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The violence in boxing

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Summary

Violence has many faces. It may express itself in a morally justified and socially accepted action. However, in a situation when it serves destruction or represents the civilisation of death, it becomes morally reprehensible and is contested as such. Examples of it are popularised in media, mainly TV, in scenes of violence and cruelty (mainly for commercial reasons) and participation in gladiatorial shows, where the contestants risk life and health and the spectators satisfy their primitive instincts.

The article is focused mainly on the cultural phenomenon of boxing and other similar combat sports and they reflect on the show of violence. It analyses the problem of aggression as a source of violence; the presence of brutality and violence in mass and sport culture, and presents relations of professional boxing to the contemporary gladiatorship. Apart from the issues of boxing and boxers' ethics, the cases of extraordinary Polish professional boxers have been presented. Martial arts (e.g. karate) have been compared with contact combat sports – boxing and kick-boxing. This comparison indicates the unquestionable superiority of the noble, traditional ways. The far-Eastern martial arts, representing the way of non-aggression and overcoming one's own weaknesses, counteract the cult of force and violence.

Key words:

Mass culture • Violence • Boxing • Gladiatorship • Ethics

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INTRODUCTION

The violence has various faces. It may manifest itself in the actions justified by war, police's reactions to crime, self-defence against the evil, or other forms of activity morally justified and socially accepted. However, in a situation when it serves destruction (using the terminology suggested by E. Fromm) or represents the civilisation of death (as stated by John Paul II), it is morally reprehensible and contested by moral authorities. Examples here may be 1) killing the weakest (abortion, euthanasia) in the name of falsely perceived freedom, egoism or other "human rights"; 2) popularising violence and cruelty by media (mainly for commercial reasons); 3) participation in "gladiatorial shows", where the contestants risk their lives and health and the audience satisfy their primitive instincts; 4) "the right of the fist" in the criminal and hooligan circles.

The paper concentrates mainly on the cultural phenomenon of boxing and similar combat sports, as well as on the spectacle of violence. This concerns the violence in media and the fights of contemporary gladiators.

Aggression as the source of violence

Biologically oriented researchers (evolutionists, ethologists, behaviourists, geneticists and bio-sociologists) often look for the reasons for aggression in "human nature" by drawing conclusions from research on fish, birds, rats, dogs or monkeys. Are such distant analogies really justified? Genetically conditioned principle of maximising the Darwin's fitness, connected with passion, egoism, nature, animal element and the body, is contrasted with the mind, altruism, culture, the divine element and the soul within the religious and philosophical systems, respectively.

Fromm [21] attempted at connecting contradictory points of view by saying that *«it is biologically necessary so that the male had the ability to act forward and overcome obstacles. However, these qualities alone do not mean hostile or offensive behaviour, this is assertive aggression. The fact that male aggression is radically different from destruction and cruelty is confirmed by the lack of existence of any evidence which may lead to the conclusion that women are less destructive and cruel than men»* ([21] p. 112). Thus, it is not true that sex conditions hostile aggressiveness. Capra [6] adds that *«Excessive aggressiveness, rivalry and destructive behaviour are characteristic only for the human kind; these qualities should rather be viewed in the categories of*

cultural values and they should not be pseudo-scientifically 'explained' as phenomena said to have their roots in the nature» ([6], p.383). Understanding the world in the categories of conflict and fight appears contemporarily in social sciences, as a conflict in the social sphere or as more or less precise understanding of fight [60]. In the theory of the conflict, crucial for combat sports, one should take into consideration not the 'fight instinct' which was indicated by combat sports specialists (especially in sports like boxing or kick-boxing) but rather the "archetype of a warrior" – the psycho-cultural factor. Apart from the conscious reasons for practicing martial arts and combat sports, there may be unconscious reasons associated with the archetypal heritage of culture. The role of a warrior may be one of the hidden needs. Nowadays, at the time of fighting feminism, boxing women joined the community of boxers which might suggest overtaking the traditionally male role of a warrior (cf. [41,13]).

A success in certain combat sports may be conditioned by having proper potential of aggression which makes boys of the black race better candidates ([42], p. 351) for e.g. boxing. According to J. Dyduch (7 dan in karate), factors of the social background (social, economic, historical) are more important here. He stated in an interview for the *Karate KungFu*: *«...A great will for victory and wonderful skills are without a doubt characteristic as well for the Japanese, English or Dutch. The Americans are very well trained, militant, and especially motivated but they lack in natural impulses which result from e.g. difficult life experiences that shared the inhabitants of Central or Eastern Europe. It can be seen in the fight for victory when you have to be determined and fight to the end despite the power of the opponent»* [18]. The representatives of the 'replete' western societies are not very militant. In the contact sports, Arabs usually fight in the colours of France, Germans are represented by Turks, and Americans by the Black people.

It is worth noticing the influence of combat sports presented on TV programmes on the perception, interpretation and acceptance of behaving in an aggressive manner. *«If the aggressive model had been rewarded for its aggressive behaviour, the kids who watched it would have been more aggressive later on than the kids who had witnessed the model being punished for its aggressive behaviour»* ([2], p.339). Increasingly frequently the researchers blame television most for the aggression and brutality of children [57,45,33]. Commercial movies use combat sports and martial arts which are presented most frequently in a brutalised version and in isolation from their



ethics in specific violent films [24,49]. Moreover, the techniques of Far-Eastern martial arts are included into the fight scenes in various action films as a kind of ‘ornament’ which attracts viewers. It is worth noticing once again that frequent watching films full of violence or combat sports (especially the full-contact type) *«in a way, teaches aggressive behaviour resulting in the fact that a human reaches for them more willingly in everyday life. Watching violent scenes causes indifference to such stimuli and in result one accepts violence as something normal and thus, he justifies using it»* [57].

Force and violence in mass culture

Although the non-violence idea is widely circulating, the cult of force and violence is being promoted in the contemporary mass culture. “The cult of violence” concerns especially rivalry combat sports and certain team games but it is present in the whole consumer-oriented, strongly commercialised mass culture. The cult of violence, fight and victory is a sign of primitive egoistic understanding of competition and rivalry or an effect of orientation towards the result (in politics, business or sport).

The American director Jim Jarmusch [28] stated that the USA are *«a country built thanks to violence, blood and destruction of the natives...»*. Indeed, a pistol and western movie became significant motives of self-identification of the USA and the Americans. “The law of the fist” or “law of the gun”, and “an eye for an eye”, contributed to the fame of such Hollywood heroes as Charles Bronson (“The Avenger”) or Clint Eastwood (“Dirty Harry”). Films full of violence are present not only in the American cinema and on TV but, in effect of globalisation and Americanisation of mass culture, all over the world [11,12].

Media, and especially television, significantly influence the shape of today’s culture. The TV heroes are perceived as immortal mythical figures. What kind of message is passed and promoted in this way? The fact that young people frequently watch scenes of physical violence on TV is deeply disturbing; similarly, an early contact with violence is particularly dangerous for the development of personality. In the USA a young TV viewer will see on average 200 000 acts of violence, including 16 to 40 thousand murders, until the age of 18. In this country, in the post-television generation, in 1965-1990 there was a significant increase (fourfold in case of homicide) in crime. The UNESCO research from 1998 confirmed that the world-spreading violence feeds itself with violence from the media. The fact that as many as 43% of violent scenes in films and TV programmes

are shown in a humorous way, thus being trivialised, is very dangerous. On the children programmes it happens in 76% of cases [33].

Probably the violence in the sphere of mass culture is a result and, at the same time one of the factors, of advancing brutalisation of culture, which would require a separate study. Brutalisation of many social areas and institutions also concerns children and school youth in a very painful way [27,55]. Are we not dealing here with regression to some new version of “the law of the jungle” for which the media give us proper patterns of behaviour?

D.F. Draeger [17] says that we are apt to agree with J.J. Rousseau that civilisation and war have a common origin. In Nietzsche’s writings the war is “a kind of dignifying experience for the society as a whole”, and A. Toynbee sees the acts of war as “direct causes” of actions aiming at the destruction of every civilisation. The fact that the fight brings certain specific satisfaction is crucial here. The man has always been a fighting creature involved in mutual destruction. If this desire for fight has its roots in the human nature, or is a result of civilisation, it still remains clear – in Draeger’s opinion – that fight constitutes the pattern of behaviour without which personal freedom would be impossible. Plinius the Older wrote that *«only the crying animal, the man is destined for a fight in life due to the nature of his being»*. Some consider human belligerence as an instinct which shall not be limited by cultural conditions. Others accept it as a result of environmental pressure which pushes people to conflicts. According to T. Hobbes, the social relations are the state of war. The fight is a manifestation of life and its beginnings lie lurking in every human being before they are awoken by the existing law ([17], pp.12-13).

The primitive warrior of the *homo sapiens* species continued the “fight for fire”, for the hunting areas, etc., lasting many centuries. The “fighting man” (Lat. *homo pugnans*) depended not only on physical strength but also used intelligence, physical fitness and technology (starting with primitive tools) which, by feedback, perfected his brain. A larger and more developed brain enabled human beings to better adapt to various geoclimatic conditions. The history of the man-warrior did not end when he stopped settling conflicts with the use of direct physical aggression. The warrior remained in the sphere of instinct, sub-consciousness and myth, as well as the pattern of the social role of a man or an Amazon-woman. Fight and violence are as old as the history of mankind and under certain conditions – socially acceptable and justified.

The question whether TV programmes cause aggression is very much up-to-date. Although the television itself has existed for a few dozen years, only recently its influence on the society has been seriously considered. At present, the TV broadcast has become the strongest medium gathering daily millions of viewers in front of TV sets. Not a small part of the broadcasting time is taken by boxing fights. Of all combat sports, boxing, especially in its professional form, heavy weight at best, is most willingly shown. The reason for this is quite obvious. What may cause greater viewers' interest than brutal, full of blood and violence show with an unknown ending? Despite the presence of referees and gloves everything may happen including the death of one of the contestants [29].

Nowadays, the access to sporting competition is facilitated by media, especially the TV. This common access to sport brings certain dangers. At present, the viewers are not only adults but also children, who are fascinated by patterns of aggression in a very particular way. Many sport events are full of it. Those include some team games and combat sports with boxing, which occupies a special place (cf. [53,54,10,26]).

Generally speaking, cognitive processes may be viewed as a regulator of aggressive behaviour. Only the watching aggression may influence the attitude of the observer and his aggressive behaviour. Here one may notice a phenomenon of certain "induction" of aggressive behaviour. It is necessary to emphasise the fact that the influence of the model is generalised. The observer does not repeat thoughtlessly the aggressive patterns of behaviour but extends them, creating new schemes of those patterns. Whether or not the presented process takes place, it is influenced by the consequences experienced by the model.

Violence in sport

The basis for the everlasting popularity of sports is the passion of human beings for checking own abilities in comparison with other people. It may be associated with the will to win, to dominate over others and to reach a better social position. Although the contemporary sport fulfils many praiseworthy and socially useful functions, one must never forget that it is based on the rivalry between contestants to a high degree. One should know that every kind of competition exists due to aggression to a smaller or greater degree. It is especially clear in case of sports with a direct confrontation of contestants. The existence of aggression in these cases is confirmed by numerous rules aiming at limiting its acts to a minimum.

Karolczak-Biernacka [32] tries to answer the question as «*to what degree does sport generate brutality?*» since e.g. in case of hand-to-hand combat sports "one may speak about a system of control to prevent such forms of behaviour from occurring". She gives, following W.R.Johnson, D.C.Hutton and G.B.Johnson, a set of characteristic qualities being a guarantee of success in sport: extreme aggression, uncontrolled emotions, high level of fear, high self-confidence, high level of aspirations, a strong need of achievements. Here one should distinguish between instrumental aggression and hostile aggression [31,32]. Of course, in certain sports such as archery or shooting, the way to success is a rigid control of emotions. However, in contact combat sports, aggressive contestants dominate and their aggressive behaviour (or generally – attitudes) are additionally strengthened by the applause of the coach and the audience, by the result of the competition and the notes of journalists, a passive behaviour being punished.

Combat sports, also those originating from the Far-East, draw attention by their spectacle and aesthetics, or they are a form of fulfilling certain psychological needs (of identification, projection, getting over, mythical ritual). The Olympic achievements of Waldemar Legień and Paweł Nastula encouraged many young boys to practice **judo**. Similarly, the earlier success of Marek Piotrowski in professional **kick-boxing**, resulted in growing popularity of this sport in Poland. The whole sporting (and not only) Poland was fascinated by Andrzej Gołota's fights, who competed with the Black champions of the fist on professional rings. Contemporary popularity of professional sports, the Olympics etc., shows the renaissance of interest in the tradition of European knights and other symptoms may confirm the constant need for the insight into the primeval source of the individual and collective imagination of the present-day man. The root for spiritual self-identification of our culture is the ancient warrior and the ethos of fight.

Connections of professional boxing

A few years ago the condition of Polish boxing could be described in the following way [58]: "*We share with the Germans one world class boxer – Dariusz Michalczewski. What our 'amateurs (getting more money for beating on the face in so-called extra-class than Drogosz, Pietrzykowski or Kulej used to get) showed in Perma was an argument supporting the idea of forbidding boxing. It was framed as a sport in order to improve the physical condition of gentlemen from the Islands over a hundred years ago. And it used to give a chance of social promo-*



tion for the 'sly fellows' from the city yards in the country on the Vistula river".

Almost all pathologies of contemporary sport are present in boxing. Those are in particular:

1) Illegal doping; 2) The pressure of result; 3) Commercialisation – sport becomes a merchandise; 4) Brutalisation of sport, hooligan-like behaviour of spectators; 5) Corruption; 6) Dehumanisation, depersonalisation – athletes become a merchandise; 7) Becoming political – sport as a tool of political fight; 8) Abandoning the fair play principles for the sake of pragmatism; 9) Racism; 10) Counter-examples of certain "champions", especially in professional sports; 11) Negative effects on health of taking up sport very early in life; 12) Frequent abuse of stimulants by athletes [12]. Fair play is replaced by something like professional ethics. Jerzy Kosiewicz, who wrote about the fair play principle, precisely explains [34]: «*In professional boxing the moral and ideological indications of institutions and people supporting this crucial for sport ethical principle are being ignored*».

Professional boxing emerged in symbiosis with the criminal world. The boys from the suburbs of e.g. New York, grew up in the streets «*practicing in robberies and assaults. At the same time many of those learned boxing in hundreds of boxing halls mainly because it would make it easier for them to work. The knowledge of the criminal world was closely connected with the knowledge of boxing. Both interacted, strengthened and impressed each other*» [38]. The famous boxer, Jake LaMotta, faced the Senat Kefauver's committee in 1953 and confessed that 5 years earlier he had surrendered the fight to B.Foks in order to get a chance to fight M.Cerdan for World championship. His connections with the mafia are one of the main threads of the biographical film "Raging Bull" with Robert de Niro. In 1970, another boxer, Sonny Liston, was murdered. He had an opinion of being "a man of the mafia" and he learned boxing in the street and in prison (where he was put for armed robbery) [38]. The first boxing organisation (International Boxing Council, IBC) was established by three "mobsters" who were put on trial in 1961 and one of them – F. Palermo – was sentenced to 15 years imprisonment.

«*The co-operation of famous Jack Dempsey, a folk hero of the 1930s, with the mafia, has not been made completely clear yet. Dempsey was accused of, together with Frank Sinatra (who knew all the mafia bosses),*

being a courier transporting large sums of money from and to Cuba» [38]. Despite that, an American professional boxing champion Jack Dempsey (1895-1983), was greatly respected in the USA. He did not leave sport – he worked as a referee, an expert, he ran a restaurant in New York. He was called the "Tiger", just like later Dariusz Michalczewski. Another professional champion, Ray Leonard, is doing well after having terminated his career. He does business and comments fights for TV networks. He left the ring because of a serious eye injury. Some special cases are boxers who are not associated with any scandals and preserve high level of culture. Te heavy-weight World champion Lennox Lewis (a college graduate) and Vladimir Klichko, having a Ph.D. degree in sport sciences (the University of Kiev), belong to this category [22].

Not all researchers agree whether boxing can be called a sport. The effects of boxing include 361 cases of death on the ring in 1945-1993, as well as brain, eye and mental damages, damages to the spectators of this brutal show (there is no evidence of injuries here), etc. The barbarian character of boxing and its connections with criminal organisations are indicated [54,38]. Should, therefore, boxing be forbidden? Many researchers give very critical evaluation and reach very radical conclusions [48,53,54]. Ludwig Prokop [53] asks for social acceptance and limits of medical tolerance for boxing, in particular for its professional form. He calls professional boxing "a deadly show". In 2001, as many as 11 boxers died on the ring and between 1942 and 2004 there were 347 casualties! [8]. Robert L.Simon [56] indicates the principle of hurting, present in boxing, which, according to the utilitarian philosophy of J.S.Mill, should be decisive as to whether this sport is moral and legal. From the point of view of his philosophy, one should minimise evil and avoid suffering. In turn, referring to personalism, Andrzej Pawłucki states "a sharp deficit of sense" in certain forms of sport – «*not all sports are axiomatically equal*». According to him, professionals of an extreme sport, including boxers, are called circus artists and representatives of lower culture. In his opinion, boxing is more a "gladiatorial show" than a sport¹.

Leniarski [37] perceives the king of contemporary professional boxing, Don King, as a comic figure created in a world of absurd and representing that reality. He quotes this 'king', "To be or not to be, as Macbeth said", «*Give me Gołota and I'll make Chopin of him*». King's empire used to have problems with authorities (FBI) due to connections with Italian

¹ From an interview during the symposium "Axiology of Sport", SALOS, Warsaw 13.10.2001

mafia for a long time [38]. Nevertheless, it is still working well and “champions of the fist” promoted by him make big money. King is not an exception in the boxing business – other promoters and organisers of professional boxing are also associated with corruption and cheats [23,38].

Various strange things also happen on the ring, especially in the heavy-weight category. The public *«do not necessarily know what is happening during the return fight between Lewis and Oliver McCall because somebody normal does not have to understand the ‘psycho’ (in addition probably ‘on drugs’). On 28th June the hit confrontation between Evander Holyfield and Mike Tyson happens but instead of the hit the front pages of newspapers are occupied by flying pieces of a bitten-off ear...»* [7]. Whitaker confesses: *«When you are 203 cm tall, you weigh 118 kilos and react to the nick ‘Rock’, you may have the personality of a child and in spite of that you terrify people with your appearance. But when such a boxer starts attacking like a raging bull then he not only frightens everybody around but he may destroy his opponents...»* [47]. The same boxer states directly [47]: *«Being aggressive improves my skills»*. What do well-known boxers say about boxing and other boxers? Before fights they often criticise their rivals and announce their destruction for marketing reasons (heating up the atmosphere). On other occasions it may be a matter of increasing self-confidence through criticism.

Twenty years ago the president of the Amateur International Boxing Association (AIBA), Donald F. Hull, evaluated the perspectives of this sport in the following way: *«At a certain point of time its existence was threatened as a result of controversial and hostile publications. We observed noticeable decrease in popularity of this sport among the youth of some countries but on the other hand we notice its considerable development in other countries, the increase in the number of AIBA members or boxers associated in many national federations»* [1]. Safety helmets were introduced and the rules of refereeing were changed.

Professors Emil Zhechev from Bulgaria and Anwar Chowdhry from Pakistan praise boxing due to the fact that they occupy important posts in AIBA (the presidents of referee committees of this organisation). In this perspective, boxing may be viewed as a masculine, educationally beneficial sport. A piece of work on morality of boxing was written by the graduate of the Catholic University in Lublin, priest Mirosław Mikulski, who is an unofficial chaplain of Polish boxing. Of course, amateur boxing differs significantly from the professional one.

One does not have to convince numerous fans about the value of boxing. For them “The Ring” magazine has been published since 1922. However, is there a transmission between generations about great values of this sport among the boxers themselves? Ronald Hearn, the son of famous Thomas ‘Hitman’ Hearn, admitted that *«my father didn’t want me to be a boxer. That’s why he didn’t show me the boxing technique. I had to watch how the champions stroke, I learned watching fights on TV»* [5].

Boxing and boxers’ ethics

Józef Lipiec presents boxing as a extreme situation in which not only the courage but also emotional sensitivity and responsibility for decisions made by the contestant are tested. The boxer is in the ring alone with his rival, suffers pain, risks his health [36]. Maybe taking up this hard and demanding, closer to being a gladiator’s than sport work, causes that some boxers do not sometimes cope with themselves (psycho-emotionally) and with life (with living in accordance to social norms).

Oliver McCall ended his sporting career on a compulsory rehabilitation as a drug addict. Similarly Pernell Whitaker, an unfulfilled star of American boxing has such problems. Davey Hilton, Canadian, was sentenced to 7 years imprisonment for sexual abuse of minor girls. Stevie Johnson has children with three women and is wanted for not paying alimony. A well-known boxing promoter, Bob Arum, was sentenced for paying the IBF bosses for placing his boxers on higher places in the ranking. Another promoter, Russell Pelz, is on trial with his former friend Bill Cayton about money from the sales of boxing films [4]. These are just a few examples.

Not only professional boxers and their promoters have sometimes difficulties with adjusting to customary and legal norms. Not so long ago a serious fight between two amateur representatives of Poland – K.Cieślak and R.Kaczor – took place, as informed by the Wirtualna Polska (Virtual Poland) website. Boxers are seldom “nice boys”. Probably the more excitable and aggressive ones take up boxing and that sport teaches them additionally to settle conflicts with the use of the fist.

On the other hand, a quasi-professional (“not fully amateur” or “not fully professional” sport is discussed, according to the terminology of Z.Krawczyk [35]), or professional boxing is a source of earnings – it is (in its professional version) a job enabling the boxer to make living for his family. This has been presented in a very suggestive way in a new film by



Ron Howard entitled *Cinderella Man*² [19]. In that film, the historical boxer, James Braddock, does not do boxing in order to build his sense of being a “macho”, giving way to his complexes or frustrations, but to support the existence of his poor family.

Michalczewski’s case

Darek Michalczewski was born in Gdansk on 5th May, 1968. As a young boxer he immigrated to Germany where he accepted citizenship. He was the World champion in 1994 – 2003. He fought for himself, for money, as a German. «*A boxer cannot be an angel and usually great champions are not ones also outside the ring*» [46]. Although Darek considers himself a Christian and a practicing Catholic, he did not keep himself apart from various earthly joys. He stated: «*I’m not a patriot. Perhaps for many people this doesn’t sound god but this is the truth. For me the most important thing is money and ... health*» [50]. So he fought for more and more money – from 500 to 5 million DEM. But in 2002 he announced that he would fight under the Polish flag and Polish anthem and he would like to be an example for Polish young people. Thus, there is no more “Tiger” but “Tygrys” (in Polish). Probably he made this decision because of the attitude of German spectators who never accepted him as their own (the star during fights with Rocchigniani and Hall). On the other hand, Polish fans were always faithful to him.

During the second fight with R.Hill (2002), Michalczewski proved that he was mature enough to be a patriot, that his character was steadfast as expected of a great warrior. The fight was very dramatic, like those in the Rocky movies, and the Polish boxer finished it with more bruises. It was then when the Swiss expert in boxing, kick-boxing and martial arts Saravuth Sek, claimed (a telephone call with the author on the next day after the fight) that Darek should end his career. However, Michalczewski did it quite late, in 2005, after having been knocked out in the fight with F.Tiozzo. Another great semi-heavy weight champion, the American Ray Leonard, apparently valued money more than fighting for the absolute championship in this category at the time when Michalczewski was invincible on the throne of the WBO. He demanded as much as \$ 25 million for the fight with Darek. Was he then afraid of a confrontation with the Polish boxer?

L.Lewis left boxing as an invincible champion. Others, like M. Tyson³, ended their careers after lost fights. Still others, like the former karate practitioner,

ninefold World champion in kick-boxing and professional boxer, Marek Piotrowski, despite suffering from Parkinson’s disease, remain in sport as instructors or activists. Also Darek Michalczewski stays in contact with sport as a businessman, TV commentator and patron of young talents.

Gołota’s case

Riddick Bowe, just like Mike Tyson, took part in robberies and thefts since he was a child growing up on the streets of Brownsville. Similarly, the opponent of both African-American boxers, Andrzej Gołota, had many problems with the prosecutor’s office. Probably he was also a “soldier” of the Pruszków gang⁴ for some time. As Leniarski indicates [38], present-day boxing is not ruled by mobsters but by promoters and “near the ring ordinary criminals appear”, who particularly like being photographed with the “champions of the fist”.

Andrzej Gołota was born on 5th January 1968, and grew up on the streets of Warsaw. He has been training boxing since 1981. He was a junior world champion (1986) and a bronze medal winner at the Olympics in Seoul (1988). Since 1992 he has been a professional, he trains and fights in the USA. There he has the opinion of a brutal, unfairly fighting “hope of the white” in heavy-weight category dominated by the Blacks.

What does Gołota say about Polish professional boxers? «*Michalczewski? In his weight there is nothing – no rivals, no money. The stories about his money are lies. (...) Saleta⁵ is more of a playboy. He is better at this because he doesn’t do very well at boxing (...) I haven’t seen ‘Diablo’ Włodarczyk with my own eyes. Sosnowski has some coaches from Russia or Ukraine and I have no idea what’s this about Bińkowski*» [25]. However, according to many commentators, Gołota won the drawn world championship fight with Chris Byrd (2004), as well as the next one with John Ruiz, which was evaluated by the referees the other way round. He fought with the best heavy-weight boxers of the world. Despite four fights for the title, he has not become the World champion in this category.

Karate or kick-boxing?

Karate appears to be the most interesting among combat sports which children would like to practice. In the second place there is **judo** (chosen especially by girls) and **boxing** (chosen almost exclusively by

² *Cinderella Man*, directed by Ron Howard, USA 2005, Forum Film.

³ Summer 2005, after the knock-out in the fight with Kelvin McBride from Ireland.

⁴ E.g. Gołota’s honour. Fakt, 2004, 92: 1; PAP, Boxing and law. Gołota on trial. Gazeta Wyborcza, 2003, 1:31.

⁵ A former professional heavy weight champion of Europe.

boys) [43]. In contrast to boxing, resulting from the cult of violence and winning, karate and martial arts introduce knightly culture with hierarchical structure of progress. The aim is the “way” of psycho-physical and moral self-perfection, the indications on this way are the authority of masters and rules of ethical codes. The general rule is to avoid fighting and using violence [3,13].

Two psychologists, Varrot and Rolland, from the *Centre Médical psychologique des Ulis* specialising in children’s and young people’s behaviour, give five reasons for practicing **martial arts or Far-Eastern combat sports** by children:

1. Transition from fiction to reality (“They become aware that they are not invincible”). Children at the age between four and six identify themselves every day with the heroes of cartoons or books. Thanks to the action of facing difficulties, they learn to make the step between what is “real” and what is “fiction”. They become aware that they cannot, any more, identify themselves with the hero who can conquer the world. *Superman* or *Ninja Kid* are invincible and immortal on TV or in books; thus, the youngest perceive that these figures do not exist in reality. A safe fall from the third floor is finally impossible when one feels the impetus of hitting from one’s own height. Practicing martial arts is an activity which limits child’s wild fantasy. It is especially important at the time of computer games [9]. Doing martial arts enables understanding the limits (possibilities) of the fight. By fighting with more experienced partners, the practitioners gain awareness that they are not invincible and safe from defeats. They also notice that in the street they may meet an opponent stronger than themselves.
2. The cross-generation transmission of rituals (“Attachment to roots and rituals”). In martial arts attachment to roots and rituals attracts many young people as well as adults. People search for identity, roots and symbols. Every martial art recognises its master and founder. It also orders respect for the passed rituals in its teachings. The *kata* practices (of technical forms) are connected with history. The youths are proud of the responsibility for the younger ones which they can be trusted with.
3. The background with principles (“Rituals which create restoration of time and values”). Practicing martial arts sets “points and borders”. The place and time of the practice, the hierarchy of degrees, the duty of bowing to one’s teachers and partners, the duty of doing exercise from the beginning to the end, are constant rules associated with this

kind of activity. The norms of behaviour require showing respect and good manners; the practice starts and finishes with bows. In martial arts clubs, gaining a degree expresses respect for rituals and emphasises effective progress. These notions are continuously accepted by the youths because while practicing martial arts the normative background and functioning values have been chosen by them (and to certain degree internalised).

4. The word of an adult (“The teacher is the example”). The teachers of martial arts are (or should be) competent teachers of physical education who are supposed to pass their mission; the teacher should help the young man find his own way of life. Sometimes the coach plays the role of the third adult in relation to the family circle (the mother and father) on a neutral ground and almost always remains an example, point of reference, a person constantly entrusted.
5. Aggression limited by rules. Combat sports express aggression within the frames of a certain convention. While crimes touch upon children more and more early, one may not claim that practicing martial arts is a wonder remedy for this form of expressing aggression. Nonetheless, performing martial arts enables meeting a person who influences behaviour in a positive way and develops the practitioners’ self-confidence, who gives an opportunity to learn skills, allowing to direct external aggression better [36,13].

The contemporary warrior is not necessarily a soldier or a representative of other military formations. Everybody becomes a warrior through mental **identification with a TV hero** and even more through active repetition of combat (or sublimed) forms of a martial art or through practice and participation in sport fight. It seems rather ridiculous to assign the “cult of violence” to the present-day ways of martial arts (Japanese *budō*), which might rather concern rivalry combat sports and certain team games. Martial arts reduce and sublime natural aggression [30] and, due to this, they are also called the non-aggressive ways. However, practicing **full-contact combat sports** may bring about a rise in the level of aggression in the practitioners [24,14,15].

Kick-boxing radically abandoned the specific philosophy and ceremonial of martial arts and has become a sport similar to Indo-Chinese forms of boxing but with rules close to American professional boxing (especially in the full-contact version). It emerged in the USA in 1970 for the sake of sporting confrontation of various forms of karate and other martial arts. Its main



(maybe the only) sense is to function as this specific form of confrontation. «*Out of misunderstanding the philosophical-ethical basics of karate, lack of patience and the apotheosis of the physical aspect of fight kick-boxing was born in the USA. And although the rules of sporting fight are very clear, the total abandoning of tradition and philosophy made this form of physical activity rather shallow, limited to the dimension of physical confrontation*» ([51], p.43). Only the pre-forms of kick-boxing originating from South-Eastern Asia (e.g. *muai thai*), containing spiritual background and cultural context, remain martial arts. In contrast, the American kick-boxing originating from professional *full-contact* karate, is exclusively a sport related to boxing.

Karate and other Far-Eastern martial arts may be used as a way for reducing the juvenile aggression and for counteracting crimes. Thus, they are recommended from the educational point of view, and because of their application to pathology prevention and rehabilitation [44].

Gladiators of the 21st century

The contestants of the rings question the real value of *budōka* practising traditional martial arts in contact confrontation. They are not interested in moral or spiritual development or in other values of those traditions. Above all, they want to be able to fight effectively and win. In effect, a strictly sporting or rather more gladiatorial *Mix Martial Arts* (MMA), combines various martial arts and combat sports like the above-mentioned *kick-boxing* (combining selected techniques of Far-Eastern martial arts with boxing) or the “Brazilian jujitsu” (combination of elements of *jūjitsu* and wrestling).

The show of fights without rules has been legalised to a certain degree, especially in Brazil, the USA and Japan, in form of professional tournaments (*ultimate fighting* or *vale tudo*). In this vulgarised form, which can hardly be called sport, such “heroes” as “Ken Shemrock 100-kilogram, stuffed with steroids Ken...” [59] fight in cages for money.

This tradition comes from ancient arenas. The European *pankration*, born in ancient Greece as the most versatile form of unarmed combat – often for life or death ([52], pp.80-91), was a form of sport fighting without rules. Dolin and Popow [16] claim that the Chinese *kempo* (Jap. *kenpō*) comes from *pankration*.

At present, *pankration* has been reborn in Japan as one of methods of “ruleless” fighting referring directly to Roman gladiators. The serial neogladiator tournament in Tokyo has been called *Colloseum* [59] with a sense of nostalgia. Even ancient Greeks, who fought to honour their gods, did not treat their skills as anything more than craftsmanship.

As James Dully said, «... *commercial films are in many cases a direct image of the pathology of life (...)* According to professor James Kock, a sociologist and psychiatrist from the University of Columbia, *this tendency to glorify force and violence results from lowering the degree of sensitivity of the contemporary man. As he is not capable of living with the society in a harmonious way, of creating so-called higher feelings inside many people escape into the world of brutality and finds pleasure in experiencing it by means of movies or live performances (...)* Many far-eastern martial arts practitioners take part in illegal duels. They are most frequently people practicing in “wild” clubs being protected by gangs ...» [40].

Some boxing and kick-boxing clubs, also in Poland, prepare for the illegal hand-to-hand fights. And here the boxing, body-building, security and gangsters’ environments overlap.

CONCLUSIONS

The evaluation of combat sports, excluding even the set of pathologies tormenting the whole contemporary commercialised sport, must remain ambiguous.

The cultural phenomenon of boxing, and the popularity of similar contact combat sports or the gladiator-like forms of the brutal fighting show, result from low instincts of their spectators. Additionally, it is strengthened by a generally low level of contents of the mass-culture with frequent shows of violence which seem to generate that kind of needs.

On the other hand, the same archetype of a warrior may lead to taking up the ethos of non-aggressive way, as the Japanese term *budō* may be translated. Thus, martial arts in their sublimed version, may constitute a sort of a vehicle for spiritual development and self-realisation. However, professional boxing and gladiators – derivatives of the violence – enable the contestants to make living for themselves and their families, while they risk their health or even life.

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