136086

Smith, J. (2017). Remembering Muhammad Ali: Myths, memory and history. *Reviews in American History, 45*(1), 177–188. https://doi.org/10.1353/rah.2017.0025

Wacquant, L. J. (2004). *Body & soul: Notebooks of an apprentice boxer*. Oxford University Press. https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780195168358.001.0001

Wheaton, B. (2002). Babes on the beach, women in the surf. In A. Tomlinson & J. Sugden (Eds.) *Power games: A critical sociology of sport* (pp. 240–66). Routledge.

Woodward, K. (2008). Hanging out and hanging about: Insider/outsider research in the sport of boxing. *Ethnography, 9*(4), 536–560. https://doi.org/10.1177/1466138108096991

Woodward, K. (2011). The culture of boxing: sensation and affect. *Sport in History, 31*(4), 487–503. https://doi.org/10.1080/17460263.2011.650371

Zelizer, B. (2008). Why memory's work on journalism does not reflect journalism's work on memory. *Memory Studies, 1*(1), 79–87. https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698007083891

Zelizer, B., & Tenenboim-Weinblatt, K. (2014). Journalism's memory work. In B. Zelizer & K. Tenenboim-Weinblatt (Eds.), *Journalism and memory* (pp. 1–14). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137263940_1

MARTIAL ARTS STUDIES

ABOUT THE JOURNAL

Martial Arts Studies is the official journal of the Martial Arts Studies Association. Visit https://www.martialartsstudies.org/ to learn more about the Association, including conference details, publications, and memberships.

Martial Arts Studies is an open access journal, which means that all content is available without charge to the user or his/her institution. You are allowed to read, download, copy, distribute, print, search, or link to the full texts of the articles in this journal without asking prior permission from either the publisher or the author.

ISSN: 2057-5696



The journal is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License.

Original copyright remains with the contributing author and a citation should be made when the article is quoted, used or referred to in another work.



Martial Arts Studies is an imprint of Cardiff University Press, an innovative open-access publisher of academic research, where 'open-access' means free for both readers and writers.
cardiffuniversitypress.org

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Peter J. Katz	*University Hospitals & Case Western Reserve University*

EDITORS

Emily Dobrich	*Western University & University of Toronto*
Xiujie Ma	*Chengdu Sport University*
Martin J. Meyer	*University of Bayreuth*
Wriddhibrata Saha	*Shiv Nadar University*
Thabata Telles	*University of Maia & Polytechnic Institute of Maia*
Luke White	*Middlesex University*

EDITORIAL ASSISTANT

Jiongyan Huang	*Cardiff University*

FOUNDING EDITORS

Paul Bowman	*Cardiff University*
Benjamin N. Judkins	*Cornell University*

EDITORIAL ADVISORY PANEL

Oleg Benesch	*University of York*
Stephen Chan	*SOAS University of London*
Greg Downey	*Macquarie University*
D.S. Farrer	*University of Guam*
Adam Frank	*University of Central Arkansas*
Thomas A. Green	*Texas A&M University*
T. J. Hinrichs	*Cornell University*
Leon Hunt	*Brunel University of London*
Felipe P. Jocano Jr	*University of the Philippines*
Gina Marchetti	*Hong Kong University*
Meaghan Morris	*The University of Sydney*
Daniel Mroz	*University of Ottawa*
Meir Shahar	*Tel Aviv University*
Dale Spencer	*Carleton University*
Douglas Wile	*Alverno College*