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Social and cultural anthropology

Standard level

Paper 1

9 May 2025

Zone A afternoon | Zone B afternoon | Zone C afternoon

1 hour 30 minutes

Instructions to candidates

- Do not open this examination paper until instructed to do so.
- Read the passage and answer questions 1 and 2. Choose either question 3 or 4. Answer question 5.
- The maximum mark for this examination paper is **[30 marks]**.

Read the passage.

Passage adapted from Hopkinson, L., 2022. Only one Mayweather: a critique of hope from the hopeful. *J R Anthropol Inst*, 28, pp.725–745.

During ethnographic fieldwork in Ghana (2014–2016), I trained as a boxer, living alongside gym-mates as they developed their careers. I spent countless hours discussing dreams, aspirations, and the challenges of everyday life with my interlocutors.

5 Abraham is a talented boxer who planned to build up a winning record, fight abroad, win world titles, and become wealthy through boxing: a common aspiration for Ghanaian professional boxers. Despite his ambitions, Abraham repeatedly refused lucrative, high-profile fights abroad. Why turn down such opportunities?

10 Ghanaian boxers encounter racialized structural inequalities as a cheap source of expendable labour from the Global South. As they realize this, boxers reshape their understandings of success. Despite their critical perspective, boxers and coaches maintain hopes of transcending the industry’s prejudices and realizing grand ambitions.

15 Drawing on Marxist understandings of ideology as a dominant set of ideas that support social structures by obscuring relations of subordination, boxers recognize what I call the ideological function of hope: the role hope plays in encouraging their necessary participation in an exploitative industry.

In Ghana, boxing is associated with the Ga people. My interlocutors described the Ga aptitude for boxing as continuous with Asafo Atwele: a combative practice prior to colonization that was central to male social inclusion in Ga society. Though British colonial authorities banned Asafo Atwele, boxers still see themselves as heirs to this tradition, rooted in pre-colonial warrior masculinity.

20 Boxing is also associated with a history of political agency. Older ex-boxers remember seeing Roy Ankrah, the first Ghanaian to win a British Empire title in 1951, beating their “colonial masters”. These intersecting histories of continuity with colonial resistance, ethnic sovereignty, and success in a global industry support contemporary boxers’ hopes for a prosperous future.

25 In boxing, for every winner there must be a loser. Professional boxers who contest world titles must have records of many more wins than losses. Producing one champion requires the labour of many more losers. Ghanaians’ assumed “toughness” and “durability” fit them well for the role of entertaining crowds. However, in the transnational industry, these qualities position Ghanaians as valuable opponents to be beaten, rather than future champions. Reflecting on his decision to refuse a title fight in London, Abraham explained:

30 My opponent was a famous North American promoter’s boy. So how can I win? If it is your boxer fighting, you [the promoter] have to make sure he wins. If I go, they cannot let me win.

35 Other Ghanaian boxers will knowingly contest unevenly matched fights. Despite recognizing these disadvantages, financial incentives make fights abroad difficult to refuse. The boxing industry promises great success and gives a false sense of equality of opportunity. Ghanaian boxers are offered fights at short notice, arrive poorly prepared or are subject to unfair scoring.

The industry extracts value from Ghanaian boxers, using their labour in losing to produce value elsewhere: to generate “successful boxers” from the Global North. Here, boxers’ subordination is a consequence not of exclusion from global flows but of inclusion on unequal terms, as is typical of post-colonial, neoliberal forms of social control.

40 Osman, a coach, explained:

If you go to the UK and you fight well, even if you lose, they will like you, and give you another fight. Samuel took a fight in the UK and fought hard; the fans enjoyed him. He lost, and they paid him £10,000. Now he walks around wearing nice clothes because of his performance.

45 Osman praises Samuel’s understanding of the “losing” role as a route to material wealth, global mobility, and gendered respect. As a “tough Ghanaian”, Samuel is taking responsibility for the benefits of a lucrative fight abroad, rather than being used by the industry.

Abraham is critical of the role that false hopes play in perpetuating industry inequalities. Yet he believes that he can transcend the industry’s exploitative practices and realize

50 championship dreams.

Being a “tough Ghanaian” boxer is an ambivalent experience. It reveals the sport’s systemic inequality and racism while also facilitating opportunities for prosperity that are difficult to refuse. The attributes that encourage boxers’ hopes in Ghana make them willing to take fights abroad that systematically disadvantage them. Boxers’ choices involve a conscious, critical engagement with

55 the racialized commodification of their bodies and labour.

Answer question 1 **and** question 2.

1. Define the term **agency** and describe how it can be understood and applied in the context of the passage. [4]
2. Analyse the ethnographic data presented in the passage using the concept of **identity**. [6]

Answer **either** question 3 **or** question 4.

3. Compare and contrast the ways in which the key concept of **power** or **belief and knowledge** is evident in this passage with how it is evident in **one** other ethnographic example you have studied. [10]

OR

4. Compare and contrast the approaches to research adopted by the anthropologist in this passage to the approaches to research used by **one** other anthropologist you have studied. Make reference to concepts and ethnographic material in your answer. [10]

Answer question 5.

5. How are we the same and different from each other? Discuss with reference to **at least two** sources of ethnographic material and examples from the passage. [10]
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References:

Hopkinson, L., 2022. Only one Mayweather: a critique of hope from the hopeful. *J R Anthropol Inst*, 28, pp. 725–745. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9655.13762>. Open access. Source adapted.