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Traveller, Boxer and Fascist: The Identities of Joe Beckett

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Doctor in Philosophy

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In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, Joe Beckett carved his boxing career. Whilst there were many pugilists that represented Britain and Europe in the heavyweight championship title bouts during this era, Beckett’s identity was unique. Born into a travelling Showperson family and boxing in the fairground booths from a young age, he was discovered by his long term manager in his late teens and catapulted into professional fighting. However, Beckett’s remarkable Traveller and boxing career was not the only exceptional aspect of his life: his prominent involvement with the British Union of Fascists in the late 1930s ensured his detention under the British government’s Regulation 18b in 1940. Beckett’s life will be put into the wider context of British social, political and cultural history between 1850 to 1965. This study, of a traveller, his career as a professional boxer and British fascist is also explored through the concept of masculinity, adding further to the making and remaking of Beckett’s identity.

The thesis is divided into three main sections. First racial, ethnic and national identity; second, masculinity; and third fascism. Within these three sections themes including national identity, the representation of masculinity through professional boxing and the attraction of fascism are considered. By analysing sources in the private realm and imagery such as family photographs, media pictures, cigarette cards and postcards alongside state and public archives, the thesis highlights the importance of Beckett’s persona utilising historical, anthropological and sociological approaches. Within the chapters a largely chronological approach is adopted primarily due to the progression of life story. This study especially considers the concepts of
‘Britishness’ in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in relation to Beckett. Themes such as race, ‘whiteness’ and wider minority/majority relation are considered throughout, exploring also the relationship between patriotism and nationalism in the life and career of Joe Beckett.
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I also feel incredibly privileged to have had a grandmother, Margaret Fosberry, who also felt it was her duty to write her father’s story - Grandma, I hope I did you proud.

A very special thank you to Tony Kushner who has provided me with opportunities throughout the whole of my academic career at the University of Southampton. Without Tony this Ph.D. would not have been possible. His endless patience, straight forward feedback, constant support and inspiring knowledge has given me the determination to see this dream to the end – I will be forever grateful.

A simple thank you barely seems enough for my mum Jane Lewis. Your unconditional love was and is always there. Without your conviction in my ability to write this thesis, I would not have finished.

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Appreciation also goes to my boys, Stanley and Joseph, who have sacrificed time that they could have spent with me on the beach, picnicking, or just watching TV. I love you more than you can possibly know.

Finally, my greatest thanks must be reserved for Anthony. His absolute belief in me, along with his wisdom, support and unwavering love which constantly provided me with the energy to keep going (along with the endless supply of Liberty notebooks). You are my hero, always have been and always will be.
For Dad – I miss you every day.
### Acronyms and Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acronym</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABA</td>
<td>Army Boxing Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBBC</td>
<td>British Boxing Board of Control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBC</td>
<td>British Broadcasting Corporation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BBS</td>
<td>British Broadcasting Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BUF</td>
<td>British Union of Fascists</td>
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<tr>
<td>EBU</td>
<td>European Boxing Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FUBW</td>
<td>Fascist Union of British Workers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GTAA</td>
<td>Gypsy and Traveller Accommodation Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IBA</td>
<td>Irish Boxing Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IBF</td>
<td>International Boxing Federation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IBO</td>
<td>International Boxing Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>IFL</td>
<td>Imperial Fascist League</td>
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<tr>
<td>IRA</td>
<td>Irish Republican Army</td>
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<tr>
<td>IRL</td>
<td>Immigration Restriction League</td>
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<tr>
<td>ISBA</td>
<td>Imperial Service Boxing Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MMA</td>
<td>Mixed Martial Arts</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSC</td>
<td>National Sporting Club</td>
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<tr>
<td>NUSEC</td>
<td>National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship</td>
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<td>NUWSS</td>
<td>National Union of Suffrage Societies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPU</td>
<td>Peace Pledge Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>USBA</td>
<td>United States Boxing Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>VDA</td>
<td>Van Dwellers Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>WBA</td>
<td>World Boxing Association</td>
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<tr>
<td>WBC</td>
<td>World Boxing Championships</td>
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<td>WBO</td>
<td>World Boxing Organisation</td>
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Introduction

(1) Aims

This thesis will evaluate the life and identities of professional heavyweight champion Joe Beckett (1892? - 1964). Beckett’s boxing career spanned most of his adult life; firstly, in the fairground boxing booths and later, as a professional British heavyweight boxer which brought him both Commonwealth and national titles in spite of his Traveller heritage. Nevertheless, Beckett’s boxing career is not the only aspect of his life that is worthy of analysis. Later, Beckett was also an active member of the British Union of Fascists (BUF). He and his wife, Ruth, were interned on 22 June 1940 for their political activism. Indeed, analysing his membership in the BUF far right will provide a micro perspective on the dynamics of non-Jewish and Jewish relations in Britain. Beckett is an important figure in British history, but in spite of his unique career and national/international importance, this is the first study of Beckett’s life, including his sporting achievements and latterly his fascist political allegiance. The thesis will be a contribution to the study of British national identity, masculinity in sport, the national appeal of the British Union of Fascists, and the place of minorities in British society. It will do so by utilising approaches, specifically from history, sociology and anthropology. Most important will be an engagement with British cultural history from the periods between the mid-nineteenth century to 1964, when Beckett died. By taking the study back to earlier than Beckett lived, it will provide insight into the ethnic and racial minorities that migrated to Britain in the Victorian era, when his family migrated to Britain from Ireland. Whilst mass Irish migration to Britain peaked before Beckett was born, the wider perspective offered by broadening the period under review will further historical understanding of the complexities of national belonging in the nineteenth century. Moreover, the extended timeframe is necessary in order to investigate the rise of social Darwinism and concepts of a ‘perfect’ masculine physique that developed, which will be crucial to understanding Beckett. The evaluation of ‘Britishness’ is the forefront of the thesis and how it was constructed in relation to and by Beckett in regard to his traveller, boxing and fascist identities. These will
include a study on ‘whiteness’ and masculinity. Stuart Hall has asserted that identity is a construct relating to perceived common or shared characteristics with another person or group.\(^1\) It is a ‘construction, a process which is never completed - always ‘in process’ – it is not determined in the sense that it can be ‘won’ or ‘lost’, sustained or abandoned’.\(^2\) In this respect, Beckett’s identity is a great example of Hall’s thesis – it was in a constant state of adaptation.

This thesis will utilise the concept of ‘racialisation’ in order to understand the process of dealing with minorities.\(^3\) Race and ethnicity are sometimes used synonymously. However, it is important to clarify that race has a ‘biological’ component, whereas ethnicity defines perceived differences in terms of culture. Both terms are used to draw boundaries between hegemonic identities (British in this case) and socially constructed ‘otherness’. It remains that established boundaries are blurred and borders negotiated over time. Moreover, British identity is especially complex - for example, in The Lion and the Unicorn (1941), George Orwell argued that the country he wrote about so much has no less than five names, England, Britain, Great Britain, the British Isles and in very exalted moments Albion.

As will be demonstrated throughout the thesis, Britain believed itself superior to other countries, especially those within its empire. Orwell further asserted that ‘it is quite true that the so-called races of Britain feel themselves to be very different from one another’\(^4\). Indeed, the multi-faceted nature of British identity involves complexity that led to terms being used to cover everything ‘British’, for example, ‘Anglo-Irish’, ‘Anglo-Jew’ or ‘Anglo-Indian’. All denote a culmination of peoples integrated into Britain and refer to the complex relation to the group that formed the ‘Anglo’ hegemonic groups, as well as the community with perceived separate race or ethnicities.\(^5\) The need to distinguish, label and categorise identity is a continual process in British society. Therefore, identity is key to this thesis, in terms of the nation and Beckett’s personal identity, as well as ethnic and racial categorisation.

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\(^2\) Ibid.
\(^3\) John Solomos, Race and Racism in Britain (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003) provides a great understanding of racialisation in Britain.
Various terms will be used to describe racial, ethnic and national identities. It needs to be noted from the outset that most are problematic and contentious, often loaded with pejorative meanings in many contexts and are fluid, evolving and unstable. This thesis will also evaluate masculinity as a construct in relation to Beckett and other boxing professionals, further complementing the understanding of Britishness.

Analysing masculinity provides the sociological and anthropological element to the thesis. ‘Manliness’, as linked to identity, is present throughout all the chapters. However, due to the nature of Beckett’s boxing career and the strong presence of a desired masculine identity in fascist ideology, it is important to have a chapter especially dedicated to its evaluation within a national context. As with other sociological and anthropological factors, masculinity is fluid and has ever-changing characteristics. Using role theory, it will assess the social behaviours through a performance and, the reality that most people, for most of the time, behave in ways that are socially prescribed. The thesis will also evaluate the psycho-dynamic element of masculinity. In the 1960s, psychoanalysts argued that masculinity had a permanent defensive flavour and men appeared to be in a constant state of uncertainty about their gender. This perspective is particularly relevant to Beckett’s identity and furthermore, a reason why boxing was promoted heavily by the state. The discussion will argue theories of men and masculinity must reflect that masculinities are both ‘structured’ in and help maintain or reproduce gender dominance. Manliness will be analysed nationally and internationally (to incorporate other heavyweight boxing champions). Additionally, as Beckett’s identity was rooted in Southampton, evidence will be evaluated to reveal Beckett’s manliness in relation to the ‘local’, particularly in relation to Beckett’s membership to the Southampton branch of the BUF and his position within the town’s community. The thesis will analyse how the BUF was part of Beckett’s character, but furthermore, it will evaluate how the fascist party affected a local sense of belonging.

9 Ibid, p. 98.
Indeed, he had a highly visible profile as a member of the British Union of Fascist in and around Southampton and was not shy in displaying his loyalty to the party. Beckett also was openly outspoken about his fascist and anti-Semitic beliefs. To that end, researching why Beckett was attracted to the BUF provides an important element to the wider discussion. Beckett, an outsider, became heavily involved with what was a controversial political party, beyond the ‘mainstream’ and which attacked the marginal group, the Jews, which it regarded as fundamentally ‘alien’. This thesis provides valuable insight into minority-minority relations, as well as majority-minority interactions.

(2) Sources and Methods

Joe Beckett was illiterate. The challenge therefore, was locating sources that allowed his identities to be studied, which included how he perceived himself. Although the family archives consisted of his daughter’s memoirs and the biography of her father, as well as his wife’s newspaper collection which provided a snapshot of Beckett’s boxing career, how he perceived his own identity is challenging. Indeed, it was important to understand where Beckett placed himself in the narrative. The implications of Beckett’s illiteracy, whilst a challenge, were not insurmountable. It was crucial to the thesis that the study uncovered cultural meanings and the changes in individual and group experience within the cultural context. Brian Roberts has asserted that ‘the interrelation between individual and society and how broader perceptions and modes of thought are represented and monitored within the specific situation and outlook of individual and groups, should be apparent’.¹⁰ Therefore, this thesis will evaluate all spheres of Beckett relationships, both socially and as a father and husband, in order to reveal his character.

By using a combination of Beckett and his immediate family members’ and private archive, local material (as Beckett’s identity was situated in Southampton) and institutional records and those of the state, in the context

of methodology embedded both in an autobiographical and biographical studies, this thesis will provide a multi layered understanding of Beckett. In order to go beyond Beckett’s immediate celebrity and public identity, an understanding and implementation of the psychosocietal approach to writing biographies is necessary. The thesis took advantage of the researcher’s relationship to the subject in question, analysing sources, texts and evidence to enhance the study, not hinder it. Henning Salling Olesen has argued, it is important to not be a ‘disruptive element’, but rather, to utilise the researcher’s prior knowledge and understanding of the subject to improve the evaluation.\textsuperscript{11} This enabled the writer to ‘see through’ the distortions and reveal other explanations as to his life. As the discussion will be centred on Joe Beckett’s ‘inner’ life, the principal sources will be from the private family collection, consisting of diaries, memoirs and photographs. Essentially, the discourse captured within a diary holds the power to significantly contribute to authorised versions of experiences and identities, even to reveal what might be called randomness and arbitrariness in the constructions of Britishness.\textsuperscript{12} For example, did he want to adopt a ‘white’ identity? Private family photographs aided the evaluation of these questions.

Family photographic evidence captured his personality more so than the media and prematch imagery which was in the public domain. Through my family connections, an unrestricted access to personal family sources has enhanced the range of issues discussed throughout the thesis. Being a family member has the advantage of placing the biographer centre stage within the narrative.\textsuperscript{13} However, as discussed, there is a fine line as Leo Edel has stressed that the writer must ‘struggle constantly not to be taken over by their subjects, or to fall in love with them’ and ensure they keep a critical distance.\textsuperscript{14} Therefore, a comparison of family photographs alongside media images of his family will be examined to show variation and contrast. The private family images represent Beckett at ease and relaxed, whereas the


\textsuperscript{14} Leon Edel in Barbara Caine, \textit{Biography and History} (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 87.
press photographs of the family reveal a different identity; a ‘staged’ family entity. The family photograph displays the cohesion of the family and is an instrument of togetherness. It perpetuates familial myths while seeming merely to record actual moments in family history. The aim is to seek insights and new methods of conceptualising and understanding how Beckett’s personal and individual identity related to, intersected or are continuous with shared, collective, public forms of identity – and how this identity shaped the social body and social character. Family photographs are important in defining cultural history and ultimately offer greater understanding as to broader social and cultural identities. Ethnographic analysis of images offers a deeper analytical interpretation of the materials studied and considerate of how identities operate in a cultural context.

The approach to photographic evidence will be of a qualitative nature rather than quantitative. Research will explore the performance of the image, as well as the reason for its capture. For example, an American stamp featured an image of Beckett, which revealed his global significance. Moreover, why does media imagery capture focus on Beckett and his family at home surrounded by all grandchildren and his daughters? Were the press images presenting an identity to emphasise a particular historical, social and economic ‘reality’? What was the purpose of capturing images of Southampton landmarks and public spaces? It was more than likely to promote Beckett as a local celebrity, in a similar way to the media photographs that promoted commercial and professional boxing bouts.

The sources collected and the imagery gathered for the thesis provided a platform to analyse Beckett’s identities. The boxing agents had a responsibility to promote the professional bouts and with the use of staged photographs, boxers demonstrated their extensively trained figures. This thesis extends the research by using Beckett as a specific case study, with comparisons to other professional pugilists, by analysing images of Beckett.

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17 Kuhn, ‘Photography and cultural memory’, p. 284.
and their symbol of the era’s ‘ideal’ manliness. It will specifically assess the
prematch photographic representations of boxing personalities. This further
extends the area of research by having a particular emphasis on the
perfection of a pugilist’s form and its demonstration pre-bout. This inevitably
leads to an inquiry and comparison of photographs and imagery taken during
the fight. In order to interpret Beckett’s images throughout his career and
extend the contemporary area of enquiry, a contrast to other professional
fighters and their experiences within the ring was assessed.

Primary sources included much ephemera such as boxing
promotional material, cigarette cards and postcards, as well as magazines
and newspaper images that specifically targeted a male audience. Although
these images and texts proved vital in researching Beckett, they are
particularly relevant for the discussions in Chapter Two (Masculinity). Indeed,
it will be asserted through the exploration of this imagery that male
homosexual and homogeneous interactions facilitate the perpetuation of
hegemonic masculinity. The public facing photographs exemplified
Beckett’s consumer persona as heavyweight champion and the image that is
constructed with the national and empirical titles. These photographs will be
analysed to conceptualise Beckett’s public image, including how his image
was used to advertise boxing as a commercially successful sport. A key
attribute to Beckett’s identity was captured through images taken throughout
his professional boxing career. Understanding and interpreting the wealth of
imagery was paramount to the investigation. The imagery enriched the
discussion and the consideration of Beckett’s ethnic, racial and national
identity, his manliness and his fascist character, which is captured
throughout the entire thesis. Indeed, even the family photographs in the
biographical section of the introduction helped to situate Beckett character in
precise historical context.

These particular images were vital primary sources which enabled an
understanding of a boxer’s training programme in the analysed eras. This
inevitably leads to an inquiry and comparison of photographs and imagery
taken during the fight. Together with the family’s personal photographs of

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Beckett and material obtained via the internet, it facilitated and furthered evaluation of the development of Beckett’s masculinity through boxing. This study broadened the debate, in particular the dedication observed in the creation of a superior masculine physique, alongside the impact of the media’s representation of this form through photographs and other images, such as boxing memorabilia and ‘collectable’ imagery.

Through the vast array of images that represented Beckett across the period in question, from professional photographs, media representation obtained from sporting magazines, to photographs in national and international newspapers, collectable postcards and stamps, will permit an insight into his boxing career. The rich array represents Beckett’s celebrity sports status and demonstrates how globally his pugilistic reputation spanned. Additionally, the press photographs, cigarette cards and other boxing memorabilia offer insight into how the press and public interpreted Beckett’s ethnicity, more specifically his perceived ‘Irishness’. Such imagery forms a huge part of this thesis and without the vast collection of pictures, understanding Beckett and situating his position within British society would not have been possible. Indeed, although the large family archive added depth to Beckett’s private character, the collection of media imagery permitted insight into his public character. Similarly, in relation to Beckett’s British Union of Fascist identity, the private archive had limited insight to his fascist identity. Certainly, all the material in the personal files did not reveal the whole picture, therefore, the government files of Beckett and Ruth’s internment under Regulation 18b, were fundamental in understanding their experiences.

Their daughter Margaret Fosberry documented later in her life her parents’ involvement and their imprisonment, but her records were particularly partial and influenced by her parents’ innocence. Therefore, both Joe and Ruth Beckett’s MI5 and the Advisory Committee files were paramount to the discussion and understanding the level of the Becketts involvement in the BUF. These files held in the National Archive in Kew, along with the Joe Beckett collection and Southampton Constabulary records held in the Southampton City archives, combined with the family’s perception of internment, aided the discussion further. The MI5 and Advisory Committee
files explored both Beckett and his wife’s fascist identity. Additionally, the British Union of Fascist newspapers, *Action* and *Blackshirt* proved to be invaluable sources when questioning the attitudes associated with patriotism and identity. Beckett’s political ideals and the reasons for his internment are not discussed openly nor have they been recorded in any of the memoirs by his wife or his daughter, apart from the Becketts’ arrest and internment that were mentioned by Margaret, their daughter. She was fifteen when they were interned and her writing encouraged the reader to believe that they were innocent. However, the MI5 file had a different potential challenge, because the records described Beckett as an ‘enemy to the nation’ and relied on uncertain intelligence material. The Beckett archive held at Southampton City Archives is on the surface limited. Indeed, it consisted of a few letters handwritten by Ruth Beckett, his wife, who acted as Beckett’s personal aide. However, they are very informative and reveal wider themes. Above all, these primary sources permitted an insight into Beckett’s personal identity, along with the themes that are to be discussed. In order to provide wider elaboration on his British identity, a juxtaposition of Beckett’s sources and an array of historical, sociological, psychological and anthropological secondary materials will be applied to Beckett’s lifestory, in both a national and global context. This combination of both family’s personal records and official records, alongside the visual material, allows deep insights into Beckett’s life and its wider context.

To that end, an understanding of his public life – through performance – will be analysed in terms of the heroic status of his professional boxing career and the public scandal of his involvement with fascism, which led to internment. Beckett’s ‘iconic’ image was very much part of his identity in the public eye. But was this carried into the private sphere? Therefore, a combination of both public and primary evidence helps explore the role of myth in the construction and reconstruction of Joe Beckett.

Clarifying Beckett’s racial, ethnic and national identities is not an easy task. Scholars such as Vanessa Toulmin, for example, enhanced this area of research and have been invaluable to the study of Showpeople. Without a doubt, her personal and indepth knowledge of life as a Showperson is of great importance to this thesis. Toulmin outlined that each region in the
country would have had three or four main booths travelling with the fairs supported the Beckett family motives for a nomadic lifestyle. Similar to Beckett’s fascist identity, his Traveller heritage was not recorded, other than within his family’s personal memoirs, until his professional career. However, Toulmin’s research included a small section of Beckett’s childhood and boxing career which enabled a comparison with the primary sources and this thesis has utilised her research and extended the evaluation of Beckett’s occupation as a travelling Showman within this field. Equally, Lisa Scullion, Phillip Brown and Pat Niner’s investigation on accommodating Travelling Showpeople in England distinguished the different types of nomadic communities in England during Beckett’s lifetime. Of particular importance was their evaluation of the Showmen’s Guild and the emphasis of the self-sufficiency of the Travelling showpeople. It further demonstrated the relationship between the Showmen’s Guild and local authorities principally for the purpose of business. This thesis further accentuates the Scullion, Brown and Niner analysis by using Beckett as the case study and placing his nomadic identity in British cultural history. Also helpful is Sarah Holloway’s analysis of ‘otherness’ specifically in relation to ‘white’ rural residents and their perception of Gypsy- Travellers. She has enriched the field of research by highlighting the contemporary opinions of non-nomadic residents and their association with the Travellers who annually travel to Appleby for the horse fair. This in itself added a contemporary element to analysing Beckett’s British Traveller persona. Holloway raised the notions of ‘whiteness’ and ‘otherness’ and alongside Kalwant Bhopal and Martin Myers, aided my discussion regarding Beckett’s ‘insider’ and ‘outsider’ status. Bhopal and Myers asserted that the boundaries of whiteness are not simply constructed around skin colour but also include other considerations such as ethnicity

21 For example, Toulmin Pleasurelands: All the Fun of the Fair! (Sheffield & Hastings, East Sussex: National Fairground Archive at the University of Sheffield, in Association with Projection Box, 2003). Toulmin’s grew up with a travelling circus and her previous occupation before becoming a professor at the University of Sheffield and founder of the National Fairground Archive, was as a circus director and producer of performances.
24 Bhopal & Myers, Insiders, Outsiders and Others.
and background.25 This was essentially for placing Beckett within the hierarchies of British ‘whiteness’. However, very few scholars have focused on an individual case study of a travelling Showperson, particularly in regard to boxing booth occupations. Some academics have discussed Showpeople’s boxing booths, few have analysed the impact on national identity, ‘otherness’ or the transition from this ethnic minority into mainstream middle-class society. Additionally, a limited number of studies have concentrated on the roving boxing booth arenas and the champions who boxed at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the twentieth century. Here evaluation extends this examination further with detailed analyses of an individual who utilised his professional boxing championship titles to improve social status and later become a member of the British Union of Fascists.

Thus, Joe Beckett’s distinctive lifestory enhances Toulmin’s, Bhopal and Myers’ previous research. Many studies have determined that numerous professional boxers used the fairground boxing booths to help train for upcoming bouts, but few studies have been conducted on individuals who were born into the Showperson way of life and who later became a professional heavyweight champion during this era. Nevertheless, there have been several discussions that were related to boxers who were also considered ‘outsiders’ to mainstream British identity. Indeed, David Dee has explored how British Jews also had an interest in boxing, and outlines how Jews found their identities were shaped and reformed through boxing.26 Dee, alongside other academics, provides a comparison for Beckett’s ethnic identity against other British citizens whose ‘Britishness’ was not taken for granted.

‘Irishness’, as an identity, is also discussed in the thesis, in particular images associated with Beckett’s perceived Irish character. Michael Di Nie’s extensive study highlights how Irish identities were characterised by the English through images in periodicals such as Punch. Di Nie’s work is illuminating and his examination emphasised the English negative attitude

25 Bhopal & Myers, Insiders, Outsiders and Others, p. 90.
toward the Irish by analysing images from 1798 to 1882.\textsuperscript{27} This thesis, alongside Die Nie’s research, outlines the disparaging satirical imagery of Beckett’s professional boxing career and further raises the questions of how ‘Britishness’ was perceived. Furthermore, this inevitably raises issues as to who was considered to be ‘white’ during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Although there is a huge wealth of studies that relate to ‘whiteness’, few have been directed on the Travelling communities in Britain whereas a large number have been conducted on American social hierarchies - for example, both Alastair Bonnett and Richard Dyer assessed the racial representation of ‘white’ in the western media.\textsuperscript{28} Bonnett discussed the working class marginalisation from the white racial identity in Victorian Britain.\textsuperscript{29} However, in the late 1990s British ‘whiteness’ research was produced in great quantity. In particular, Roger Ballard and Brian Klug both challenged the 1991 Census and questioned the relationship of ‘ethnicity’ and what characteristics were needed to be considered ‘white’ in Britain during the 1990s.\textsuperscript{30} Together they emphasised the importance of the inclusion of the ethnic questions and the new dimension it offered in deciding how data associated with the new ethnic group variable can be interpreted.\textsuperscript{31} Klug furthered the discussion and developed concepts that highlighted the ‘privileged white’ box compared to the ‘other’ available ethnic options. Together the studies were informative and define the issues in modern day Britain and its concept of ‘Britishness’. Although both are contemporary studies, their approaches help contextualise Beckett’s identity and highlight attitudes of what was considered to be the right ‘white’ English/British citizen, as opposed to ‘others’ who were perceived as not quite the right ‘white’. All these studies relating to ‘whiteness’ or what ‘white is white’ were essential for understanding Beckett’s ‘outsider’ position in the British society. Indeed, the complexities of his multi-ethnic identity and the challenges he faced with a

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{31} Ballard, ‘Negotiating Race and Ethnicity’.
perceived Irish heritage and strong nomadic showman character are critical in this thesis.

The establishments and buildings which the professional matches were housed, along with the influence of National Sporting Club (NSC) committee and Lord Lonsdale also were highly influential on the success of professional pugilism and individual championship careers. Moreover, the club determined which boxers were permitted to professionally fight. Guy Deghy’s has contributed significantly to the area of research linked to the powerful NSC, particularly as the club’s official records (minutes from meetings and the like) were not available to the public. This area of study utilises Deghy’s analysis which is placed alongside the memoirs from the Fosberry family collection to understand Beckett’s place in the British boxing hierarchy.

Professional boxing not only raises questions about masculinity, but also the discussion with regard to the violence of boxing and public exhibitions of strength and the demonstration of desired masculinity traits. Kath Woodwood was greatly significant to this area of research. Her investigation facilitated the case study of Beckett’s part in the violence of professional pugilism and she suggested that:

> in boxing, celebrity is closely tied with losing as well as winning and the spectacle of violence that takes place in the ring. This relationship between winning and losing and between the beautiful and the broken body is crucial to the internal dialogues through which masculinities are forged.

This in turn, enabled insight into why the media mocked Beckett after his major loss against Carpentier. Lynda Nead has extended the evaluation of violence through photographic imagery and outlined the contrast of the beautifully cultivated bodies between the bloodied ugliness of the fight.

There exists a considerable body of literature that discusses violence in

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33 Ibid, p. 111.
boxing, as well as the manliness persona that is represented in the sport, but there is limited research available for the era analysed in the thesis. Therefore, this study systematically and theoretically studied images and reports of professional boxing bouts that not only related to Beckett, but furthermore, demonstrated a wider and even global display of violent masculinity in the name of sport. As important was the discussion of hegemonic masculinity, along evaluations of homosocial interaction. Here R.W Connell’s was fundamental to the discussion of boxing, particularly commercial pugilism, and the male role within the BUF.\(^{35}\)

With regard to Beckett’s political identity explored in Chapter Three, there were limited primary sources that related to Beckett’s membership of the British Union of Fascists. However, Tony Collins aided the connections between British masculinity and the BUF highlighting that boxing was an exalted sport within the party and Mosley himself was a schoolboy pugilist.\(^{36}\) Alongside Michael Spurr’s research, it has assisted the thesis in the debate about the importance of sport within the BUF.\(^{37}\) Clearly, evaluating the connection with sport, in particular boxing, with the British Union of Fascists needed to be stated as this was one of the attractions for Beckett. As well as whether the BUF obtained Beckett’s membership to use his sporting career to promote the party’s manliness ideals. This was especially so, as their goals were to create a British nation with men who were fit and strong. The British Union of Fascist’s ideology of what constituted a decent ‘English’ man was predicated on xenophobic, racist and anti-Semitic mentality. David Dee facilitated the discussion on the BUF’s mentality of the Jewish ‘hidden hand’ in boxing. Dee further asserted that just like other British minorities, the Jews were also attracted to boxing, but the British Union of Fascists proclaimed that Jews were financially controlling British boxing and dubbed this as their ‘hidden hand’.\(^{38}\) Dee’s evaluation also assisted the thesis and


research on other British minorities using the boxing occupation to aid their financial position, but also, just like Beckett, to climb the social ladder. He assessed Ted ‘Kid’ Lewis’ journey and career in professional boxing, and there are direct comparisons to Beckett’s and Lewis’ vocations. Dee’s work also contributed to the section within the chapter about horse racing and opened avenues of research that were previous unknown. Tony Kushner proved vital to the discussion regarding the BUF’s anti-Semitic ideology and its impact on the mass arrest of the radical right. Certainly, there is a certain historical evaluation and emphasis on masculinity within the British Union of Fascists, therefore, Julie Gottlieb also aided the enquiry in relation to Ruth Beckett. It was important in the thesis to address Ruth’s experience, especially as the couple were arrested together. In doing so, the study provided an evaluation of the feminine aspect of the British Union of Fascist membership. This also served the analysis on the couples’ involvement in the fascist organisation, which in turn opened the discussion of the involvement and its impact on the whole family.

Beckett never wrote an autobiography; therefore, it was important to include other peoples’ memoirs and accounts that related to his story. In particular, memoirs written by his professional boxing peers, accounts of fellow members of the British Union of Fascists and particularly with George Orwell’s accounts, provided an understanding of how British identity was constructed in this period. A combination of autobiographical theory along with the inclusion of other memoirs of the era was paramount to the discovery of the nature of Beckett’s identity. Autobiographical theory is fast developing. For example, the positing of Augustine’s Confessions as the first ‘true’ autobiography is completely different to George Orwell’s twentieth century

39 Dee, Sport and British Jewry: Integration, Ethnicity and Anti-Semitism 1890 – 1970, p. 166.
40 There are many works of Tony Kushner that have aided the development of this thesis. In regard to anti-Semitism, his Ph.D. on ‘British Anti-Semitism in the Second World War’, Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis Vol.1 & 2, The University of Sheffield, 1986 and The Persistence of Prejudice: Anti-Semitism in British Society during the Second World War (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press,1989) were pivotal to the investigation regarding Beckett’s anti-Semitic beliefs.
41 Although many of the British Union of Fascist texts referred to the British Union of Fascist members’ masculinity, few have addressed the female associates and their feminist display within the political party. Therefore, Julie. V. Gottlieb, Feminine Fascism: Women in Britain’s Fascist Movement, 1923 – 1945, (London & New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2000 aided the evaluation of Ruth Beckett’s fascist character.
42 There were many George Orwell books which contributed to the understanding of what constituted ‘Britishness’. Particularly, Orwell’s, The Road to Wigan Pier (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937) and The Lion and the Unicorn: Socialism and the England Genius (London: Penguin Group, 1982).
experiences of British social history.\textsuperscript{43} Additionally, it was imperative to the thesis that Beckett's daughter's memoirs were included in the discussion and without them this thesis would not have been possible. Indeed, Margaret Fosberry's autobiographical account of her father and mother are analysed throughout the thesis. Margaret's memoirs recount her part in Beckett's story. Memories such as her parent's detainment under Regulation 18b in April 1941 are invaluable. These include recollecting the moment when her parents were arrested, the consequences of what happened to the five children and her time living with her aunt Amy, Beckett's sister, and travelling with the fair and their sideshows for nine months around the southern counties. It proves a remarkable text and offers a further insight into the nomadic lifestyle and identity as seen by a teenage girl. Margaret also recollected the holidays that she took with her parents and siblings in their family caravan.\textsuperscript{44} Margaret's self-creation of her identity in Beckett's lifestory substantiates the image of her father's heroic identity. The autobiography permits an insight into the writer's own identity. To be precise, autobiography creates questions about self-identity, self-definition and self-deception, as the writer recounts their existence.\textsuperscript{45} It needs to be remembered in relation to Margaret's account that autobiographies do not always provide distance with regard to their story.\textsuperscript{46} Autobiographies require detachment with regard to themselves in the focus for the purpose of defending one's (or someone else's) reputation, or for self-aggrandisement.\textsuperscript{47} Margaret does not achieve, or even attempt, this distancing. Her memoirs are emotive with an insistence of her father's innocence in connection to his fascist ideals. Consequently, she has not engaged or demonstrated an interest in pursuit of the 'difficult' truths. In this sense, she worked to justify her own account of her and Beckett's self-worth.\textsuperscript{48} She has strained toward a completion of coherent expression of a small part of her life. Margaret attempts to persuade the reader of her father's honourable connection to the British Union of Fascists

\textsuperscript{44} Margaret Fosberry, 'Memoirs on Beckett's Boxing Career' – Jennie Lewis-Vidler's personal collection.
\textsuperscript{46} George Gusdorf, 'Scripture of Self' in Olney, \textit{Autobiography: Essays Theoretical and Critical}, p. 35.
\textsuperscript{47} Marcus, \textit{Autobiographical Discourses}, p. 157.
and the injustice of his internment. Autobiography is not simple repetition of the past as it was or was perceived to be, because recollection brings not the past itself but only the presence of a person in their personal lifestory. 49 However, the Fosberry memoir is crucial to this thesis. Without it, private knowledge of Beckett and his family would be missing. There is potential to misinterpret my grandmother’s papers, but careful consideration and impartial analytical research will be undertaken.

Other pugilists accounts of life as a professional sportsman helped an understanding of Beckett’s boxing career. For example, if masculinity is to be the demonstration, examples by heavyweight champions, such as Gunner Moir’s, The Complete Boxer (1930) will be considered. 50 He provided a systematic and detailed analysis for the arduous and rigorous training routine that was (and is) required for a pugilist, professional or otherwise. Moir’s comprehensive outline on the building of a boxer’s physique was set out in seven chapters, which included ‘A Boxer’s Early Training’ and ‘The Boxer’s Education’. This pamphlet along with the images published within the book, instructed amateur boxers in the development of the pugilistic training. This is turn was a vital primary source which enabled an understanding of a boxer’s training programme. Furthermore, in order to interpret Beckett’s images throughout his career and extend the contemporary area of enquiry, a contrast to other professional fighters and their experiences within the ring was assessed. As French, European heavyweight champion George Carpentier contributed enormously to Beckett’s career, positively but mostly negatively, an exploration of his self-titled biography written in 1958 proved extremely valuable, especially as this provided alternative insights into the two bouts with Beckett, which link with Beckett’s family’s personal documentation of the fights with Carpentier. 51 The tone of Carpentier’s published autobiography is arrogant, but there is a chapter dedicated to

51 Both of George Carpentier’s biographies were valuable sources for this thesis. George Carpentier, Translated by Edward Fitzgerald, Carpentier (London: The Sportsman Book Club, 1958) and My Fighting Life (London: Cassell and Company, Ltd, 1920).
Beckett. This source will provide valuable information toward the two European Boxing Union (EBU) titled contests.52

Another period of Beckett’s life that required other autobiographical accounts was his membership of BUF. Here, other British Union of Fascist members allow a piecing together of his experiences as a fascist, including life as a fully-fledged member and later his detention under Regulation 18b. Without doubt, it was imperative that Oswald Mosley’s biography was included within the research of Beckett. A true understanding of what it was to be a British Union of Fascist member was gained through evaluating Mosley’s writings.53 Indeed, his memoirs demonstrated the progressive racialisation of the party and its people and aided the understanding of Becketts’ state records and Southampton’s Constabulary reports. The level of dedication that the BUF members displayed to the party’s policies and beliefs, together with the loyalty to their leader was demonstrated through memoirs. For example, Richard Reynell Bellamy’s chronicle of life in Walton Prison in Liverpool and later Ascot detention camp was highly informative. Bellamy recorded the experience from the perspective of a BUF ‘insider’ which offered the opportunity to understand how the internees were treated and under what conditions they were kept.54 Fortunately, Bellamy also detailed an account of Beckett’s internment during the early days of the detention.

Historical biographies can promote a narrative in a coherent order: reading the sources is like puzzle building requiring a framework for analysis.55 The biographical sources available for Beckett, although ample, still have limitations. There are a variety of missing pieces and research needed to be extensive in order to ascertain as much of the story as was possible. Biographers should treat such sources—untruths and myths with caution as they need to be unpicked and the narration should cover the whole life.56 The biographical element not only required a biographer who

52 Carpentier, Carpentier, p. 116 – 121.
53 See Oswald Mosley’s, My Life (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd, 1968). Also, Mosley’s The Greater Britain and Tomorrow We Live were fundamental in understanding the leader’s desire for how his party was to be organised, orchestrated and executed.
engages with the subject, but someone who will write with distance from it. Although related to Beckett, I am sufficiently removed to investigate his identity and evaluate the sources without omitting or concealing important discussions relating to the thesis. It allows an anthropological gaze as both insider and outsider. Additionally, having unique access to otherwise unavailable private sources adds extra layers to this thesis.

Combined with Beckett’s family’s personal documentation of the matches with Carpentier, alongside blow-by-blow accounts in Lydia Monin’s about Tom Heeney, all extended the investigation within this thesis and consequently enhanced this area of research on the boxing side of this thesis. Monin’s account of New Zealand’s heavyweight champion Heeney’s professional boxing career proved particularly useful. Indeed, not only did it have detailed information of Beckett's experiences toward the end of his professional career, but furthermore, both he and Heeney were managed by the same boxing promoter, Bernard Mortimer. Therefore, the category of ‘experience’, especially shared experiences, has played a large part in biographical criticism. Experience, in this sense, is distinct from the mere registration of ‘facts’. Consequently, it was equally important to include another boxer who had an ‘ethnic’ heritage. Michael Herber’s detailed account of black boxer Len Johnson’s professional pugilist career is such an example. This biography was valuable and provided not only an account of another twentieth century boxer, but additionally because Johnson was a communist, it provided a different perspective.

Biographical (and autobiographical) study has evolved from eighteenth and nineteenth century self-reflection and retelling of life story, to a more modern expression of extension and conception creating threads in history and ‘connectedness of life’. Biography is invoked, in this context, as a means to understanding the sense in which parts of life are linked to a whole. Today, biography is viewed as having a more difficult and demanding relationship to history writing, it requires a ‘double focus’: the

57 Lydia Monin, _From Poverty to Broadway: The Story of Tom Heeney_ (Auckland, New Zealand, 2008).
58 Marcus, _Auto/biographical Discourses_, p. 137.
60 Marcus, _Auto/biographical Discourses_, p. 138.
61 Ibid, p. 139.
difficulty in maintaining a focus on both the individual and on ‘contemporary’ history. It is crucial to keep Beckett at the centre of the evaluation, but this will not be a narrow study. The key themes will allow breadth of wider contexts, but will return always to the original subject matter. To that end, in order to understand the themes within the chapter of this thesis, it is important now to provide a brief biography of Beckett.

(3) Biography

Joe Beckett was a Hampshire ‘hog’, born and bred, and he was proud of it. No matter how far he roamed, touring with the southern county fairs, he was always pleased to be classed as a local man, and there were many in Hampshire who remember Beckett with pride. In 1995, Doreen Massey in her article ‘Places and their Pasts’ asserted that places could be understood as articulations of their social relationships and links that are made in the construction of notions of identity. Therefore, Beckett was considered a homegrown local hero who would always return to Southampton in between fights and train for future matches on Southampton Common and in the gym behind the Avenue’s Cowherd pub or at the YMCA Gymnasium on Ogle Road. He never forgot his roots and could regularly be seen jogging along the local roads and he stated that ‘I am able to train much better in Southampton than in any other place’.

It is likely that on 4 April 1892, future British and Empire heavyweight boxing champion Beckett was born into a travelling Showpeople family. Nevertheless, there is much uncertainty about Beckett’s ancestry and even his date of birth. Indeed, there are some records which state that Joe was born in 1894. If this date was accurate, however, then Beckett would have been born inbetween marriages. His mother Charlotte, married Joseph Beckett (senior) in 1887 and he died in 1892. Geoff Boyce, a distant cousin of the Becketts, generated an extensive family tree. Boyce’s

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66 *Southern Daily Echo*, 23 November 1920; *Southern Daily Echo*, 2 June 1919.
67 Geoff Boyce’s Beckett/Boyce/Birch Family Tree, Jennie Lewis-Vidler’s personal collection.
document is generally well researched and specified Charlotte’s three marriages and the birth dates of her eight children. If Beckett was born in 1894 then his father is unknown. His death certificate states that he was 73 when he died in 1965, therefore, that would indicate his ‘official’ birth was 1892. It is worth noting, however, that formal birth certificates were extremely rare in travelling families and their offspring. Official state documentation, including christening records, almost always exclude Travelling and Showpeople families, simply because these citizens did not register and hardly ever baptised their children. Indeed, nomadic families explored their ancestry through kinship networks and family names; their name proved their lineage.

Equally important and worth highlighting in terms of his Traveller background is the confusion regarding Beckett’s surname. George, Beckett’s older brother, was originally a Frankham. George also boxed in the family business, having a successful semi-professional career during the 1920s. In 1887, widowed Charlotte Frankham (Beckett’s mother) remarried Joseph Beckett Sr, and George changed his surname from Frankham to Beckett, primarily for the booth business. He continued to use Beckett as his official name during his boxing career. The surname Frankham was specifically associated with basket making and general hawking within the showmen and fairground communities of Britain. The Becketts, however, were proprietors of a legitimate fairground booth business. The change of surname, consequently, acknowledged a new career in boxing, but did not distance him from the gritty booths of the fairs or his travelling background. Beckett was the second to last born of eight siblings; six were half-siblings and the seventh child, Amy, his only full sister. There was only eighteen months between Beckett and his sister Amy, their bond was strong and Beckett financially supported Amy. In turn, as will emerge in Chapter Three, Amy supported Beckett and his family when he was later interned during the Second World War.

70 Toulmin, A Fair Fight, p. 49.
71 Geoff Boyce’s Beckett/Boyce/Birch Family Tree, Jennie Lewis-Vidler’s personal collection.
Joe Beckett was born in hardship, the son of a family who earned their living by travelling through the countryside with their boxing booth, going from fair to fair, from spring until autumn.\textsuperscript{72} The booth would have been one of the sideshows that toured with the fair around the southern counties of Britain and called ‘all-comers’ to challenge the boxers who stood in a line to a bout to win a pound.\textsuperscript{73} Beckett grew up running around the fairs playing games of tag, and cowboys and Indians amongst the wagons; he also loved to wander around looking for the Dutch organs that played piped music which could be heard all around the site.\textsuperscript{74}

![Figure I - Chipperfield family on show in front of a Dutch organ photographed in 1916 at Chichester Fair – Rowland Scott Collection, National Fairground Archives, reproduced with permission of the University of Sheffield.](image)

Beckett only attended school during the winter months, when his family would set up a camp in Northam, a working-class dock district of Southampton and as a result of the fragmentary formal education he was completely illiterate.\textsuperscript{75} The Becketts did not see the importance of school - they did not have any formal education themselves and as long as they could count the takings and perform the general bookkeeping, that was all the

\textsuperscript{72} Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{75} Oral history from the Beckett family.
schooling required. Indeed, Margaret Fosberry, Beckett’s daughter, boasted that her father could ‘add up the price of the petrol at the station quicker than the attendant’, proving that the skills that were needed for the family business were passed down through the generations.

Beckett experienced childhood poverty and suffered during the winters when the family did not have an income. From a very young age, all of the family had to work for the family business. Beckett’s job when he was young was to tend to the workhorses. He especially enjoyed this job and horses remained one of his passions throughout his life. The only time he did not predominantly like caring for the animals was after he had listened to the ghost and superstitious stories that were told around the campfire, each story more horrific than the previous one, in particular the headless man riding on a spirit horse. He then had to walk the horses back to their meadows for the night, which could be several fields away. He knew that he could not refuse as every family member had their specific job, he would collect the horses and lead them across the misty fields, his heart pounding and imagining every branch or snap was the spirits after him and once rid of the horses, he would run back to the caravans as fast as he could for safety. The other conversation around the fires were of the opponents that each booth champion fought against; men would share their stories and talk of contenders not being tough enough and of the awful punishments that were dished out to those not clever enough to duck or weave in time before the booth champion’s blow was delivered. Beckett was twelve when he first stepped into the ring and his older brothers suggested that ‘it’s time for our Joey to be taken in and taught how to defend himself’. Joe and his older brother George started to box together from an early age in the family’s show and he was always ready to give him a hard time. George took him into the ring and sparred for hours. Beckett was shorter and stockier then his peers for his age and there were no shorts that fitted him. His mother Charlotte,

76 Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’.
77 Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 Toulmin, A Fair Fight, p. 47.
who was no stranger to the ring herself and wore a breastplate to fight when there was a shortage of male boxers, took a pair of his brother’s shorts and cut them down to size. Beckett stayed in the booth ring with George all day. It was rumoured that George could knock out a man with just his elbow and Joe had to stay in the ring until he was able to know how to defend himself and could carry the fight to the opponent. Eventually, there was a shortage of boxers and Beckett first had to enter the ring to fight for money. He knew that he was in for a hard time, as he was the shortest fighter standing in the line with the other champions in front of the boxing booth and he knew if he lost his fights he would be in trouble with the family for losing the hand. Eventually, he learned to hit back and he became the lad that no longer was the push over he looked. George sparred with Joe during his professional career. Figure II. is the only photograph surviving in the personal collection of the two brothers. Although there is a physical distance between the two men, both appear to stand together in an aggressive manner – maybe the photographer was the person the brothers wanted to intimidate – both seem to be looking directly at something or someone. It is more than possible that the brothers are posing as hard men. Equally, the photograph could have been orchestrated to boost Beckett’s early career by encompassing this toughness.

85 Ibid; Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’.
86 Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’.
In the 1920s, Beckett became a local as well as a national sporting hero and his professional boxing nickname was ‘Southampton Joe’. Beckett earned his title from when he toured the local area whilst travelling with the fairs. One particular occasion took place at the White Horse pub in Ampfield, near Romsey in 1911. A young cowman, Arthur Waters, challenged Beckett to a bout. In an article in the *Hampshire Magazine* significantly entitled ‘A fighting man of Hampshire’, S.M. Jarvis remembered how:

> on the platform outside the curtained entrance to the big tent stood three men in studied indifference. Their arms were folded across their chests to make a show of their muscles and they stood there as the red-faced promoter shouted ‘A pound for
any one of you good looking lads that can stay three rounds with any of my boys’. 87

Arthur Waters took the challenge and chose Beckett to compete against. Jarvis continued and described:

he pointed to the one on the right-hand side. ‘That’s Joe’ said the promoter, and quite a gasp was heard from the crowd, not because Joe was famous, but because of the three boxers, he seemed the toughest proposition. At seventeen he was good looking, not marked like the other two, with a broken nose or a cauliflower ear, but well-built and lively looking. His body gave the appearance of being well exercised, it looked hard and lissom with the vigour of youth. 88

It was stories like this which cemented Beckett’s local reputation as a legend in Southampton. It was part of his persona during his professional career and even after his death he was still known as one of Southampton’s famous sons.

During the winters of Beckett’s adolescent years, work was rare. Beckett and his brother George would travel into London and it was there that he introduced himself to the Canadian heavyweight boxer, Sam Langford, whilst he trained at The Ring in Blackfriars. Beckett’s daughter related her father’s recollection of Beckett and Langford’s first meeting. Beckett was aware that Langford was training in London, so chose to sell logs that he had chopped down in this particular area. 89 Once all the logs had gone, he made his way to the venue with the thought that Langford might need sparring partners. Joe and George entered the hall and sauntered up to the boxing ring, where several men were standing around watching the training session. At first, nobody took any notice of them, but when the sparring came to an end, Langford caught sight of both Becketts and after a hard morning’s training did not want to be bothered with young boys with delusional aspirations of becoming specialised boxers. However, Joe persisted and told Langford that he could box and just wanted the

89 Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’.
chance to prove it. Langford agreed and remarked ‘if you are still standing after I’ve finished with you, then I will walk around and see what is holding you up’. According to Beckett, they sparred and after the contest the Becketts returned to their campsite. A few days after the sparring match, Bernard Mortimer, a boxing promoter, visited Joe Beckett’s mother and offered to take Joe on and train him professionally. He was sent to London and it was to Sam Langford he was sent to learn the proficient skills of boxing. Beckett received the benefits of another boxer’s funding and experience, which inevitably helped to his professional career.

Indeed, by the time Beckett was twenty he had earned the success of his first event at London’s respected National Sporting Club (NSC) in Covent Garden on 20 April 1914 fighting against Harry Smith. However, by August 1914 Britain was at war and like many other fighters of that lineage, Beckett joined the armed forces. Nevertheless, he did not fight on the front line; it seems almost certain that he became a fitness instructor and taught the art of boxing, which in turn physically trained men to go to the trenches. Alongside this, Beckett continued to fight in organised matches throughout the war for the NSC representing the British Army. A serving soldier could box professionally with permission from the Army Boxing Association (ABA). This included, his fights against Sergeant Dick ‘King’ Smith in 1917 and Sergeant Harry Curzon in 1918 both held at the National Sporting Club.

It was not unusual for boxers to continue to fight during wartimes. Indeed, bouts were considered as a ‘morale booster’ for the troops and used as entertainment. In total Beckett boxed eleven bouts between 1914 to 1918, winning seven. And as will be discussed in Chapter Two, pugilism in the form of public entertainment asserted a powerful form of masculinity. Certainly, it also implies that Beckett’s boxing prowess was recognised before his championship matches that took place in the 1920s. Undeniably, the continuity of pugilistic training throughout the First World War enhanced

90 Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’.
91 Ibid.
93 Tony Mason & Eliza Riedi, Sport and the Military: The British Armed Forces 1880 – 1960 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), p. 120.
94 Ibid, p. 258 – Although Mason and Reid do not discuss boxing specifically as a way of keeping morale high in the army, they do analyse sport in general.
his professional status after 1918 and made his title British Boxing Board of Control (BBBC) win in 1919 possible. The fight took him away from the prestigious National Sporting Club boxing establishment and he competed at the Royal Albert Hall. It was here that Beckett won his first championship fight, the King’s Trophy, against ‘Bombardier’ Billy Wells.96 Nevertheless, because Beckett’s win was outside the NSC’s jurisdiction and as the encounter was held at an alternative venue the National Sporting Club did not recognise Beckett as their champion. The exclusive club believed that they had control over the British Empire heavyweight title and therefore Beckett’s win was not sanctioned. Eventually the elite club did reluctantly award Beckett the Lonsdale Belt. To Beckett, this was the ultimate of boxing trophies and he spent the whole day preparing himself for the presentation reception that was to be held at the NSC.97 However, when he arrived at the club, all the lights were turned off and the only person in the building was the porter. Behind him, on the table lay the belt. Joe walked out of the NSC and left the prestigious award behind, a reflection of his ongoing outsider status and his resistance to accepting it.98 Yet he was now a professional boxer and each win brought him substantial financial reward. With lucrative prizefights, Beckett had positioned himself within a gentrified society, but yet he was astutely self-aware of his place in the social order: the NSC’s rejection made a deep psychological impact. For instance, it is mentioned more than once in his daughter’s journals where she stated:

whatever he had become, he could not lose his background and was always conscious of where he had come from. He would not have forgotten someone who would put him down and he always had a sense of inferiority as if he was not as good as others, even if those others did not have the talent or ability he had and straight forward honesty. As a man who did not attend school during the summer as the fair was always travelling he was aware of his lack of education and a target for

97 Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’ - Later he decided to have a replica made of the belt, but this was later sold to pay for a new garage to his property in Shirley, Southampton.
98 Ibid.
any jealous person’s jibe who needed someone to take the fire away from their lack of ability.99

His traveller status will be explained in more depth in the following chapter.

The championship competitions that Beckett had gained fame were not seen as prestigious enough because the NSC had not created the titles. As a consequence, Beckett was ostracised until the elite club recognised that he would indeed draw in large crowds with international bouts. A few months later on 27 February 1919 at Holborn Stadium, London, he fought ‘Bombardier’ for the second time, but this time for the BBBC Heavyweight title, winning in five rounds. Throughout the period from 1917 to 1923, Beckett’s professional boxing career rose to the dizzy heights of British heavyweight Champion and over the course of five years, he had secured both the British and British Empire Heavyweight titles awarded by both the British Boxing Board of Control and the Lonsdale Belt. During this time, Beckett fought six times for the BBBC British Heavyweight title and won a remarkable five times, beating champions Frank Goddard, Dick Smith, Bombardier Billy Wells and Boy McCormick. He also fought three matches and won all of them for the title of the BBBC British Empire Champion, defeating fighters including Billy Wells, Tommy Burns and George Cook.100

99 Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’.
Beckett’s career contributed heavily to the professional British pugilist scene and by this time commercial boxing was well established within the national sporting society. Both amateurs and professionals alike were governed by the Queensbury Rules established in 1867. The main focus of the rules was to limit the timing of each round to a three minute duration, so as to control the severity of the injuries and stop the bouts ending in the death of a contestant; they prescribed the sizing and the use of padded gloves throughout the matches, which in turn, outlawed bare knuckle fights.

Finally, the rules introduced the ‘counting to ten’ when a boxer was knocked down onto the canvas by his opponent. More precisely, the Queensbury Rules were created in an attempt to socialise boxing and with an esteemed, yet clinical Victorian attitude, to sanitise boxing and legitimise pugilism so that the British male masses could observe or participate in ‘healthy’

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102 Ibid, p. 28.
competitions as a sanctioned leisure pursuit, following that of other popular male dominated sports, such as cricket and rugby. The regulations were crucial and curtailed the former brutality of boxing from its grass roots of bareknuckle and contest to the death illegal bouts, to specially designed rules to appeal expressly to the middle-class gentleman’s principles and in turn, transforming the reputation of the boxing profession. Even so, although the Queensbury Rules helped to govern professional bouts, boxing remained a violent sport. Indeed, as will be shown in Chapter Two Beckett himself pushed the professional boundaries to the limit within the ring.

In 1977 Gilbert Odd, of the Boxing News, penned an account of Beckett’s career. In a series entitled ‘Champs I'll Never Forget’ he recounted what he classified ‘the hardest hitting contest between heavyweights ever seen in Britain’. Beckett’s daughter recalled in her memoirs ‘the fight lacked exceptional skill, but more than made up for it in excitement, clash and bravery’ – the opponent was Frank Moran, otherwise known as the ‘Pittsburgh Dentist’. The match was brutal and extended, Beckett acknowledged that he had taken a beating and had suffered for days after the bout.

In this sense, through the inherent dangers and nature of the sport, and despite the obedience to the rules of the ring, as well as the combination of enforced personal self-restraint, it still led to intense danger in the ring. There was thus an additional characteristic that was needed for a boxer to walk onto the canvas: self-confidence. Before and during the bout, it was the key ingredient to a boxer’s success and it formed an essential part to the outcome of the bout. On 4 December 1919, Beckett fought the French Champion George Carpentier for the European Boxing Union (EBU) Heavyweight title. Beckett could not deal with the tall, long armed Carpentier and he was defeated in the first round in just seventy four seconds. The fight caused much interest and journalist S.M Jarvis wrote later for the Hampshire

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103 Anderson, The Legality of Boxing, p. 28.
104 Gilbert Odd, ‘Champs I'll Never Forget’, No. 9 in a series, Boxing News, 12 August 1977, p. 17
105 Ibid; Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’.
106 Odd, ‘Champs I'll Never Forget’, p. 17.
Magazine that ‘after seventy four seconds, I am sorry to say, Hampshire men were profoundly disappointed’.  

There can be no doubt that Beckett had an extraordinary career. In it he won not only his bouts, but also the adoration of the nation. When he fought ‘Boy’ McCormick at the Royal Opera House on 12 September 1921, he was at the height of his career.

Figure IV –Beckett and ‘Boy’ McCormick, 12 September 1919, Royal Opera House, London, presented in The Daily Mirror, under the collection titled ‘Famous Boxers Series, Jennie Lewis-Vidler’s personal collection.

But it was the EBU title again and the French champion who finished Beckett’s professional boxing career. On 1 October 1923, the highly anticipated rematch between the French champion George Carpentier and Beckett was held at London’s Olympia. This time it took forty five seconds for Carpentier to knockout Beckett. The Prince of Wales, who had attended the

109 Toulmin, A Fair Fight, p. 15 – Toulmin discusses Beckett’s win again Bombardier Billy Wells in 1919 and states that Beckett was the ‘People’s Champion’ and that the autocratic decision by the NSC to not accept Beckett as the new champion enhanced his appeal to the British general public.
event, complained that he turned to light his cigar and missed the whole bout.\textsuperscript{110}

The fixture had caused so much interest around Britain and in particular in Southampton. Indeed, it was arranged that coloured rockets would be fired into the air from the Southampton’s Common to let his supporters know the outcome of the match – blue for a Beckett win and red for a Carpentier victory.\textsuperscript{111} After the match, Beckett could not face the reception in Southampton that waited for him after the bout and he arranged for his chauffeur to pick him up at St. Denys train station and away from the public.

\textsuperscript{110} Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’.

The embarrassment of not winning the title cemented his decision to retire from professional boxing.

Beckett will always be remembered for his loss for the EBU titled matches against Carpentier, more specifically, how quickly he had been defeated. Before the Carpentier match, Beckett appeared publicly confident and had alluded to a victory. Nevertheless, Beckett’s daughter wrote in her memoirs:

Dad had his last fight with Carpentier, the French man. He was taller with longer arms and he was very quick. Joe was short and thick set, although he was always very fit. Later, when I asked him about his final match, he said that, even though he trained, he did not feel fit during this fight. He learnt just before the fight, that even his own guys backed his opponent. Dad could never forget this and he knew that there was a lot of money placed on this fight and the big talk in the papers provided the build up beforehand. Joe felt the pressure and the fight was over in seconds.113

Coupled with Beckett’s inferiority complex, his lack of self-confidence about his own physical fitness, created a negative mindset, which in turn helped him lose the bout. However, it is noteworthy to highlight that Carpentier was given cocaine as a painkiller just before the match. Indeed, he had an injury to his shoulder and in his autobiography Carpentier recollected that his:

arm felt a trifle heavy, but I was confident that it would not worry me much when the time came. Doctor Faidherbe gave me the cocaine injection a few minutes before they came to announce that it was time for me to enter the ring. Beckett had gone first and had received a tremendous ovation.114

No doubt, Carpentier’s injection of cocaine prior to the bout with Beckett helped with the speed in which he won the match. However, it remains that Beckett felt that he was not ready to compete against Carpentier.

112 Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’.
113 Ibid.
114 Carpentier, Carpentier, p. 119.
Beckett did not return to the professional boxing ring after the EBU match against Carpentier and he officially retired in 1924 aged 32. At this stage of his life, Beckett’s process of identification with pugilism had been transformed into the aspirations and dreams of what a professional boxing career could hold. This was not only in terms of the financial benefits of the winning with each subsequent bout leading to an ever increasing purse, but also in crossing class boundaries and his newly established social acceptance into mainstream society. For example, Beckett started to buy his handmade shirts, suits and shoes in Saville Row; he attended race meetings at Ascot or Goodwood and associated himself with the owners of the horses, who he considered ‘good contacts’ and the ‘right people’.¹¹¹ Beckett also employed a chauffeur and valet.¹¹² He had made enough money to last him all his life and to live more than comfortably.

¹¹¹ Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’.
¹¹² Ibid.
Eventually he would send his children to private schools, always having enough money for the things he enjoyed doing. Further establishing his surface acceptance, he belonged to the Conservative Club in Above Bar in his hometown Southampton and would go to their dinner dances and up to London.\(^{117}\) Furthermore, the contrast to his children’s education and his own is significant and revealing. Beckett understood – through personal experience - the value of formal education and society’s negative attitude to the lack of it. Therefore, when Beckett placed his children in private schools, he recognised the importance of not only a conventional education, but an elite one.

A month before Beckett fought Carpentier, he married Ruth Margaret Ford on the 17 August 1923 at St Paul’s Church in Worthing. Ruth’s father, Henry, was an originally an engineer’s apprentice in Manchester where his mother had inherited a sweet and tobacco shop. Ruth’s mother, Annie, was born in Bow, East London and her family owned a public house.\(^{118}\) After the First World War, Henry and Annie Ford moved to the south coast and bought

\(^{117}\) Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’.  
\(^{118}\) Ibid.
a half share of The Marine Hotel in Worthing from the East London based brewery Bass-Charrington.\textsuperscript{119} Ruth moved to Worthing with her parents and older sister Tina, to help run the hotel and in the spring of 1923, in the foyer she met Beckett. The couple were engaged and married a few months later. Although the Fords owned a share in a popular south coast hotel, they were from modest backgrounds. Their parents were lower-middle class, but with respectable vocations. Ruth’s parents had worked their way up to own a share in a prestigious hotel and therefore, had a lot in common with Beckett; he too had established a lifestyle through working hard to develop a suitable occupation which permitted him to climb the British class system. Even so, the Ford family were never considered outsiders in British society. They were for example, house dwellers, educated to a certain standard and owned conventional businesses. However, they knew that it took hard work and determination to establish themselves within the upper spheres of British society and had this much in common with Beckett and his family.

Figure VIII –(Left) - Joe and Ruth, 17 August September 1923 on their wedding day outside St. Pauls Church, Worthing. (Right) – The Beckett’s with their dog Mikey- all photos are from Jennie Lewis-Vidler’s personal collection

\textsuperscript{119} Fosberry,’ Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’.
After they were married they moved to the middle-class suburb of Upper Shirley, Southampton where they purchased a three bedroom house and soon after Joseph Jr. was born. Eighteen months later, their son was followed by a daughter called Margaret and the family moved again within this Southampton neighbourhood to a bigger five bedroom house, with larger gardens, stables and a coach house.\textsuperscript{120}

\textsuperscript{120} Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’. 
‘Respectable’ Upper Shirley was far from Beckett’s showman travelling days and the transient lower-class world of Northam. Shirley provided access to both the attractions of a busy town life, alongside being a short walking distance to Southampton’s Common. Another daughter, Mary, was born four years later, followed by David and then their youngest son John. Yet even living in suburbia, Beckett never lost his identity as a Traveller. The family enjoyed caravanning holidays and would disappear together for a month every summer, where they would also meet up with Beckett’s sister Amy and her husband. Margaret had extremely happy memories of their family holidays and she reminisced in her memoirs:

we had our first caravan in 1932. It was beautifully handmade and it was towed every year to either Ilford Bridge, near Boscombe or Milford-on-Sea. There was a heavy canvas awning on the side for the children to leave all their wet costumes, towels and bikes.121

Figure X– (Top left) – Ruth with Mary on her knee and Margaret sitting next to them both. (Bottom left) – Joe and Ruth with Joe Jr. and Margaret. (Top right) Joe, Ruth and Margaret. (Bottom right) Amy sitting in the doorway of her caravan with her husband- all photos are from Jennie Lewis-Vidler’s personal collection.

121 Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’.
Joe and Ruth Beckett had a close but fractious relationship and most would have thought that they had the ideal existence. ¹²² And with Beckett’s income from his professional boxing bouts, they had a lot of time on their hands and their daughter Margaret commented in her memoirs that they were bored: they would visit friends, go to the local Conservative club dinner dances, horse racing, social events in London, including the Showmen’s Guild dances. ¹²³ Ruth was desperate for Beckett to invest his money in a business, but Beckett was not interested and thought that his lack of education would be a huge problem in the commercial world. Ruth was Joe’s secretary and carried out all of his correspondence. ¹²⁴ There was, however, one particular area that Beckett invested his money and that was in housing. By the time Britain entered the Second World War, Beckett owned twenty seven houses in the Southampton area and a large share of the Cowherds pub on the Common.

In the 1920s Joe became a member of the local Conservative Party. But in a break from conventional, ‘respectable’ politics in 1939, both the Becketts became members of the British Union of Fascists. Their fascist identities and its impact will be discussed in depth in Chapter Three. This political affiliation ensured their detention under the Defence’ Regulation 18b, leaving their four children to fend for themselves. Margaret recalled on the day of her parents’ arrest:

I was so confused, as there was no Mum or Dad. The girl who worked at home, got us a meal and then left at six. She did not come back the next day. My brother Joe, who was the eldest at sixteen and myself at fourteen, my sister Mary who was ten and brother David were all left on our own for the night. The next day a Mr. Weston from the party came to visit in the morning. Later our Aunty Amy came to take us away. ¹²⁵ The older children went to stay with Amy, Joe’s sister and taken to live with them for nine months, travelling with the fairs around the southern counties: Odiam, Whitchurch and Basingstoke. Baby John, who was just three months

¹²² Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’.
¹²³ Ibid.
¹²⁴ Ibid.
¹²⁵ Ibid.
old, went with his mother to Holloway, whilst Joe was sent to Walton Prison, Liverpool with the other detainees. The inmates were constantly threatened with solitary confinement, threats of deportation to Canada and confined to their cells.

Both Joe and Ruth were released before the other detainees were transferred to the Isle of Man, where most of them stayed until 1942. Ruth was freed after eight months and Joe after nine. The Becketts decided to start a new life in Basingstoke; they sold the majority of their properties in Southampton, one of them being the Cowherds pub on the Southampton Common. Their internment impacted on their relocation and the family’s move to north Hampshire was a direct result of their fascist involvement. Indeed, it was the many complaints from the town’s community that was partly responsible for their arrest under the Defence Regulation 18b. Once released Beckett felt that he could not stay in Southampton and the family started a new life on the outskirts of Basingstoke.

Figure XII – Beckett outside his bungalow in Basingstoke, date is unknown but it would have been in the early 1950s as Beckett returned to Southampton not long after Ruth’s death, Jennie Lewis-Vidler’s personal collection
The family was extremely happy living in the countryside and Margaret (my Grandmother) and her siblings have exceptionally fond memories of living there.

Ruth died in 1952 and Beckett moved back to Southampton to be nearer to his family. Now a Grandfather to four children, he spent the remainder of his life devoting days to his family, whom he adored. His reputation as a former British heavyweight champion remained intact and although his fascist past featured in articles that were written reminiscing about his sporting glories, his BUF membership was only mentioned in passing and he was never interviewed about his relationship with Mosley in any depth.\textsuperscript{126} Beckett continued to frequent attended amateur boxing matches and he was photographed regularly by the \textit{Southern Daily Echo} doing so.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{Figure_XIII.png}
\caption{Figure XIII– (Top left) – Grandad Joe with Pauline (on Joe’s left knee), Jane (my mother, on his right knee), Kathleen (left) and Stephen (right). (Bottom left) – Joe trying to teach his less than enthusiastic grandson Stephen how to box. (Top right) Joe, pushing Kathleen and Stephen in his grandson’s new car. (Bottom right) The not so intimidating heavyweight champion holding his first grandson Stephen - all photos are from Jennie Lewis-Vidler’s personal collection.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{126} S.M Jarvis in the \textit{Hampshire Magazine} in their April 1966 edition and in Odd’s article on 12 August 1977 in the \textit{Boxing News} did not mention his involvement in the British Union of Fascists at all.
Joe Beckett died on the 12 March 1965 in Northampton after three months of illness. His children decided that he was best placed in a care home, away from Southampton, so he was able to live the remainder of his life in privacy. This decision did not have anything to do with Joe’s fascist career, but more the fear of the media attention his illness could potentially cause. Additionally, the nursing home specialised in mental health, specifically dementia and Alzheimer’s, which Beckett had suffered from during the latter stages of his life – perhaps a legacy of his boxing days. Beckett left a large family and heritage that would be passed down through its generations.

(4) Thesis Outline

There cannot be any doubt that Joe Beckett’s multifaceted life provides an interesting insight into British society during the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Indeed, his Traveller heritage, ‘Britishness’, manliness and political identity offer an understanding of the different social dimensions of British society, therefore, will be the organising principles of the chapters to follow.

The thematic, rather than a traditional chronological, approach will aid the qualitative exploration and help to place not only Beckett, but also the identities connected to him in a social and cultural context. However, as the examination is a case study of an individual and because of the nature of the biographical content in the primary sources, a largely chronological approached within the chapters will help root the exploration and help structure the content. By approaching the different categories of identity and masculinity in three separate chapters and by structuring the order of chapters chronologically, common characteristics will be easily identifiable and differences or similarities toward other identities will be highlighted. Whilst generally he is still known as a national boxing champion, his life consisted of many interrelated layers and therefore, he cannot be placed in just his pugilistic career.

The thesis will thus comprise of three chapters which will allow an insight into Beckett through his biography in the context of biographical theory. The first chapter will discuss racial, ethnic and national identities in Britain, divided into three sub sections; all are associated with and connected
to Beckett’s personal identity: the Travelling showmen and entertainers, Irishness and Whiteness. The second chapter will be solely dedicated to the examination of masculinity and it will discuss how authorities put boxing forward as a ‘manly’ sport for the nation. This chapter will be analysed through four themes to evaluate how manliness was created in boxing: training to examine the creation of a boxer, the agents and how they promoted professional pugilism through pre match imagery, violence and the sport itself and finally match imagery. The third chapter will analyse Beckett’s identity as a British Union of Fascist member. It will examine how masculinity was represented within the fascist political party and equally, it will demonstrate how fascism, as an identity, was articulated in Britain during and after the Nazi era. What was the attraction of the British Union of Fascists, the party members’ attitude to Oswald Mosley, the draw of an anti-Semitism outlook and the consequences of Regulation 18b to the internees, but specifically to Beckett and his family? All three chapters will have a biographical focus incorporating Beckett’s lifestory and his personal identity but within a wider national and international context allowing the first study of Beckett’s ‘Britishness’. 
Chapter One – Racial, Ethnic and National Identities

Figure I – Boxing Monthly, Issue No. 9 (January 1990) – Jennie Lewis-Vidler’s personal Collection - A remarkable photograph of a 1920s sporting hero, taken by Jimmy White, a famous sporting millionaire in the 1920s. He had a passion for boxing and held an annual dinner to celebrate British sporting celebrities. This provides an insight into the ethnic diversity of professional boxing during the era, but with no black boxers. Including Beckett himself, to Irish Eugene Corr and finally Jewish Ted ‘Kid’ Lewis.

Introduction

Joe Beckett’s identity was without doubt multifaceted and dynamic. For this reason, it is clear that Beckett’s life story is remarkable and offers an insight into not only a sports related history, but furthermore, an ethnic minority existence of the travelling Showmen and an understanding of a fascist political identity in Britain before and during the Second World War. Consequently, all the sociological, cultural and political facets to Beckett’s character provide an insight into the construction of British national identity. For example, which racialised categories were in use in Britain during his life and where did Beckett ‘fit’ within them? More specifically, in what spheres would a member of an ethnic minority such as Beckett be considered as English/British (if at all)? In the process of acceptance and rejection, would
Beckett have been regarded as ‘white’ and if so, on what terms? How relevant was physicality, in particular when articulated through boxing, and how accessible was a professional sporting career to people who were categorised as in some way racially different?

Fortunately, with regard to Beckett, primary materials survive allowing an exploration of his identity within the nation and beyond. For this purpose, in order to clarify how British identity was constructed, the definition will be based on the hegemony of the nation’s perceived characteristics as a cohesive entity and will focus on the social stratification within the late nineteenth and early twentieth century when Beckett’s career was forged. For the purpose of this chapter, individual features in the construction of British identity will be referred to in each section. In summation, by applying specific identities in relation to Beckett, it will demonstrate his social mobility and complex ‘racial’ nationality as well as local identities.

It has been argued that cultural and behavioural expectations may function as keys to recognisable identities. It is also crucial to note that Britishness was diverse and contested in many areas beyond the sphere of ethnicity and race. In particular, the ideas of a class system complicated both group and individual identities. Indeed, Patrick Joyce asserted that ‘class consciousness’ should be seen as the attribute of organisations and individuals, and what matters is the capacity of a class to behave as a ‘class actor’ with ‘class organisations’ to enable the transformation of a ‘class identity into a class consciousness’. Moreover, all the British types changed over time and were not fixed or cohesive. And discussion needs to allow for the contestation of what it was to be British.

It is vital initially to discuss British imperial identity. During the timeframe of the thesis, the British Empire and its conquering aspirations, combined with the national concept of white superiority, led to the self-belief that Britain was a dominant and powerful nation. As will be shown in the Irish section, the British imperial framework also encouraged an explicitly English sense of superiority. As Desley Deacon has stressed, the authority was

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1 Colin Clark & Margaret Greenfields, Here to Stay: The Gypsies and Travellers of Britain (Hatfield, Hertfordshire: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2006), p. 28.
'exacerbated by racial arrogance: a sense of superiority over the other 'natives' living in British colonies'. More precisely, imperial expansion was justified as humanitarian, as the extension of British civilisation allegedly could spread progress. Above all, the superior attitudes of the nation created a social identity that viewed and classified other racial and ethnic minorities or a person deemed of a different persona other than English, in lower esteem. Ultimately, the idea of and belief in white superiority led to English settlers living on imperial soil primarily to expand British territories, but also to assert that it was their destiny and duty to educate the subjugate ‘inferior’ races. This sense of superiority was central in the attempt to control the Empire. Indeed, colonies could only be maintained if the government had control of the people. The newly self-elected leaders created modes of power through education in English culture, politics and religion. Although imperial territories varied greatly, the pattern of English colonisation remained similar. White superiority went hand-in-hand with imperial domination. The ‘white’ English believed that it was their destiny to convey dominance over others judged as inferior.

This chapter will be separated into three different types of identities, all of which had a relationship to Beckett. First comes from the nomadic community, namely the Travellers, but more precisely the Showpeople of Britain. This section will demonstrate how the roaming communities created their own social mobility through the boxing vocation. Equally as important, the separate identities of the travelling community will also be highlighted because the heterogeneous nature of Gypsy and Traveller group reveal the complexities in attempting to analyse their situation as a whole. The second section will study the Irish identity (Beckett was of this background) and how the Irish responded to concepts of English racial hierarchy. It will evaluate whether the racial categorisation impacted on the Irish and how perceived Irish cultural identities were reflected publicly in national newspapers.

3 Adrian Carton, ‘Imperial Melodies: Globalising the lives of Cliff Richard and Englebert Humperdinck’, in Desley Deacon, Transnational Lives; Biographies of global modernity, 1700 - present (Basingstoke: Palgrave Mcmillian, 2010), p. 86 - Deacons article chronicled the lives of Richard and Englebert who were both born and raised in India. They moved to Britain with their families in the late 1940s and early 1950s.
popular magazines and periodicals. It will further focus how an Anglo-Saxon identity was constructed in contrast to the lowly ‘Celt’. Additionally, it will consider how Victorian scientific racial categorisations influenced public portrayal of the Irish. The third and final segment will consider ‘whiteness’ and British identity. It will particularly focus on the individual representations of the various non-white groups compared to other migrants perceived to possess white skin. It will question how British racial stratification impacted on minority identities and how the elite white British identity articulated hegemony in the British Isles. The three themes have been chosen and emphasised because of their relevance to Beckett’s life story and personal identity. With this in mind, all the themes discussed will enhance and enlighten not only an understanding of Beckett’s individual character, but will further emphasise how he as a British citizen constructed, performed and adapted his identity. Simultaneously, the themes will elaborate and reflect how Britain as a nation influenced and fought to preserve what were considered ideal national characteristics.

**Travelling Showman, Gypsy and Traveller Identity**

Beckett’s boxing identity was steeped in the fairground tradition, governed only by which town the Travellers chose to establish their portable entertainment, how much money each boxing bout had brought in, but above all the family responsibility of the day-to-day running of their trade. When Joe was an adolescent, he was given roles within the boxing ring, along with the maintenance of the equipment. His daughter Margaret later noted:

> After the fair the previous day, everyone was packing up and pulling. The two girls were folding the canvas and Amy and Mother were packing the van. The lads were busy with the boxing ring and everything else that was moveable.\(^7\)

Throughout the harsh winters, there was work that still needed to be done and crucial money that had to be made:

> In the winter when the fair people found winter quarters, turnover would be short of money. That meant other work must

\(^7\) Margaret Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’—Jennie Lewis-Vidler’s personal collection.
be found … at this time trees would be cut down and made into logs. The poor horses would pull these logs from door-to-door, hoping a housewife would buy them. If they did not bring any money home, the new Stepfather would beat up Joe.\(^8\)

Similarly, crucial to Beckett’s life story was his earlier career within the boxing booths. Essentially, in the hands of the house fighters who toured with the fairs, along with the lack of self-control and absence of restraint within the show rings, the boxers taught Beckett to fight for a living. As he grew up amongst the family business, the men trained and sparred. When they got ready for their evening performance, they began to include young Beckett and would box with him, giving him a ‘hiding if he could not defend himself’ as they ‘couldn’t have kin who could not take part in the family business’.\(^9\) Beckett was thus prepared for a career in the spotlight of booth boxing. Figure II provides an insight into of how the Beckett booth would have functioned. The fair’s boxers would have lined up outside the false front painted with extravagant boxers whilst the ‘Barker’ made sure that the tent inside was packed with customers who had paid their entrance fee.\(^10\)

Figure II - McKeowen’s Boxing Booth - Freddy Mills (far left) with Sam McKeowen (the Barker on the microphone) the owner of the booth, date unknown but circa 1930s. The boxing promoter parading his boxers who challenged onlookers to a bout – taken from Boxing Rec webpage – http://boxrec.com/media/index.php/File:MillsBooth.JPG [accessed 12 March 2018].

\(^8\) Margaret Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’ – Joe’s father died not long after his birth and he was raised by his mother and his step-father. However, there is no mention of his biological father in any family memoirs or in any other sources. His mother ran the family boxing booth and other family members worked toward making that business work smoothly. Therefore, one of the reasons that his Stepfather is not mentioned in Joe’s family’s records could potentially be the strong maternal influence.

\(^9\) Ibid.

Figure II also demonstrates that the Showman’s booths were not exclusive to white boxers. Indeed, the unknown black boxer on the far-right demonstrates that the showground fights did not have the colour-bar like the exclusive and elite professional boxing establishments, such as the NSC. All that Beckett endured in his early life as a young fairground boxer and later as a professional champion, combined with his tenacity to transform the experiences of his fairground roots into an accomplished commercial career, encouraged his status and identity as a boxing champion of Britain.

Figure III - Freddie Hughe’s Boxing Booth – The Mancunian Hughes family had champions such as Harry ‘Kid’ Furness and Len Johnson perform in the booths, date unknown but circa 1930s – taken from the Manchester Boxers webpage - http://manchesterexboxers.co.uk/bert-hughes-boxing-booth-manchester/ [accessed 12 March 2018].

Figure IV - Bob Parkin’s Boxing Booth on Southsea Common. The booth travelled with the W. Smart Circus and the photo was taken by George Tucker June 1948 – George Tucker Collection, National Fairground Archives, reproduced with permission of the University of Sheffield. Figure V Ronnie Taylor’s Boxing Booth at Nottingham Goose Fair. This image was taken in October 1983 and demonstrates the longevity and popularity of the booths in fairs – Ron White Collection, National Fairground Archives, reproduced with permission of the University of Sheffield.

11 The colour barrier will be discussed later in the chapter when evaluating ‘whiteness’ and black boxers in fairground booths will be evaluated further in Chapter Three.
Beckett, it seems almost certain, was descended from Irish Travellers and originally the family’s occupation was that of self-employed (like most travelling occupations) horse traders.\textsuperscript{12} Joseph Beckett Sr married Charlotte Frankham (Beckett’s Mother) and raised the Frankham children.\textsuperscript{13}

The winter trade in the travelling Showman’s career was tough and most led a hand-to-mouth existence during the quiet season. Travelling communities tended to provide low skilled, self-employed occasional work: tinsmithing, chimney sweeping, crop harvesting and peddling to wealthy landlords.\textsuperscript{14} Equally as important is the particular identity associated with another branch of the travelling community, the Showmen’s Guild. The Guild was established as a governing body as a result of the 1889 Moveable Dwellings Bill.\textsuperscript{15} A select committee introduced the much detailed and controversial Bill, led by George Smith MP, to ascertain the numbers of British nomadic cultures and integrate members of the travelling communities into mainstream society. By these means, assimilating the roaming communities into conventional society was seen as desirable because it sought to diminish the ‘otherness’ of the travelling communities.\textsuperscript{16} Indeed, to undermine and control the British nomadic character would be to confront all the stereotypes associated with them such as, dirty, criminal, tax evaders, illiterate and other anti-social behaviours. In addition, the Bill insisted that every dweller’s cart must be registered to a specific town, simply for the obvious fact that the government and local authorities could then deduce how many people travelled and furthermore, what local authority was responsible for the travelling communities’ perceived transgressions. From this, the officials would then be able to insist that the wandering communities would have to remain in their registered town for a set period of time every year. Above all, the Bill’s expectation was that all Traveller children should attend a local school. Nonetheless, the nomadic lifestyle inhibited the

\textsuperscript{12} Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{15} A consequence to the 1888 Hawkers and Peddlers Act and the Vagrancy Act passed in 1898, both of which highlighted concerns and curtailed the travelling communities, superseded the three-timed submitted Moveable Dwellings Bill. Moreover, the bill repeated restrictions that were previously mentioned in the Hawkers and Peddlers and the Vagrancy Act. Therefore, the select committee responsible for submitted proposals, even with the tendered alternations to the bill, finally accepted that the restrictions would never be passed. In this sense, a non-Traveller failed to alter the identities of the nomadic communities.
\textsuperscript{16} Colin Clark & Margaret Greenfields, \textit{Here to Stay: The Gypsies and Travellers of Britain}, p. 32.
probability of meeting the ascribed school attendance. Instead, a more likely outcome would have been an education in the family’s business or other occupations that related to the itinerant lifestyle.\textsuperscript{17}

The Showmen’s Guild insisted that the purpose of travelling for their Showpeople’s itinerant lifestyle was distinctively business orientated. In fact, this particular section of the travelling community did not necessarily consider themselves members of the Gypsy or Traveller sect; instead they insisted that the reasons for travelling amongst the fairgrounds that toured the United Kingdom were primarily economic. It is not known whether the Beckett boxing booth was registered with the Showmen’s Guild or if any of the family were members, because the records did not survive. It can only be surmised that the Becketts were associates of the Guild, primarily due to the size of the booth and how dependent the family were on the income it generated. Indeed, it was the only substantial money they received throughout the year, other than peddling goods during the winter. It would have been wise to be members, not only to distance themselves from the poor reputation of the other nomadic communities, but to also make their business ‘legitimate’. However, it can only be assumed rather than proven as there is no verification either way. Other fairground operators were also keen to distance their livelihoods from the ‘other’ travelling family identities. Robert Sexton has asserted that prominent fairground owners George and John Sanger maintained that ‘proper Showmen kept away from Gypsies, while genuine Gypsies were not Showmen’.\textsuperscript{18}

In order to separate their social identity as Showmen from that of the Gypsies and Traveller communities, the use of words like ‘proper’ and ‘genuine’ can be seen in their rules. Moreover, a parliamentary agent who was a licenced solicitor, acting for both the Showmen’s Guild and his employer, represented them.\textsuperscript{19} Additionally, non-Gypsies and Travellers saw them as detached from other nomad communities and Showpeople – as business people – and had an interest in maintaining and keeping good

\textsuperscript{17} Vanessa Toulmin has suggested that the education received by the Showchildren when they reach the age of school attendance is a contentious issue. Predominately because the itinerant life can have an obvious effect on their level of schooling.


\textsuperscript{19} The University of Sheffield, The National Fairground Archive, ‘The Showmen’s Guild of Great Britain Collection’, \url{https://www.sheffield.ac.uk/nfa/collections/showmen} [accessed on 29 August 2015].
relations with local authorities who licensed their funfairs and provided their employment. Similarly, the Showpeople also asserted that there was a dissimilarity between ‘law abiding’ Showpeople and other Gypsies and Travellers who were involved in ‘unauthorised development’ of caravan sites without permission. The main concern of ‘outsiders’ was that the nomadic families and their lifestyles would impact on ‘conventional’ society.

During the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, there was anxiety that the lower classes were bringing down the wellbeing of the nation (and indeed empire) as a whole through their physical deterioration. Issues that concerned the education, housing conditions and occupations of the working classes were considered paramount to distinguish what part each citizen played within the empire. A social stratification was solidified and the travelling communities were considered to be outside the parameters of civilisation. They were not recognised as individuals, but instead as members of a negatively constructed group. The main aim of the state was to identify groups who were to be seen fall inside and outside the parameters of criminality. Their internal identity was shaped by the belief that they were a distinct cultural group: one which was traditionally inherited, one that was considered self-marginalising and that prided itself on placing themselves on the edge that lived apart from society. All of these facts were key to the Gypsy and Traveller culture. The Travellers and Gypsies kept to their own communities and inter marriage with outsiders was rare. In short, their identity, they believed, was passed down through the children of such marriages and only the direct descendants would be considered Gypsies or Travellers for as long as they remained within the community. Above all, a Gypsy or Traveller would have to inherit their identity from at least one parent

20 Sexton, p. 125; Scullion, Brown & Niner, ‘Accommodating Travelling Showpeople in England’, p. 204 – the paper outlines the contemporary aspects of the Showpeople and their problems of the lack of support from local and governmental authorities in regard to winter quarters. What is interesting about the paper however, is the way in which the authorities view the Showmen’s Guild and its members. The nomadic communities are seen as separate entities and both the Gypsy and Traveller communities have political rights to settle. Whereas the Showpeople, because of their distinct ethnicity, are not seen in the same light as the Travellers and Gypsies.


22 David Searle’s The Quest for National Efficiency: A study in British politics and political thought discussed issues relating to Britain’s labouring and working-class citizens. His study analysed the impact of the Education Act in 1903 and Education Bill in 1906 on the children of these families, with the view to reform the ‘labouring classes’. Searle stated that in 1901, L. Magnus suggested that the supreme lesson from the Boar War was that the national experience in the past two years is the need for educational reform. Searle argued that the main concern was that the British education system ‘lagged behind Germany’s’.


with a nomadic ethnic status. The children of Gypsies, travellers and Showmen would typically assume the identity of the kin and their lifestyle would have upheld the group’s values. Maintaining their unique way of life meant that outsiders were kept at a distance that fuelled unease and fear which circulated through the non-travelling communities.

Essentially, the Showmen Guild’s identity was born out of the travelling community and, like the Gypsy and Traveller body, trained internal family members for the running of the business which were, above everything else, to be self-sufficient and to have an identity grounded in their occupation. Indeed, these Travellers not only required a fee payable membership, but more precisely, this particular roaming identity was not an inherited birth right, but required, along with the tariff, an established travelling business such as a fairground stall or circus act. Nevertheless, the touring stands and booths were kept within the family and were often inherited by Showmen kin.

An additional identity that the travelling entertainers displayed was their lack of formal education and the most significant factor Beckett’s personal identity was his illiteracy. Above all, this typical ‘Traveller’ trait affected his whole life and was a major factor in his experiences and reactions to him. As it was considered a negative characteristic within British society to be illiterate, leading to inefficiency and lack of civic engagement, occupational options were limited and the only form of employment available was within the realms of lower working-class manual work. Indeed, British education was a hotly debated topic during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Subsequently, a myriad of parliamentary legislation was passed, for example, the 1908 Children’s Act, which insisted on a compulsory education for any child up to the age of thirteen. Even then, there were options for the child to leave at the age of ten, although they had to prove a sufficient knowledge and be able to read, write and do simple arithmetic. Traditionally, the fairground children only attended school for three months during the winter. The majority of the time, only one member of

the family would be permitted to leave the camp on a daily basis; the other children would have had to stay behind to help with the daily camp chores. Beckett’s sister Amy attended the local school during the winter period, as she was required to inherit her Mother’s occupation as the family bookkeeper. By the 1930s, the Showmen’s Guild encouraged caravan schools as a means of resisting assimilation. Consequently, their children became aware of not only their separate cultural identity from the non-Traveller community, but in addition, their hierarchy within the travelling world.

There were instances where the Showmen’s children did attend state school, although just as with the Gypsy and Travelling communities’ children, most would normally have been preoccupied with the running of the family business. For the most part, only one child would have been selected to attend the state run school. This was usually a girl and would have only been permitted to remain in the school until she had learnt how to read and write and do simple arithmetic. The purpose of this was again for business gain, as the women of the community were the bookkeepers and traded with the outside community. Equally important, women’s identities within the fairground society and the structure of the society permitted and encouraged women to perform and work in whatever role they were good at; whether that be as an acrobat, driving the vehicles or doing manual work. It was the role of the women to know the business as thoroughly as their husbands, brothers and fathers. The role of the Guild, therefore, developed into a dual one. First, a relationship with the outside world, with its aim to protect the position and livelihood of its members. Second, an internal one of control and discipline. The jurisdiction within the body of the Showmen’s Guild established a strict membership scheme that ensured the Showpeople created and maintained their own identity, separate from other Gypsy and Traveller communities, as well of course from the non-Travelling communities.

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27 Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’.
29 ibid, p. 225.
30 Vanessa Toulmin, Pleasurelands: All the Fun of the Fair! (Sheffield & Hastings, East Sussex: National Fairground Archive at the University of Sheffield, in Association with Projection Box, 2003), p. 67.
31 Sexton, Travelling People in the UK, p. 131.
Whilst state led liberal and philanthropic ideals of education reform have been much discussed, it has a specific importance in relation to nomadic communities’ identities, in particular, the level of control exercised by the state. Education was used to assimilate and control the various racial and ethnic communities in Britain and transform their identities into the mainstream. To be precise, a variety of migrant groups (especially Jews) were acculturated through an Anglicised (and Anglican influenced) education. David Englander has discussed the Jewish immigrants in Britain during the Victorian era. He asserted that little was known about Yiddishkeit (the Jewish way of life) and the established Anglo-Jewish communities of Britain utilised the denominational Jewish Free Schools to instruct another form of Anglican ‘British’ Judaism and acculturate migrant children.  

However, David Dee further asserted that sport was another route into social integration. Indeed, he discussed the career and life of English track and field athlete Harold Abrahams and he suggested that Abrahams was ‘a perfect and useful example of how Anglicisation could lead to social and sporting integration’. He further asserted that in him:

the Jewish elites had someone from an immigrant background who had progressed through the exclusive public school and Cambridge system and who had gained prestige for himself and his community through his efforts in amateur athletics - an example which young immigrant Jews should look up to and try to emulate.

In the case of the roving communities it was not education reform cemented in the Church of England that pressurised the itinerant communities of Britain. Here, British Travellers’ observance of, and regular adherence to, either Protestant denominations of Christianity or Roman Catholicism tended to be far higher than the settled population. Ultimately, the main problem of

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34 Ibid, p. 62.
35 Clark & Greenfields, Here to Stay: The Gypsies and Travellers of Britain, p. 48.
the state led education was that it required a traumatic identity change. The reforms asserted that nomadic communities, for the educational welfare of their children, were not to travel up and down the country. Therefore, the transformative education strategy was not successful with these communities, purely because they prided themselves on living outside fixed places and spaces. Beckett’s future career, therefore, was crafted in the skills of furthering the family’s business, yet not one of the family could have predicted the impact on Beckett’s long term career and subsequent lifestyle.

Beckett’s identity as a travelling Showman, specifically a booth fighter’s character, granted him opportunities that he would otherwise have never experienced and provided him with a professional sporting career later in his life. As a travelling adolescent, he experienced life as an ethnic minority, but more poignantly as an outsider to ‘mainstream’ British life. Specific notions of ‘Britishness’ were relevant to Beckett’s character. Therefore, for this purpose, chances for social mobility were linked to Beckett’s change of identity. Beckett transformed from being on the fringes of society to integrating with the upper echelons of mainstream civilisation, via a career enhanced opportunity. Boxing did (and still does today) provide men like Beckett the break to transcend the class barriers that would otherwise be impossible to break through. Above all, the most important factor was money. David Dee assessed that well paid occupations were not available to men lacking in an education and the lure of the boxing ring provided men with financial rewards that were quick and relatively easy to gain.\textsuperscript{36} Beckett’s entertainment roots within the Showman profession gave him a unique background and one that enabled him ironically to craft a new identity away from the roaming existence of his childhood. However, Beckett never considered himself fully accepted and he had a constant sense of inferiority. Indeed, it hindered future business decisions as an adult, but more specifically ensured that his children did not go without formal education. In fact, as noted in the Introduction, all five of Beckett’s children attended

\textsuperscript{36} David Dee, \textit{Sport and British Jewry}, p. 112 – Dee specifically deals with the second generation (1920s/30s) Jewish community in London and the reasons as to why they chose boxing as a career. Most could not find work when they left the army after the First World War. Although not a direct Traveller comparison, the Jewish community nonetheless, also had identities that were seen as an outsider’s character to the British nation.
private schools in the Southampton area. Beckett’s daughter Margaret recorded:

whatever he became, he could not lose his background and was always conscious of where he had come from. He always had a sense of inferiority, as if he was not as good as others. Even if those others did not have the talent or ability he had. He would constantly aware of his lack of education and a target for any jealous jibe.\(^\text{37}\)

It is ironic that the very occupation that ensured Beckett’s identity as a Showman within the fairs was actually his route beyond his ‘outsider’ status. As a sport, twentieth century boxing became generally accepted as a popular form of entertainment, with massive media coverage.\(^\text{38}\) The commercialisation of boxing assured skilled booth boxers such as Beckett a career away from the fairs. Ultimately, these opportunities were pivotal in the boxer's new public and private identity. In this, he was not alone.

More recently, an example of a boxer who has also transformed his identity from an Irish Traveller to a world heavyweight champion is Tyson Fury. Like Beckett, Fury won his first BBBC (British Boxing Board of Control) championship title in his twenties beating John McDermott on 11 September 2009.\(^\text{39}\) His commercial boxing career started with an application to fight for Ireland in the 2008 Olympic games held in Beijing. Ireland denied him a chance to represent them and Fury traced his heritage back and demonstrated that he had a Belfast heritage. To that end, Fury was offered a chance to represent Great Britain. Since then, Fury has gone on to win every professional bout and held the BBBC, European Boxing Union (EBU), International Boxing Organisation (IBF) World Boxing Association (WBA) and the World Boxing Organisation (WBO) Heavyweight Champion titles.\(^\text{40}\) His Traveller heritage is comparable with Beckett’s. In fact, Fury inherited his boxing from his father, just like Beckett. Fury’s father was a bareknuckle champion, but never fought in the travelling booths.\(^\text{41}\) Clearly this

\(^{37}\) Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’.


\(^{39}\) Tyson Fury, BoxRec [http://boxrec.com/en/boxer/479205] [accessed 30 November 2017].

\(^{40}\) Ibid.

\(^{41}\) John Fury, BoxRec Encyclopaedia - [http://boxrec.com/media/index.php/John_Fury] [accessed 16 May 2015].
demonstrates that boxing is still a viable career path for ethnic minorities, particularly for those with a Traveller’s heritage. In short, boxing has often provided an avenue to success for young men from poor environments.\textsuperscript{42} Comparably, British Jews were able to use boxing as a profession and additionally for acculturation purposes. Dee has noted that (like Beckett and other British minorities) ‘Jewish involvement in boxing reflected and hastened wider Jewish absorption of the “habits and tastes” of Gentile working-class society’.\textsuperscript{43} On the one hand, the lack of accessible vocational opportunities and the location at the bottom of the social scale in British society created an isolation from middle-class cultures and ‘respectable’ society. On the other, the lower socioeconomic environment fashioned ‘the best’ booth fighters and the knowledge that boxing was the way to money and prestige.\textsuperscript{44}

The Beckett family made the choice that Joe did not regularly attend school. Consequently, it could be argued that he was isolated from mainstream society. Equally, it could be asserted that the fairground environment can be compared that of a school where the teachers would often be the parents, instructing their children in the operational side of their business.\textsuperscript{45} The Becketts’ boxing business was deemed education enough for Joe. By the time he was a teenager he had fashioned a pugilistic education and at which point his mother was approached by the ‘outsider’ boxing scout, she permitted him to leave the travelling Showman occupation to train professionally and ultimately become an ‘insider’.\textsuperscript{46}

Although isolated from what was considered the socially acceptable house-dwelling domain, most British fairground families have had some connections with particular towns and for the Becketts it was Southampton.\textsuperscript{47} Beckett’s connection with the port city remained a strong factor throughout his life. Indeed, his geographical identity - although initially nomadic – was rooted in Hampshire. The family’s winter quarters varied from the outskirts of the Southampton in Northam, where Beckett had his limited schooling, to

\textsuperscript{43} Dee, \textit{Sport and British Jewry}, p. 3.
\textsuperscript{45} Toulmin, \textit{Pleasurelands}, p.70 - 72.
\textsuperscript{46} Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’.
\textsuperscript{47} Adams, Okely, Morgan, & Smith, \textit{Gypsies and Government Policy in England}, p. 106.
Shedfield near Wickham, a small village on the outskirts of Winchester, where the traditional annual Gypsies’ horse fair is still held every May.48 Every year they would return to Southampton area and rent a yard to store away the booth and travelling equipment, along with stables for the horses.49 Throughout Beckett’s childhood and well into his travelling Showman days, the fair in which the family’s booth toured, travelled around Hampshire, Berkshire, Somerset and London.50 The season would start at Easter on Southampton’s Common, then would travel to Basingstoke, Hampstead Heath, whilst stopping at a variety of villages and towns, finally, the season would end with the Bridgwater Fair, Somerset, in late September.51 The fairs comprised of a variety of entertainments and attractions. At the turn of the twentieth century, rides were powered by steam, such as, the steam swings in Figure VI. The Lighthouse Slips, the first to open in 1905 by T. Harrison of Preston (modern day Helter Skelter) in Figure VII was made out of wood and designed to be disassembled for transporting across the country.52

Figure VI - W. Symond’s Steam Swings, taken in 1900 – Other attractions that were available at Southampton’s Common Fair – Arthur Jones Collection, National Fairground Archives, reproduced with permission of the University of Sheffield. Figure VII - Dan Baker’s Lighthouse Slip, taken in 1907 – P. Jackson Collection, National Fairground Archives, reproduced with permission of the University of Sheffield.

48 Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
Throughout his early years Beckett inhabited the south of England - more precisely and primarily due to the location of the winter dwellings, Southampton.

Figure VIII - Harry Gray’s Gallopers, taken in 1924 – Hampstead Heath was another fair that the Beckett Boxing Booth was pitched – Rowland Scott Collection, National Fairground Archives, reproduced with permission of the University of Sheffield. Figure IX - Crowds gathered at the Hampstead Heath Fair, taken in 1924 – Rowland Scott Collection, National Fairground Archives, reproduced with permission of the University of Sheffield.

The significance of Beckett’s Southampton identity is demonstrated in local newspaper articles. The earliest match reported locally was between Beckett and a Green Beret Guard, Private Casing. The fight was held in Southampton and the Southern Daily Echo on 20 January 1913 announced that both George (Joe’s older brother) and Joe had defeated their opponents. George beat Dai Thomas winning in ten rounds and the brothers were victorious.53 Nearly six years later, Beckett competed against Billy Wells for the King’s Trophy. Although Beckett lost the match, his reputation was by then widespread. Equally important, the newspapers reported his Southampton identity. The success of Joe Beckett as the ‘Southampton’ boxer, in the imperial services boxing tournament at the Albert Hall received a chorus of praise from the London press. In particular, the Evening Standard asserted that ‘Beckett showed the greatest improvement; he was splendidly fit’.54

53 20 January 1913, Southern Daily Echo.
54 12 December 1918, ‘Chorus of Praise’, Evening Standard, Jennie Lewis-Vidler’s private collection.
By the 1920s, Beckett had become national champion. George, however, remained in Southampton to fight amateur boxers and on 5 February 1920 defeated Albert Brancher. An unidentified newspaper source in the family’s private collected stated that:

every square inch at the Atherley Drill Hall was occupied at St Marys Road, Southampton last night. Long after all the seats were filled, an appearance of Joe Beckett, the British Heavyweight Champion, received great enthusiasm. Joe must have felt very flattered with his reception and when he could make himself heard, Beckett announced that they all knew he could defend his title at the present times. But when there was further outburst of enthusiasm, Beckett proclaimed that there is no Brit who can take the title away from me.55

Such press reports accentuate Beckett’s local roots. Indeed, the three articles stress an acceptance of his local identity through the years of competing, as well as his national pride. The first article reported a match held in St. Mary’s Southampton, the second acknowledged Beckett’s Southampton heritage and the third review proclaimed his heroic character as a boxing champion.

Further reinforcing local identification, as an adult when in training for the upcoming professional bouts, Beckett would run through Southampton’s Common and streets. Additionally, he purchased multiple properties and made investments in the Southampton area further revealing his rootedness in the town. Moreover, Beckett purchased a house for his mother on Winchester Road, Southampton, which further asserts his Southampton heritage.56 In turn, Beckett transformed his personal identity and extended static roots within the family. Equally important, for a man with a nomadic identity, to buy fixed homes clearly indicated that Beckett felt Southampton was ‘home’. He also involved himself in and created a political identity.

Beckett’s reflected middle class politics which led to him becoming a member

55 5 February 1920, Unknown source – Jennie Lewis-Vidler’s private collection. Both Margaret, Beckett’s daughter and Ruth, Joe’s wife, had a habit of cutting out newspaper articles on Beckett. They were not interested in where the article had been reported, so cut it away in order to stick in the scrapbook. Margaret would also type up reports of Beckett in newspapers. This particular source was typed up in her memoirs of her father.
of Southampton’s Conservative Club in the town’s centre.\textsuperscript{57} It would appear to be a move to manoeuvre, navigate and move upward through the British social classes, but also reflected his right-wing leaning which would emerge more significantly in the late 1930s. Similarly, as a parent, his five children attended Southampton schools; the boys King Edward VI situated on Winton Road and the girls went to St Anne’s (a Catholic school), just off Carlton Place.\textsuperscript{58} In short, reference to Beckett’s hometown of Southampton is constantly suggested and was reported in the international, national and local media relating to him and in his own commercial, political and family activities.

There can be no doubt that sporting celebrities were adopted by their hometowns as local boys ‘done good’ and therefore professional boxers were represented as both national and local heroes. Consequently, it added to Beckett’s character during his professional career and even after his death that he was still known as a local man. Crepeau has discussed that society needs the hero to ‘show us what we ought to be, and we make him a hero because we wish to be what he is’.\textsuperscript{59} This would indicate that people need inspiration from celebrities and therefore, a sporting hero’s identity should act as a good role model. Certainly then, the local affiliation toward a sporting celebrity encouraged the notion that someone from the same neighbourhood can provide a positive example for others to emulate. Moreover, the sporting hero’s character and warrior status must conform to the ideological practices and beliefs that are accepted by the masses; a mere athlete may have the fame, but a hero must have more.\textsuperscript{60} In this respect, the concepts of a hegemonic and homosocial masculine identity are relevant, which will be discussed in detail in the next chapter. Briefly, however, a sporting hero who portrayed his identity clearly, particularly within the realms of boxing would be rooted in strong – not just physical – hegemonic masculinity. In this context, however, the complicating ethnicity of the nomadic entertainers need to be addressed.

\textsuperscript{57} Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid.
The perceived racial characteristic of the travelling Showmen in Britain, both within the community itself and in the public's discernment of the group’s identity permits an acknowledgment of two separate identities. First, the self-awareness of self-reflected identity of the groups’ ethnicity as a homogenous body. Second, an outside public perception of the Travellers’ characteristics. Here, the Traveller’s identity will be labelled as an insider’s standpoint and the non-Traveller’s interpretation will be classed as an outsider. These two classifications can be applied to all British ethnic minorities. In general, identities carry political connotations and offer the possibility, however fragile, of resistance and challenge to structural and discursive constraint. More precisely, ethnic bodies are important components in the relational processes of differentiation through which identities are forged. For example, the itinerant lifestyle of the travelling groups (Gypsies, Irish Travellers and Showmen) is what epitomised the group’s distinctiveness and it was that particular identity that was deployed to create the difference. This particular cultural identity was deeply intertwined within the community, which in turn provided the group with a clear cultural boundary. Above all, the outsiders could not understand why the Travellers did not desire a fixed abode. How could they possibly lead a normal, healthy existence without living in a static home? From an insider’s outlook, the conception of themselves was as a distinct cultural group - one which was culturally inherited and not learnt, one that was considered self-marginalising and prided itself on being placed on the edge of society and living apart from the mainstream population. This characteristic was key to all bodies of the travelling communities and one that shaped their internal identity. In fact, the only time that the travelling communities truly interacted with outsiders would have been in the business sphere.

In order to maintain their separate identities and encourage their self-awareness as a separate ethnic group, much of their day-to-day living and family life remained within the communities. Indeed, all family members – men and women, young and old - produced the household income. The children contribute economically through begging, peddling and picking.

62 Ibid, p. 15.
It was rare for Gypsies or Travellers to make a living in the non-travelling communities. This is not to deny that they did not make money from the outsiders, as has been referenced when Beckett sold logs door-to-door, but they remained within the realms of the unskilled labour market and preferred to make their business contacts at annual Gypsy and Travelling events. For example, the annual horse fairs provided opportunities for English Gypsies and Travellers to gather – distant groups, families, former associates and neighbours assembled for entertainment, trading and friendly social interaction. The fairs were important not only in terms of making business contacts, but encouraged the young to meet other Travellers and Gypsies and keep marriages within the community. In addition, this maintained the inherited Gypsy and Traveller birthright which propagated their identity and their concept as a distinct cultural group.

The only travelling sect to specifically interact with outsiders was the Showmen’s Guild and its members. As previously mentioned, this particular body of Travellers considered itself not only separate from the non-nomadic community, but furthermore from the Gypsies and Irish Travellers communities. In fact, its membership ensured that the travelling business community remained unconnected to both non-Travellers and Travellers. There were ten regional sections to the Guild with specific members in each section dealing with issues such as planning, safety and education. Equally, the Showmen’s Guild members’ livelihood was completely dependent on the interaction with outsiders. The business of entertainment is what defined and shaped the Showpeople’s identity. Their businesses operated as villages on wheels, tied not only to the kinship of the Travellers but provided mobile entertainment that toured the country. There were three basic attractions within the fairs, relating to human curiosity, the instinct of competition and the desire for movement. In relation to the first category, the peep shows, freak shows, performing animals, fortune telling, exhibitions of curiosities, animate and inanimate, strolling players and booths, where

65 Ibid., p. 318.
patrons could watch or take part in boxing and wrestling bouts, worked alongside games of luck or skill that provided the competitive element, and stalls with food and drink have always appeared where large crowds gathered.69 In contrast, the only rival of the Showmen’s Guild’s fairs were Victorian music halls with the social ambience that emphasised a ‘popular’, rather than ostensibly, working class identity.70 Until the First World War, traditional fairs satisfied their customers with a unique form of spectator entertainment where crowds could choose to simply watch for no charge, or participate for a few pence.71 Cities and villages across Britain embraced the outdoor entertainment that would periodically appear in towns and communities, from the spring through to the autumn. It is important, therefore, to note that the cultural values of the Guild evolved. Indeed, they subjected their traditions, a nomadic lifestyle, to other groups with different social values. In short, the travelling communities acquired a sense of their own identity within British society once it was exposed to mainstream civilization. The members of the Showmen’s Guild clearly demonstrated this with their periodic exposure to conventional cultures across the United Kingdom. Likewise, within mainstream British culture the entertainment business that toured the country was valued as a source of excitement and difference to everyday life.

To this day, the fairs that tour the country and arrive at towns on a yearly basis provide a social activity for a mass of people and the seasons themselves seem to wait for the fairs.72 In fact, the annual fairs arrived before public holidays, which were linked to religious or pagan festivals, and consequently, spring and autumn were their most popular and busiest times.73 This alone demonstrates how the Showmen integrated their business into the religious and spiritual lives of their customers. However, the benefit of fairs timing their visits to coincide with public holidays was that their customers had free time to enjoy the entertainment offered. The welcome distraction of the music, the stalls and other attractions would have created, as Ian Starsmore has suggested, a ‘pied piper’ effect with the magnetism of

69 Roope, “Come to the Fair”, p. 9.
70 Joyce, Visions of the People: Industrial England and the Question of Class, p. 305.
71 ibid, p. 15.
the rides and shows. The history of the fair has penetrated British history for over a thousand years and it was at its most popular during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with the introduction of electricity to power the rides. The Showmen’s businesses were so integrated into British culture that political bills and acts were introduced to regulate and maintain their presence in British cities and towns. As previously discussed, the political influence on the regulation of the travelling professions was one that was based on mistrust of the nomadic way of life. In contrast, the fairground was viewed more positively, city councils with vision offered support to the travelling fairs because they recognised their importance, revealing an awareness that they brought life and colour to the towns and city centres. Southampton’s council encouraged the Showmen and their fairs to entertain its citizens on an annual basis. As noted earlier, Beckett’s fairground community stayed on the Common in the spring, before touring the southern counties. However, although Southampton became Beckett’s home town later in his life, during his childhood and adolescent years the family and its business was not static in one town for long during the season. This ensured that Beckett remained an ‘outsider’ to mainstream life at this point in his life.

Joe Beckett’s core identity was descended from travelling Showmen. Much of his early life was as an outsider from the mainstream British society. His life was imbedded in the roaming communities, more specifically the Showpeople, who themselves were and are constructed by others as not belonging to the wider community, including school and society. They were always ‘outsiders’, never insiders, and it is clear that Beckett had transformed himself through his personal social mobility and his earning potential during his professional boxing career. In fact, he crossed the boundary that had been created by the ‘other’ and became an insider. Indeed, he chose to live outside the Showpeople community when provided with an opportunity to do so, decided to marry outside the families of the Showpeople and more directly bought houses and laid down permanent roots all year round. Moreover, Beckett moved away from the inside aspects

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74 Starsmore, English Fairs, p. 7.
75 Ibid, p. 17.
76 Ibid.
77 Kalwant Bhopal & Martin Myers, Insiders, Outsiders and Others: Gypsies and Identity (Hatfield, Hertfordshire: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2008), p. 103.
of the Showman’s identity. Yet, he did remain in the Showman world as an entertaining sports personality: instead of boxing in moveable fairground booths, he competed in fixed establishments and mixed in mainstream circles. The question that needs to be probed further is whether Beckett saw himself as an insider or outsider.

For the most part – or so it would seem superficially – Beckett’s identity after his professional career had been established as that of an insider. Yet, whilst not wishing to dismiss the idea that Beckett was classed as an insider, especially in terms of his local identity, professional boxing championship titles and living outside of the lifestyle of travelling Showmen, he did live with a constant sense of insecurity and an inferiority complex that was connected to his illiterate origins and roots. Furthermore, newspaper articles and biographies of his life would always mention his roots in the fairground booths, such as, the articles in the Daily Mirror, biographies in the Boxing News and Boxing World, more locally the Hampshire Magazine. However, as will be discussed in Chapter Two, this was not necessarily classified as a negative identity, especially in regard to his chosen boxing career. For the most part, Beckett lived as an insider within the British ‘mainstream’. He understood the mechanics of what was needed to have a conformist ‘British’ identity. Yet, he threatened that acceptance in the late 1930s when he became a member of the British Union of Fascists and therefore gained an additional outsider identity, even though this was not one he necessarily sought. Ultimately, Beckett was proud of his heritage and it was something that he never hid. Even so, he did not box to represent Showpeople: he boxed to represent the heroic identity of a national champion. It thus appears that the change to a non-nomadic lifestyle also transformed his personal identity.


79 On the 12 August 1977, the Boxing News wrote ‘Beckett came from fairground stock, his parents running a boxing booth that travelled as a side-show with a circus in the South of England’. Additionally, in the April 1966 edition of the Hampshire Country Magazine it asserted ‘The whole Beckett family were fairground workers and Joe learned his art the hard way in the boxing booths’.
Irishness

Beckett, like other Travellers in the twentieth century and most definitely the contemporary Travellers of today, had substantial Irish connections. Although Beckett was not known for his Irish heritage (more his Showmen ancestry), the evidence strongly suggests connections to Irishness. In short, it is almost certain that both his parents were of Irish descent. Even so, because their identity was of Showmen and entertainers, being members of the Showmen’s Guild enabled them to distance themselves from the Irish Travellers that roamed Britain. Due to the lack of extensive primary evidence, the problems of tracing Beckett’s Irish lineage is amplified by the non-registration of members of the family’s births and deaths. Combined with their illiteracy and an absence of recorded memoirs and diaries that would have potentially linked the family’s heritage to Ireland, there is a problem with absolute proof. In fact, the only link within Beckett’s and his daughter’s personal collection is a family tree that was researched by a distant cousin of the family.\textsuperscript{80} In this respect, Beckett’s Irish connection is held by surname alone, as well as internal family memory. However, the suggestion of his Irish origins was a prominent part of Beckett’s heritage, but more precisely, an Irish identity as perceived more generally in society within the timeframe analysed demonstrates an additional layer of complexity. The relevance to the thesis, and more specifically this section, is the assumption of ‘English’ superiority over the ‘Irish’. Whether it was displayed through political and territorial policy or racial thinking, English anti-Irish prejudice was communicated to the masses through culture as well as state actions. For this reason, an exploration of how Irishness was constructed needs to be considered. It is relevant specifically because of the idea of the Irish boxer as a racial type and the importance of performing Irishness for the spectators, as well as its marketing.\textsuperscript{81} As with other ethnic minorities, the English as outsiders classified the Irish through racial chauvinism. More specifically, the

\textsuperscript{80} Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’ - Geoff Boyce, a distant cousin to the Becketts, generated an extensive family tree. Boyce’s document is well researched and specified Charlotte’s three marriages and the birth dates of her eight children.

poor Irish were seen as inferior beings and as with other ethnic minorities, vocational opportunities for the minority were limited.

During the nineteenth century, Irish immigration into Britain soared. Significantly, the heavy influx of immigrant reached its climax in 1845 – 51 raising the estimated Irish born population from 419,256 to 727,326, with a majority of them inhabiting major cities such as Liverpool, Glasgow, Manchester and London, with smaller groups of Irish migrants also inhabited the smaller towns and countryside. 82 This largely English speaking migrant community proved a challenge to the English, Scottish and Welsh to categorise their status and identity. Clearly, the Irish constituted a peculiar minority because they mainly spoke the same language and were British subjects under the 1800 Act of Union. 83 To this end, the English established a way to classify the Irish - above all, a way that placed Anglo-Saxons at the top of the racial scale. This racial discourse was designed so that the ‘Saxon yeoman’ was the heroic archetype immeasurably superior in all respects to the clannish, aggressive and primitive ‘Celt’. 84 The yeomen mythically derive from the medieval era, placing English men in a social class to attend noble households. But the word also denotes a freeholder, a man who cultivates land. Interestingly, the use of this word, distinguished and even distanced the English lower classes from the Irish. It painted a picture that English farmers were classed above the Celts and were viewed as noble within the dominant interpretation of ethnicity. Peter Mandler’s study of ‘Englishness’ noted that a nostalgic, deferential and rural ‘Englishness’ identified the village or Southern or ‘deep’ England as the template on which the national character had to be formed and thus the ideal. 85 This romantic vision of what characterised English identity was held with great conviction. It certainly distanced the urban environments of London and other great British cities, where high numbers of immigrants lived from the ideal.

Englishness was thus seen as the supreme form of racial category. The racial binary of Saxon and Celt was articulated in separate spheres:

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religious beliefs, political aspirations and education. There is no doubt that
the idea of Anglo-Saxon supremacy itself was born out of a political and
imperial context. Without the British Empire and the conquering aspirations
of the English mindset, the concept of Anglo-Saxon supremacy would not
have been so dominant and powerful. The territorial success of the British
Empire encouraged an English belief system that Anglo-Saxon white men
were racially superior, better educated and were born to rule the people
whom they believed to be savages or of a backward race or origin. With this
in mind, the Irish ‘Celts’ were seen as savage and were not fit to govern their
own homeland. There were certain overarching developments that were
discernible in this period. Primarily, as Andrew Porter has stressed, ‘imperial
expansion went together with a growth between the empire of white
settlement, in which subjects successfully claimed rights of self-government
by virtue of their British descent, and the empire of dependent or protected
peoples, who were generally denied such rights’.

The ethnocentric arrogance of the intellectual elite within Britain created a collective fantasy
that promoted the view that their citizenship as almost God given. Indeed,
Mark Francis has asserted that the prominent nineteenth century evolutionist
Herbert Spencer argued that the British classical education caused the elite
to identify with the Greeks and Romans, seeing their own imperial subjects
as analogous to conquered barbarians of the ancient world. Other
dominant white settler nations, for example the USA and Australia,
encouraged the same attitude and a global classification of identification of
cultures was encouraged. Indeed, due to the mass Jewish and Irish
immigration in the middle to late nineteenth century, both Britain and the
United States discerned the problem of what type of person was constituted
as ‘white’ and therefore, as desirable.

It was not until migrants such as the Irish, the majority of who had
different religious beliefs, dress codes and cultural practices, were immersed
in the dominant culture of Britain and America, did a need to determine what
was considered racially pure and for the idea of an Anglo-Saxon emerge. A
new identity was created and the term Anglo-Saxon became widely used. To

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be an Anglo-Saxon became the overarching English racial discourse and ethnic labels emerged to decide who was racially at the top of the scale and who remained at the bottom. In this sense, the invention of a suitable Anglo-Saxon heritage required racialising the ‘Saxon’ to suit Victorian needs. The romanticism was based on the idea of Anglo-Saxon culture of kinship and lordships. This was tied to the beginning of Christianity in Britain and with a monastic culture, English counties were created and the English became aware of themselves as having a separate identity. Additionally, there was a cultural code of class embedded in the Anglo-Saxon’s way of life and an aristocratic lifestyle governed the social stratification. Above all, the premise for glorifying the Anglo-Saxon culture was that it proved that the English had an extensive heritage; one that dated back centuries and it established an English cultural inheritance to all new immigrants. In this racial imagining, the Saxon’s principal enemies were the Celts and it was suggested that the latter were incapable of understanding liberty, much less applying it to ideas of freedom for themselves. In reality, it was the upper echelons of the Victorian middle-class who categorised race and this part of society created an imagined past in which ‘Saxons’ channelled the Protestant ethic and in which imagined history, became history proper.

Essentially, the negative perception of the Celtic Irish identity was aided by the fact that the majority of the Irish immigrants came from rural Ireland and had very few opportunities in education and work. High numbers of Irish immigrants were illiterate, which ultimately limited their occupational options. The English elite were under the impression that they were already inundated with lower skilled citizens and the Irish influx into the already overcrowded, working class urban areas, was blamed for the social problems of the Victorian era, especially those connected to the new urban centres such as Manchester. Significantly, to reinforce the Irish immigrant as a negative influence for Britain, a stereotypical persona was created and publicised in popular magazines (such as Punch magazine) to accentuate the migrant’s detrimental effects on British culture. In particular, the portrayal

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of a brutalised ‘Paddy’ who was inherently violent and unhygienic, unreliable and alcoholic, was constructed as a danger to the nation. To such thinking, it was essential that the superiority and national self-esteem took precedence over others deemed ‘lesser’ English. An alternative way of vilifying of the Irish identity was achieved through the use of language. More precisely, insults became another way to dehumanise and demarcate the Irish identity. Indeed, throughout the process of exclusion from what was deemed the ideal English white identity, the Irish ‘Paddy’ character endured a torrent of abuse. The purpose of denigrating the Irish character was that the English could distance them from other ‘white-skinned’ citizens. As an example, other colonial countries, for example Jamaica, skin colour acted as the most clear-cut visual marker of difference and ‘otherness’ that could be related to a different minority identity. Consequently, the English devised an alternative strategy to differentiate their racial identity to that of the Irish and to mark out the boundary of what the English character insisted that was ‘white’ and of good breeding. For this purpose, the various abuses piled upon the Irish ‘underclasses’ and the objectification of their identity, metaphorically ‘dirtied’ their skin and distinguished the line between what was deemed as respectable and what belonged to the ‘proper’ British white identity / ‘otherness’. Therefore, the English asserted their racial anxieties and their anti-Irish sentiment by stereotyping the ‘Paddy’ and by attaching additional labels as insults, which ensured that the ‘other’ – the Irish – would endure a process of exclusion from society and culture in the pursuit of untarnished Englishmen.

An equally important reason as to why the portrayal of a stereotypical Irish character was so reinforced was the contemporary political climate. Significantly, the Irish migrant acknowledged that Britain provided them with a means to live, with better wages and hopes for improvement, but equally, they recognised that it was Britain’s misgovernment that had caused them to uproot from their homeland in the first place. Furthermore, it was not enough to degrade Irish morality: an attack on their physical nature was

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93 Bhopal & Myers, Insiders, Outsiders and Others, p. 89.
94 Ibid, p. 91.
made using Darwinian theories to scientifically prove the ape like identities of the Irish and compare them to other races that the British considered inferior to the superior Anglo-Saxon race.

Figure X - Harper’s Weekly, 1899. Artist Unknown. Using Darwin’s science theories as a basis, the idea of the Irish as less than fully white persisted. Although the artistic interpretation was printed in an American publication, the Anglo, Irish and Negro depiction is similar to English racial stratification and shows that operated across the Anglo-Saxon world.

It was with these clear images that we see the Irish construed as a group that was ultimately linked to a race that the English thought was at the bottom of the racial pile: the descendants of those of African heritage. Indeed, Charles Kingsley the nineteenth century Anglican Priest and promoter of Darwinian ideas of natural selection, on a visit to Sligo wrote in his memoirs:

I am haunted by the human chimpanzees I saw along that hundred miles of horrible country. To see white chimpanzees is dreadful; if they were black, one would not feel it so much.  

Additionally, English biologist Thomas Huxley also applied biology to the degrading of the Irish when he compared them to Africans after he asserted that the Irish prognathous facial features were comparable to an ape. It was part of the same culture that encouraged cartoons to depict Irishmen as gorillas. Thus, studies on prognathous (the position of the lower jaw) and orthognathic (position of the upper jaw), and its relevance to how facial

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angles represented a correlation with a person’s mental state or intelligence, and with incorporation of phrenology, encouraged and influenced the concept of race as a type and more importantly, created a racial distance between the English and the Irish.  

Most importantly, the assertion that the facial features of Irish men demonstrated a resemblance to that of an ape, meant that the Irish character as being unintelligent and not capable of assuming an English or even British identity.


The previous satire image was represented in the Punch magazine and once again depicted an Irish character with primate facial features. Furthermore, it also confirmed that racial stereotyping went hand-in-hand with science - albeit in a very different light to the social Darwinian theories. This specific example has depicted the Irish man as a giant, but if the focal point remains with the facial features, it cannot be denied that the relevance of

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physiognomy was to assert that the Irish identity was lower down the Darwinian social scale than that of the English.

Figure XII – Jennie Lewis-Vidler's personal collection, George Carpentier and Joe Beckett, a Tom Webster's Cartoons in the Daily Mail, 2 October 1923 and Figure XIII - Jennie Lewis-Vidler's personal collection, Joe Beckett, in The Age Of Production, Punch Magazine, 1920

Half a century on from the heyday of Victorian scientific racism, images still referred to the Irish identity with the same characterisation. Clearly, racist attitudes had not disappeared and the concept of the physiology of the Irish identity, still contained explicitly racist connotations. Mary Hickman has asserted that it was related to the attitude of 'you' (as a member of the British politic) and 'them' (non-members), which she stated, 'utilised a wide array of signifiers of phenotypical and cultural homogeneity'.

The image in Figure. XII was taken from a five page spread of a cartooned account of the long awaited 1923 re-matches between EBU Champion Carpentier (a French fighter) and Beckett. Carpentier's caricature is represented as elegant and poised, athletically balanced in readiness to strike, his feet arched displaying an energy and pugilistic presence of mind.

99 Mary Hickman, 'Reconstructing deconstructing 'race': British political discourse about Irish in Britain', Ethnic and Racial Studies, Vol. 21., No. 2. (March 1998), p. 289 – Hickman’s article provides a fascinating insight into British/English attitudes toward the Irish population living in Britain and the reconstruction of their 'Irishness' to reconstruct their identity in Britishness to create a sense of homogeneity. She also included a discussion regarding the differences between ‘acceptance’ of the migrant Irish population compared to the black communities living in Britain. Hickman suggested that the ‘whiteness’ of the Irish both continued access to higher labour power for British employers, especially for the unskilled manual labour slot. Primarily, due to their ‘invisibility in the reformulated homogeneity culture in the British Isle.
Indeed, Carpentier’s gracious physique is striking in comparison to his opponent. More precisely, his elongated brow demonstrates social standing, class division and good breeding. If we compare Carpentier’s drawing to the *Harper’s Weekly* racial interpretation, his facial features resemble an Anglo-Teutonic character. The lengthening of his forehead suggests a larger brain, insinuating his academic ability and superior intelligence. Carpentier’s fixed stare is direct and focused on his opponent and the ocular placement is aesthetically well proportioned. Carpentier’s intellectual depiction is suggestive of Beckett’s inability to out-wit his opponent and an additional mock on the time it took Carpentier to knockout Beckett, further hinting at Carpentier’s superiority. Finally, in comparison to Beckett, there is clear muscular definition. Carpentier’s arms, chest and legs display well defined physical strength.

Comparatively, Beckett in Figure. XII is representative of a debased Irishman. His pronounced furrowed brow is short in contrast to Carpentier’s, demonstrating a resemblance to the Irish Iberian drawing in Figure. X. Beckett’s protruding chin, along with the disproportionate displacement of his jaw and thickening of lips is similar to ‘The Irish Frankenstein’ in Figure XI, therefore, denoting his lower class and a definite connection to Irishness. Beckett’s lack of musculature, short and stocky physique with thick ears is presented as problematic. His pose is not pugilistic and he is simply not ready to fight. This is also demonstrated in his eyes with a surprised and startled look as if a frightened ‘native’. Beckett’s boxing identity is undermined. More poignantly, his resemblance to an ape, as described earlier, degrades Beckett’s status and his fitness to represent *Britain* as a national champion.

The *Punch* character in Figure. XIII is a cartoon of Beckett and was presented alongside other celebrities and politicians as a centre page spread in 1920. If the public were unsure of what ethnic status Beckett was during the height of his career, it was now explicit. Similar to Figure. XII, Beckett’s facial features are comparable to Neanderthal man. His brow is once again shortened and expression is of bewilderment. Beckett’s muscular physique and defensive boxing pose is present in this drawing, but alongside his facial expression, his masculinity translates as ‘thuggish’ in comparison to
Carpentier’s athletic manliness in Figure. XII. Interestingly, the *Punch* image of Beckett was drawn at the peak of his profession in 1920. Therefore, Beckett’s height is presented higher than the image of him in the *Daily Mail* that was published in 1923. The *Daily Mail*’s representation of Beckett was reporting the last competitive championship title and professional match of Beckett’s career. Carpentier defeated Beckett in seconds and the match ended in his knockout. The *Daily Mail* clearly wanted to degrade Beckett to demonstrate the nation’s disappointment. However, the Irish characterisation of Beckett in both the 1920 and the 1923 artistic interpretations denotes that the press considered Beckett to be of Irish origin and that they, therefore, implicitly assumed their readers would make this same connection.

In order to ascertain why Beckett was characterised in the illustrations as typically having an Irish identity – instead of his nomadic heritage – an interpretation of how the *Punch* magazine presented the Traveller communities needs to be considered. As discussed in the previous section, the general assertion of what constituted any of the three roaming identities classed together was that they were seen as outsiders, living on the fringe of a mainstream civilian identity. How then were the communities satirised in popular magazines? In contrast to the vast amount of Irish identity images that were procured in the prominent Victorian publications, limited evidence is available that relate to those of the nomadic communities’ identities. In short, most of the characterisations were of a confused identification that insinuated a combination of the Gypsy and Showmen or entertainer fused together. Most focused on the stereotypical travelling fortune teller. Furthermore, the pictures identified were of women, for example, the 1902 drawing and the 1875 illustration from the popular periodical *Funny Folks* in Figure XIV and XV.
Figure XIV – Source Unknown – the girl is pointing saying ‘I say Billy, ‘ere’s a gypsy! Let’s ‘ave our fortunes telled!’, [https://www.cartoonstock.com/vintage/directory/f/fortune_teller.asp](https://www.cartoonstock.com/vintage/directory/f/fortune_teller.asp).

Figure XV - *Funny Folks*, 27 February 1875, ‘Giving it to them hot’.
If we analyse Beckett’s representation in relation to the illustrations above, the public’s perception with what was considered a nomadic identity - one that consisted of a Traveller, Gypsy or Showperson’s character - was that they were female. Significantly, if their identity was so gendered, Beckett needed to be reconstructed with an Irish heritage, because such cartoons overstated physical features to exaggerate their point.100 More importantly, other illustrations of travelling communities usually drew characters alongside their moveable dwelling, for example, a caravan being pulled by a horse. In part, this was due to the association of the travelling communities and their mobile homes as being part of their identity in contrast to ‘respectable’ society. By the time Beckett was being characterised in the popular media he had adopted a sporting identity, one that had distanced itself from the former travelling Showman character. Indeed, Beckett’s dominant image was one of sports personality and not a travelling Showman. Therefore, he needed to be seen as wearing boxing attire and not alongside a moveable dwelling. More specifically, to demonstrate that Beckett had a problematic heritage, one that was not ‘pure’, it was easier to portray his persona with Irish characteristics, rather than that of a Traveller. This argument needs to be taken one step further. Why was it that the media could not assert Beckett as simply English or British? Why was there a need to insist that he was of Irish character? Beckett’s portrayal as ‘Irish’ alerted the public that he was not traditionally ‘Anglo-Saxon’. Moreover, Beckett’s Showman heritage was well known within British society. Therefore, to accept that he had used boxing as a medium of social mobility and had then adopted a new British identity (one that consisted of a celebrity sportsman that moved him into a mainstream society) was, for some, a step too far.

Although there is no absolute proof that Beckett had Irish ancestry – apart from the suggestion that both parents were of that origin – the cartoon depictions that both the Daily Mail and the Punch magazine portrayed Beckett as being from that background. Moreover, both publications attempted to undermine his status, especially in reference to his last professional bout with Carpentier - especially as he had lost and had been

humiliated by a Frenchman, therefore, undermining Beckett’s claim to be ‘English’. Interestingly, prior losing the bout the British media were keen to assert Beckett’s ‘Englishness’. Indeed, *The Times* described him the day before the ‘the great fight’ as an ‘iron-barked Englishman’. If the images are analysed in conjunction with the description of an English interpretation of a typical Irish male, it is plausible to see Beckett’s alleged Irishness coming to the fore. Ironically, Beckett never expressed or considered his ‘Irishness’ and, therefore, this particular identity did not guide the events in his life.

When Beckett married Ruth Ford in 1923 he made a considered decision to marry outside the Traveller and Irish communities. One reason for this is because he was no longer socialising with the nomadic culture or travelling with the boxing booths or considered himself to be Irish. Beckett’s ethnic status had already been acculturated. However, Beckett was careful not to lose his nomadic heritage completely and when he had a young family, they toured the south coast in their family caravan for a month in the summer every year. He was not a practising Catholic (although his daughters did attend a Catholic school) nor did he have any direct connection to his Irish ancestry. Moreover, his children did not or do not speak of their Irish heritage. In contrast, the family remain proud of their travelling Showpeople origins and this part of Beckett’s identity is being embraced and passed down to generations through reminiscence and family lore.

By comparison to the nomadic identities in the previous section, the Irish also had a racial hierarchy in relation to what was perceived as traditionally Celtic. Significantly, there was a desire to distance themselves from the Irish Travellers who were understood to be an especially degraded strain. The Travellers were nicknamed the ‘tinkers’, and debates raged between the mainstream Irish population, as well as the ‘true Gypsies’, about their traveller and their ‘Irishness’. Indeed, the Gypsies and the Irish alike both believed that the behavioural issues of which their types were accused were the fault of the tinkers alone. The Irish Travellers also did not fit into the

101 *The Times*, 3 December 1919, p. 7.
102 Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’.
103 Ibid.
traditional roaming identities. For the most part, the Irish tinkers were a subgroup that did not fit into the mainstream Irish category, as the Irish did not trust them and for the same reasons that the English did not. Moreover, the Gypsy and Showmen’s culture refused to accept the Irish Travellers within the fold of their identities. Nevertheless, if an Irish Traveller demonstrated a skill toward boxing and ultimately established a professional career, he would be regarded by the static Irish community as kin.

One of the positive ways that the Irish males demonstrated their Irish identities was through boxing. For the most part the Irish, like other ethnic minorities, lived in relatively homogenous concentrations in British urban areas; they purchased their necessities at Irish stores and formed a community within a community.105 As previously outlined boxing was a lucrative occupation for male ethnic minorities with limited or no education. Pugilism allowed those of minority origin, like Beckett, the possibility of earning a large income that would provide them with social mobility. Equally, boxing provided the capacity to unite ethnic groups to support the sporting heroes that represented them. In fact, Irish boxers in the early 1920s and 1930s adopted symbols, manners of dress and distinctive styles that highlighted their cultures and ethnicity in order to increase their popularity with their fellow Irish.106 The pugilists performed their Irish ancestry and Irish boxing spectators developed a reciprocal relationship with the cultural production of Irishness.107 An example is American-Irish boxer John. L. Sullivan, who grew up on the streets of the infamous Five-Points in New York City. Boxers battled to defend the honour of their Irish pride and to become heroes to other Irish immigrants.108 Likewise, the Irish-American Frank Moran, otherwise known as the ‘Pittsburgh Dentist’, tried defending Irish pride against American black boxer Jack Johnson in the Veledrome d’hiver in Paris on 27 June 1914 (of which incidentally George Carpentier was the referee), but failed and lost the match on points in the twentieth round.109

106 Dee, Sport and British Jewry, p. 116.
Additionally, other so-called Irish boxers specifically changed their names and even their ethnicity to gain the backing of Irish supporters. These included, Jack Moran who was born into a Polish family and originally named John Ralph Cizek.\(^{110}\) It suggests that public racial identity was interchangeable, especially if you were a boxer of non-African origin, even if Irish. However, it would have been impossible for black boxers to assume an alternative racial identity, especially if they tried to adopt a ‘British’ identity. Thus, concepts of whiteness need to be further addressed with regard to Beckett.

**Whiteness and non-Whiteness in the Constitution of British Identity**

Joe Beckett’s image had changed dramatically by the time he began to fight championship titles at the NSC and other prestigious venues. He had positioned himself and changed from an ‘Irish’ Traveller’s fairground identity to an elite white professional British boxing champion. By this process, Beckett’s male body had become normalised and universalised in its whiteness through the discourses of imperial culture, sexuality and masculinity through a sport that was seen in society as an elite, manly occupation.\(^{111}\) This section of the thesis will focus on the traits that were attached to the colour of a person’s skin and from this, their racial being and place in the world. In order to do this, the concept of whiteness in constructing British identity needs to be defined and interrogated.

As previously noted, Britain in its imperial state, upheld the need to inspire a national identity to fend off merging (both at home and in her colonies) with all the ‘others’ with whom the empire came into contact. In this respect, although whiteness as a racial identity was established, it was and is not static: white racial identity is a process and not a scientific descriptor. Indeed, it reflected the ever-shifting boundaries between different racial


groups, just as the characteristic associated with being heterosexual or middle-class within the timeframe was continuously negotiated.\textsuperscript{112}

Here, it will be asserted that the dominant English mindset categorised ‘whiteness’ and that others through this process were set apart from traditional white Anglo-Saxons. In order to do this, the discussion will pay particular attention to the spectrum in which the white-skinned characters within the British population were graded. As a consequence, this section will give further attention the importance of the asserted privileged position within British society that being ‘white-skinned’ offered. It will from this explore the differentiation of a racial ‘in-group’ from an ‘out-group’ identity, alongside the implication of a need to preserve the superiority of one’s group over the out-group.\textsuperscript{113} Lastly, the focus will remain on the boxing vocation, the elite clubs and venues and their relevance to Beckett and his identity as a white British male.

As previously underlined, Britishness/Englishness was related to Anglo-Saxon identities, as against Nomadic and Irish identity amongst others. The reinvention of Anglo-Saxonism, alongside a Darwinian scientific mentality, together with the advancement in the social movement that was eugenics, created a shift in thinking. For this reason, at the turn of the century, the Irish, Italians and Jewish immigrants were considered neither white nor black, but classified under religious and other cultural differences.\textsuperscript{114} The influx of such migrants required that whiteness represented the hierarchy of racial norm, but that it was defined by appropriation and the delineation of groups that were perceived as having a Anglo-Saxon non-white identity.\textsuperscript{115} Consequently, categorisation required further classification to which white persons were superior to another within the British nation and its colonies.

The superiority of the English white man’s identity, scientific racism, stereotyping, racial hierarchies and a concern for a widespread national miscegenation had long been a source of anxiety for generations of British citizens. It was not just an aesthetic concern; it was a real fear of the dilution

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid, p. 251.
\textsuperscript{114} Ibid, p. 251.
\textsuperscript{115} Decker, ‘The Visibility of Whiteness and Immigration Restriction in the United States’, p. 2.
blood that bolstered a ‘white’ self-awareness. Lamarckian evolutionary principles had seeped into sections of elite thought, where it was considered common knowledge that learned habits could be turned into inherited instincts by the process of the inheritance of acquired characteristics.\(^{116}\) The anthropological evolutionary ideas were now being exploited to create a model of natural selection with a view to establish that western white-skinned identities were at the top of the racial scale. Recent studies, for example by Monica McDermott, Frank Samson and Peter Kolchin, have all discussed whiteness as a theory that being of ‘white’ skin has never been racialised in itself and that whiteness was associated with privilege in comparison to other racial categories. ‘Whiteness’, as an academic concept is highly complex and requires detailed analysis, especially when discussing Beckett’s ‘white’ ethnic status. However, before this can be achieved, some historical background needs to be addressed.

From the nineteenth century and onward, people’s skin colours have been categorised, the comprehension of whiteness has been understood, but in different contexts.\(^{117}\) To be white in Victorian Britain meant superiority to others with a different skin colour. However, this is undeniably connected to the previous discussion regarding Beckett’s physiognomy. Indeed, it was not just skin colour in question, but the body as a whole. Influenced by Darwin, ranking and grading whites and non-white skinned people became the new evolutionary template. Indeed, many anthropologists, historians, sociologists and scientist alike took it upon themselves to assert a variety of models, which would govern and grade every global citizen. Such racial mapping went beyond non-Europeans. In 1850, scientist Robert Knox characterised the Celtic race as consisting of furious fanaticism, a love of war and disorder, a hatred for order and patient industry; no accumulative habits, restless, treacherous and uncertain.\(^{118}\) He added, ‘look at Ireland’.\(^{119}\) This attitude ingrained itself into western consciousness and created a mentality that prescribed that not only were non-white populations and citizens


\(^{119}\) Ibid.
considered inferior, but also there would be a hierarchy underneath as the ruling white ‘species’. By offering an explanation of the world, it not only insured the supremacy of the English white male, but created a new ‘pecking order’. It assumed an attack on the intelligence of non-whites and labelled non-English cultures as inferior. Moreover, the variety of grading the ethnicities and racial differences grew more complex. As an example, one racial stratification scale even included the climate. Irish embryologist E.W. MacBride was keen to make sure that the Irish were not too far down the scale and advocated that a colder climate should be taken into account. For instance, if one’s origins were from the north of Europe, with its colder weather and harsher climate, compared to Italy or South of France, it was assumed naturally that the selected group was advanced in order to survive. A model of racial hierarchal origins emerged and the Irish population in Britain was regarded as mentality primitive. Equally, there can be no doubt that in antebellum America the Irish were also regarded as a degraded and savage people. Their absence of whiteness was seen as the key source of this inferior status. How then was Beckett racially categorised? Did his ‘white’ skin provide a privileged position, or was he imagined differently?

Beckett’s ‘white’ ethnicity evolved throughout his lifetime, primarily because he belonged to more than one subcultural identity. There are a variety of social and economic factors that determine the importance and function of ethnicity: class, territory and ideology. These three themes will support the discussion on Beckett perceived ‘whiteness’.

Discussing ‘whiteness’ is highly subjective and complex; therefore, the evaluation will be narrowed to evidence aimed at understanding the density of categorising Beckett’s ‘white’ identity. Firstly, class status in late nineteenth and early twentieth century was complicated. Patrick Joyce outlined the differences between pre and post war Britain and argued that it was:

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122 Ibid.
pretty clear that the war saw striking developments: it greatly hastened structural changes, such as a narrowing of wage differentials within manual labour, but most of all it saw the growth of dichotomous image of society, turning upon the opposition of labour and capital. These replaced the old three-tier, and very fluid, pre-war system of an ‘upper, a ‘middle’ and a ‘lower’ or ‘working-class or classes’.124

There were different parameters and rules (which were designed by the ruling elite) to establish the hierarchical British class systems. Yet, an individual (or group’s) classification varied and depended on which part of the empire they inhabited. Indeed, Alastair Bonnett highlighted that class and white identity in Britain varied whether you lived in Britain itself or on one of its colonies and was legitimised through imputed class attributes. For example, Bonnett specified that the ‘British working-class was ‘white’ in colonial settings (including the transposition of colonial settings to Britain), but something less than, or other to, white in the context of Britain’s internal hierarchy’.125 This outlines the intricacies of imperial British ‘whiteness’ and symbolises a wide and diverse set of social ideals. Beckett throughout his boxing career was considered working-class or then middle-class (due to earnings from fighting professionally). However, if Beckett was considered working-class that would have be one identifier, but he was also perceived (and saw himself) as rooted in the travelling Showmen business. Yet, it must be noted that he chose to not live the travelling Showman lifestyle and actively adapted his ‘class’ status once he had gained economic security. Nonetheless, Beckett’s nomadic heritage created an additional set of ‘whiteness’ constraints and complications. This is especially so as Brian Klug has argued that people in Britain were divided into ‘White and Not White, insiders and outsiders’, alongside John Gabriel’s further assertion that ‘whiteness’ consisted of five categories: White Pride Politics, normative, ontological, progressive whiteness and subaltern.126 Gabriel offered that White Pride Politics entailed the conscious pursuit of and celebration of

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124 Joyce, Visions of the People, p. 8.
whiteness and which was explicitly racist; Normative whiteness as having two discourses liberal and national identity; Ontological whiteness consisted of the ‘state of being white’ under social division banners such as class and gender; Progressive whiteness which condemns white pride and normative versions of whiteness yet in which ‘whites’ continue to dominate both ideologically and organisationally; and finally Subaltern whiteness which included ‘minority whiteness’, for example, Irish and Jewish citizens.

Gabriel’s groups, however subjective, can assist with the understanding in the complexities of Beckett’s ‘whiteness’. Indeed, his ‘whiteness’ had strong elements of the both White Pride Politics, especially in the 1930s (which will be discussed further in Chapter Three) and his heritage was Subaltern whiteness. Furthermore, his character also consisted of some elements of Normative values, however, he had minimal Progressive and Ontological principles. But, as Steven Neale has emphasised ‘identifications are multiple, fluid, at points even contradictory’ and Beckett’s class and ‘whiteness’ status was conflicting. Yet, it was the mainstream public’s perception of what it was to be ‘white’ and the fluidity of their concept that enabled Beckett to adapt his ‘whiteness’. This in turn was aided by his professional and well publicised boxing career that required him to publicly expose his muscular male body. Consequently, Beckett’s professional sporting career aided his ‘whiteness’ and to an extent later catapulted him into a ‘hyper-whiteness’ position or as Klug has stressed the ‘white, white’ ethnic group, particularly in terms of his fascist political ideals. Primarily as boxing was seen as a superior sport and thus further supported the adaptation of the British mainstream’s perception of his ‘whiteness’. Professional pugilism and the romanticised understanding of an ‘ideal’ masculine white male British identity will be evaluated in the next chapter. To that end, how Beckett perceived his own ‘whiteness’ can only be analysed through his social progression through the British class system and to enter the ‘white’ race was, as Noel Ignatiev has


128 Klug discussed the Jewish citizens place in British society and queried ‘what does it mean to say when you are white?’ He further questioned ‘are Jewish people white? Their physical appearance suggests one answer, historical experience suggests another’ and came to the conclusion that ‘whiteness is a kind of sociological clubhouse, a weird compression of tribal and ethnic animosities, some dating back to the time of the Roman invasions, all realigned to make new enemies, all compromised to make new friends’ and therefore, ‘the idea in people’s heads that they belong to this clubhouse, keeping its doors slammed shut in the faces of others’.
asserted, a ‘strategy to secure an advantage in a competitive society’.\textsuperscript{129} Beckett’s Showman identity casted further doubt on his ‘whiteness’.

The Showmen were a type of entrepreneur and contributed to what Ignatiev classified as a ‘competitive society’ and they too were a different class of Traveller.\textsuperscript{130} For instance, they earned their money and complied with the mainstream town laws to conduct their business. Nevertheless, the nomadic group were considered ‘outsiders’ because they failed to subscribe to normative lifestyles.\textsuperscript{131} For the nomadic communities an ‘insider’ was someone within their own community. It would appear that each ethnic group had their own ‘ethnic’ categorisation method. Similar to British Jews, Beckett’s ‘whiteness’ was questioned as it was felt he did not represent either the ‘white, white’ or the ‘white’ ethnic group. However, Beckett did perceive his own identity as a British ‘insider’ and this will be discussed in Chapter Three. Therefore, the travelling group cannot be classed as part of the regular British working-class labouring group. If ‘whiteness’ was dependable on class, the Showmen would have been less ‘white’ than mainstream working-class citizens, which in turn, would suggest that Beckett’s ‘whiteness’ would have been questioned. Class was a major attribute of the elite ‘white’ British identity at the turn of the century, but protecting the established belief of the English rural idyll also contributed to the protection of hierarchical ‘whiteness’.

Territory, as a criteria for distinguishing British ‘whiteness’, is highly significant when analysing Beckett’s identity. For clarification, territory for the sake of this argument is related to the British rural idea - mainly because it is specific to Beckett’s travelling Showman character, as well as the connections with the adoration with their rural areas and its identity were used to promote ‘Englishness’. The conventional British view of the countryside was one of paradise. For example, in 1924 Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin idealised rural Britain in his speech ‘What England Means to Me’. He stated:

\begin{quote}
The sounds of England, the tinkle of hammer on anvil in the country smithy, the corncrake on a dewy morning, the sound of\
\end{quote}

the scythe against the whetstone, and the sight of a plough team coming over the brow of the hill… wild anemones in the woods of April, the last load at night of hay being drawn down a lane as twilight comes on… These things strike down to the very depths of our nature, and touch chords that with every year of our life sound a deeper note in our innermost being. Baldwin was not an exception, Englishness was steeped in the romanticism of the countryside. Sarah Neal further asserts that:

much of the de-racialised discursive power of the rural idyll lies in its ability to simultaneously use the countryside as a framing device for English national identity and construct it as a place of retreat and safety. Therefore, part of that ‘safety’ and the rural fantasy did not consider the travelling communities as being part of that utopia. Even considering a ‘rural’ identity was inherently intertwined into the British nomadic identity. The language to describe the nomadic communities in Britain was (and still is today) highly derogatory. For example, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth terms like ‘Pikey’, ‘Gypo’ and ‘Tinker’ insulted the roaming groups. This ensured that the travelling communities remained ‘outsiders’ even though, for the most part, their culture was embedded in the countryside. These insults were combined with mainstream opinions and heightened the heterogeneity of the category of ‘white’, especially as many in Britain viewed the traveller groups as an ‘othered’ group. This was similar to the American population labelling Southern rural inhabitants as ‘rednecks’ and defining ‘them’ as backward, a breed apart, inbred, lazy, dirty, uneducated, racist and right-wing, violent, intolerant, poor and trashy. This language further racialised the communities and questioned their ‘whiteness’. Particularly the state posited that they were ‘dirty’ and the ‘darkness’ of their skin was compared to the ‘clean’ general populace. The supposedly unsoiled
skin emphasised their ‘whiteness’ and further exaggerated their ‘white’ identity. To that end, the English ideals of the countryside were essential. The labourers of the land and the inhabitants of rural villages were considered quintessentially ‘white’, whilst the ‘other’ country nomadic communities were not. Neal has emphasised further that historically the English political and class system was forged and maintained through the social relations of the countryside.\textsuperscript{136} However, residents who lived on and off the land - the Gypsy, Traveller or Showpeople communities - were not part of the ‘white, white’ English idyll. They were considered the wrong type of ‘white’ and the distinction between desirable and undesirable ‘whiteness’ became highly visible in the rural context.\textsuperscript{137}

Neal’s study on New Age Travellers also compared the reaction of rural areas in England to the ‘not quite white’ status the Travellers, to the early responses to Eastern European refugees and asylum seekers. It provides an additional complex level to Beckett’s ‘whiteness’ status. As stated earlier, his British/English character is multifaceted and although the discussion has highlighted some of those intricacies, Beckett’s racial, ethnic and ‘white’ identity is open to interpretation. However, it is important to suggest that the British establishment did not immediately consider Beckett as fully ‘white’. The complication is that by the time Beckett professionally boxed and had earnt the large purses, he gradually adjusted his ‘whiteness’ to what was expected in general society. This in turn asserts that Gypsies, Travellers and Showpeople, if they chose, could at least attempt to conceal their origins and therefore, alter their perceived whiteness by adopting the perceived ‘norm’.\textsuperscript{138} Boxing enabled Beckett to climb socially, mainly due to his financial situation which had changed, but furthermore, because his physical (bodily) representation was glorified. Even so, it is clear that Beckett’s ‘whiteness’ and whether he was considered ethnically the right type of Englishman was constantly questioned, no more so than by the elites in the boxing world and the National Sporting Club.

Beckett was originally seen by the elite National Sporting Club as an outcast until his public popularity soared and the elite boxing venue could no

\textsuperscript{136} Neal, ‘Rural landscapes, representations and racism’, p. 443.
\textsuperscript{137} Ibid, p. 447.
\textsuperscript{138} Bhopal & Myers, Insiders, Outsiders and Others, p. 88.
longer refuse him to box within their area of jurisdiction. At the start of Beckett’s career, it was his ethnicity that prevented him from being accepted by the club and the championship title match against Bombardier ‘Billy’ Wells was held at London’s Olympia. When Beckett beat Wells for the British Empire Heavyweight title in February 1918, he became the first British champion to come from a fairground boxing family.  

Beckett’s victory, however, was not recognised by the NSC and the club insisted the fight had been staged. The NSC’s objection was partly due to the match being fought outside the club’s jurisdiction. However, the general public and boxing writers ignored the decision made by the autocratic National Sporting Club and made Joe the ‘people’s champion’. Significantly, the non-members and average boxing enthusiasts - who themselves were seen as outsiders to the elite NSC – refused to accept the ruling. Indeed, Evan R Treharne in *British Heavyweight Champions* (1959) acknowledged that if the ‘NSC would not acknowledge Joe as champion, the general boxing public were prepared to do so’. What then was the reason behind the NSC choosing Wells over Beckett? Wells was a well-known RAF pilot with a reputation that earned him the nickname ‘Bombardier’. Billy Wells was tall and handsome and might have been a film star rather than a boxer. Moreover, his ‘whiteness’ was not questioned due to a combination his manliness physique, his East End heritage and his service in the forces. Beckett in comparison was short, thickset with a ferocious attitude and was a complete contrast to Wells. Furthermore, as demonstrated Beckett’s Britishness was multifaceted and his military career was not steeped in heroism.

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139 Toulmin, *A Fair Fight*, p. 46.
140 Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’.
143 Ibid, p. 11.
‘Bombardier’ Billy Wells embodied all the attributes that the National Sporting Club admired in a male ‘white’ identity. He was a successful military man and was a fighter pilot in the Great War thus proving both his manliness and patriotism. More importantly, Well’s physical appearance personified ‘whiteness’. In figure. XVI Well’s six foot three inches towered over Beckett. His assertive pose demonstrates his lean and fit body that was suited to the ‘white’ ideal. In comparison, Beckett's physique was shorter in height and many of his measurements were smaller. The only assessments that Beckett supersedes Wells were the neck size and biceps. Beckett’s Traveller heritage was not the only identity that the NSC criticised. Indeed, the elite club could not see how Beckett could replace Wells as British Heavyweight Champion with a body not suited to the perceived ideal masculine type. Eventually the exclusive club gave into public pressure and reluctantly decided to organise an opportunity for Beckett to compete for the championship title. It cannot be categorically stated why the NSC did not organise an official award ceremony. It can, however, be suggested that a combination of racism/ethnocentrism dominant member’s elite status and class discrimination led to the decision. The NSC made a conscious decision

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145 Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’.
not to organise a formal award event. The championship matches that Beckett had gained notoriety from were not seen as prestigious enough because the NSC had not created the titles and Beckett was not perceived as being supposedly English/white or English and white *enough* or the wrong sort of ‘white’. Brian Klug in relation to the whiteness categories has clarified further in his evaluation of Britain’s 1991 census. Klug wrestled with his own British-Jewish identity whilst trying to complete the form where categorising his British ethnicity proved a challenge. Being a British man of Jewish descent, he questioned why he felt that he could not tick the box that specified his character as ‘White’. Klug reviewed his conflicted ideas about what ‘whiteness’ in a person consisted of and questioned ‘what in any case is the category White doing in a question called ‘ethnic’?’. Klug continued that the presentation of ‘white’ as the first option was not accidental. He argued that:

white as a category, the ethnic question on the Census form tends to reinforce the idea in people’s heads that they belong to this clubhouse (of genetic origin), keeping its doors slammed shut in the faces of others.\(^{147}\)

He continued:

It’s obvious what you are asking: are you or are you not a member of one of the minority groups in Britain that, because you look different, are you liable to be treated differently?\(^{148}\)

Dermott and Samson have stressed ‘the differentiation between in-group and out-group implies a need to maintain superiority of one’s group over another’.\(^{149}\) It also highlights the complexities in categorising British ethnicity, both historically and today. Klug’s thoughts about ‘others’ is as applicable to Beckett’s Showman/Traveller ethnicity. In particular to his suggestion that it creates an ‘insiders and outsiders’ mentality. As a consequence, Beckett was ostracised until the superior club decided that he would indeed draw in large crowds with international bouts. He never boxed again within the walls of the

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\(^{147}\) Ibid, p. 15.


NSC, but he did fight title bouts organised by the elites in the boxing world in huge sport arenas around Britain.

Despite his success, Beckett could not erase his background and was always conscious of where he had come from. He would not forget people who put him down and he always had a sense of inferiority as if he was not as good as others, even if others did not have the talent or ability he had and straightforward honesty. Despite the fact that Beckett was marginalised because of his ethnicity and Traveller heritage, along with his unstable whiteness, he was eventually still allowed to gain the privileged position to be able to box at the NSC. His identity was now that of a professional and each bout brought him substantial financial reward. Although primarily Beckett was from Traveller descent, uneducated and had a fairground heritage, his adopted ‘whiteness’ did in the end permit him to fight at the NSC and the colour of his skin enabled Beckett a new status. Here, it needs to be highlighted that the elite club’s control to block British boxers in the inter-war period was established through a clear set of rules. Their guidelines that related to the racial identity and the skin colour of their boxing contestants needs now to be explored further.

The NSC helped to legalise boxing. Moreover, as John Welshman has asserted, the club still drew on the tradition of oppressed racialised minorities, embodied in the careers of fighters such as Beckett, Jewish boxer Jack ‘Kid’ Berg and Glaswegian Benny Lynch. It thus has to be noted that the NSC did provide employment for some ethnic minorities in a time when a respectable occupation or any vocation in general was scarce for persons classed within such minority status. However, racial ranking in the elite boxing club persisted throughout the twentieth century, repeating wider trends in society when it came to those of African and Asian descent.

As we have seen Britain was no stranger to dealing with people who were branded ‘black’. Subsequently, immigration during the discussed period was particularly on the political and social agenda in localities where those deemed ‘coloured’ congregated. As the minority numbers rose, concerns for housing and schooling were a constant concern, but the subjects that in

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particular were contentious were inter-marriage and the job market. On 10 June 1919, for example, the Assistant Head Constable L. Everett of Liverpool’s central police office made this point neatly when he wrote to the Under Secretary of State at the Home Office and declared:

I have the honour to call to your attention the outbreak of enmity against the black population of this city, which has been growing for some time, and, on Thursday last, culminated in a serious encounter resulting in one Negro being thrown into one of the docks and drowned. ¹⁵¹

He proceeded to explain the reason for the written letter and elucidated the matter:

The trouble was caused between the citizens and the blacks, mainly on the account of the blacks interfering with white women and capturing a portion of the labour market.¹⁵²

The steps that Assistant Head Constable Everett suggested should be taken were the removal of the black population, figures up to 3000, by compulsory repatriation or otherwise. Animosity was not just directed at the black populations of Liverpool; the Chinese and the Irish were too identified as instigating disruption:

Farmers would not, or dare not, employ Chinese and Negroes on the account of the bitter feeling that at present exists, and in the Ormskirk District, Irishmen are also unacceptable.¹⁵³

Therefore, the only occupations that were available to people who were considered ethnic minorities and uneducated, were vocations that were on the fringes of society or professions that would ultimately gain celebrity status. Sport – in particular boxing – had long been established as a career for ethnic groups who were classed as outsiders to mainstream society. Indeed, within British Jewish history, boxing provided an assertive response to anti-Jewish prejudice and stereotypes. Whilst only a small proportion of the Jewish population took up the sport, success in boxing created the perception that Jews were strong and willing to physically defend

¹⁵¹ Home Office records, HO45/1107/377969/6, National Archives, Kew.
¹⁵² Ibid.
¹⁵³ Ibid.
themselves. Moreover, throughout the twentieth century, boxing halls and arenas were opened by Jews of immigrant identities, keen to capitalise on the growing commercial and professional Jewish boxing market. An article in the *Jewish Chronicle* on 8 June 1934 clarified that pugilism since the turn of the century demonstrated that Jews:

were courageous and gallant race, cherishing the British ideals of fair play, pluck, manliness and chivalry. Pugilism had done cartloads of oratory and writing to combat any tendency towards anti-Semitism that may have been sown by the unscrupulous and perverted devotees of the very un-English hatecult.

Although the Jewish boxing market, particularly the boxing halls, could not compete with the elite boxing arenas, they did provide an alternative venue for want to be boxers to fight against other pugilists. Nevertheless, it remained that the National Sporting Club held the title belts and matches.

It is of critical importance, however, to note that the NSC’s ambiguous rules on who boxed on the premises were clear cut when it came to boxers who were black. Significantly, the NSC elite enforced a colour bar and black boxers such as Len Johnson were excluded from top fights, which was undoubtedly linked to Britain’s role as an imperialist world power and the influence of race in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Accordingly, the club only permitted black boxers in the ring when they knew their place in society and kept to it firmly or when they fought another black boxer. Appropriately, the NSC preserved the white man’s elite identity within the walls of the club. Particularly after the Great War, Britain focused on maintaining its ‘white’ empire by establishing the ‘old’ realm attitudes of white superiority. Neil Evans stressed that the compounding job shortage and housing crisis advanced further the desire to assert racial hostility and blame toward the ‘alien’ and ‘black’ communities, particularly in port cities, such as Cardiff, Liverpool and Southampton, with focused attacks on the black

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154 Dee, *Sport and British Jewry*, p. 198.
155 Ibid., p. 118.
156 *Jewish Chronicle*, 8 June 1934.
population rather than towards employers or the government.158 In 1925, methods evolved to issue identity cards to black soldiers and documents that were issued during the war were often revoked.159 After the war increased the empire’s territory, thanks to the peace treaty, nationalism had been greatly strengthened as a result of the fighting and the collapse of the old empires of eastern and southern Europe.160 Therefore, the National Sporting Club staunchly asserted the same imperial boundaries within the walls of this privileged club.

In keeping with the position within society and the self-created elite status in the professional boxing world, the NSC was committed to emphasising its sense of white superiority to what was classified as the gentlemen’s sport of boxing. In terms of membership of the club, the ethnicity of members was not really a defining character, for it was money that paid the way. However, the colour of the member’s skin was also taken into consideration. Clearly, in order to make the decision to permit a fight on the premises, each challenger would not only be judged on their boxing abilities and public popularity, but would further be assessed on the distinguishing colour of their skin or their current or original ethnicity. An example of this would be Len Johnson. As Toulmin has argued ‘despite the tradition of black boxers on the fairgrounds from the end of the nineteenth century, the organisers colour bar, resulted in many talented fighters, including Johnson, not being able to fight for the British Championship’. She continued that ‘this was not lifted until 1948 when Dick Turpin defeated Vince Hawkins becoming British Middleweight Champion and the first black boxer to be recognised by the BBBC’.161

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, white-skinned boxers were given the privileged opportunities to be able to box in elite rings, without the fear that the colour of their skin excluding them from prominent titled bouts. As boxing was a perceived ‘Gentleman’s Sport’ the NSC influenced the boxing world. It did not, however, completely govern it. Other

159 Neil Evans, ‘Across the Universe’, p. 81; p. 82.
161 Toulmin, A Fair Fight, p. 54.
bouts held outside the premises and therefore the National Sporting Club’s jurisdiction, also administered championship titles to fighters. For example, the British Boxing Board of Control often held their British and Empire titles in esteemed halls such as the Royal Albert Hall and Olympia in Kensington, but the titles too had a colour bar and it was not until 1975 that Jamaican-born Bunny Johnson became Britain’s first black Heavyweight Champion. Similarly, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, boxing’s American led world titles bouts also had a colour bar. Indeed, in 1876 the World Boxing Championship (WBC) commissioned an additional belt specifically named the ‘World Coloured Heavyweight Championship’. The popularity of the sport was furthered when it became an Olympic sport during the St Louis, Missouri games in 1904. Although the Olympic tournament consisted of contestants from America, few were of Irish and Jewish descent.

Title bouts for matches other than the Lonsdale Belt which itself was limited to the boundaries of the NSC, were available to any valid contestant, any ‘up and comer’, or fight thirsty challenger, for all these defined as non-black. This is not to say that ethnic origins never arose in the ring, on the contrary, it was always apparent. For example, in the newspapers a writeup would not hesitate to label the contestant as Jewish, Irish or British, often labouring the point. For example, The Times reported an upcoming fight between Kid Lewis and Roland Todd on 31 August 1922 that stated ‘Ted (Kid) Lewis, one of the most effective, if not the most brilliant, of the growing number of Jewish boxers’ and again on 11 August 1924 the paper described black boxers Len Johnson and Sam Langford as ‘negro’. Nonetheless, fights were open to any man who had the ability to box. Indeed, boxing unlike many other sports demands physical damage, which is not accidental; it is the main purpose of the activity. It is noticeable that some historians, such as John Hoberman, have classed boxing as a ‘blood-sport’ and others, for example Bohun, have insisted that the sport cannot be classed as a ‘natural sport’ like running and swimming, but as an ‘artificial sport’.

163 The Times, 31 August 1921, p. 6; 11 August 1924, p. 6.
164 Woodward, Boxing, Masculinity and Identity, p. 16; John Hoberman argued in his book Sport and Political Ideology that boxing should be classed as a blood sport specifically because of the physical brutality of men demonstrating active violence toward other men.
man proved himself through physical strength, which in turn portrayed his masculinity, his ethnic ‘white’ identity, along as the boxer was not black, was overlooked. The ideal British physical masculine identity outweighed racial categorisation.

In comparison, boxers such as Johnson were barred and prevented from competing at the NSC. Johnson’s ‘blackness’ proved to be the issue and with whom he competed against proved to be a constant problem, regardless of their origins. In 1929, Johnson was due to fight the Italian born Leone Jacovacci at the hallowed portals of the NSC. Jacovacci immigrated to England when he was sixteen and adopted the anglicised name of John Douglas. However, although Jacovacci was also black and despite the support of the manager of the NSC Lionel Bettinson, who reassured that the rules of the NSC were that ‘we have no objection to two black men in opposition at the club, but bar contests between black and white men’, the fight did not take place within the hallowed walls of the prestigious NSC.165

As Gerald Early explains:

the black man boxing becomes both a dreaded spectacle and a spectacle of dread; the black fighter is truly a heroic man, for the black masses and the black intellectual only when he is fighting a white fighter or someone who has defined as representing the white interests.166

In this sense, as with the Jewish examples seen earlier, the black fighters could transform their characters through boxing, even with the limitations on which bouts they were permitted to box. As with other ethnic minorities, it would seem that pugilism promoted a collective masculinity, which enabled greater freedom of movement, but not totally so. Ironically, Beckett also experienced bouts being cancelled due to racial discrimination and racial concerns being the issue – but with regard to his opponent. In 1922, the Home Secretary William Clive Bridgeman, prohibited the match between ‘Battling Kiki’ the Senegalese light-heavyweight champion of the world and Joe Beckett. He proclaimed that ‘we took the view that the colour issue might

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165 Herbert, Never Counted Out!, p. 13; p. 33.
awaken partisan passions and animosities among the spectators'. Here, we see Beckett defined as *white* with all its complexity. Indeed, the top-down, state-led decision to block the fight between Beckett and Kiki can be interpreted in two ways. The question as to whether the fight was stopped due to the colour of Beckett’s skin needs to be answered. His social standing had dramatically changed – from a travelling Showman to a titled boxer. In the past, no member of parliament would have intervened or cared who Beckett’s opponents were. Could this then be interpreted to mean that Beckett’s status as a white *English* boxer had now to be protected? Was it specifically down to Beckett’s skin colour and him as an individual white man within the British society? Or was it more Beckett’s titles that needed to be protected? Was it simply that anyone holding a British and Empire boxing title, should not professionally fight a competitor who happened to have a different skin colour and nationality? The example of the government’s decision to stop the fight confirms ongoing racial discrimination. The concern that hostility might be stirred within the spectators is itself extraordinary. It is clear that the elite boxing clubs and the BBBC regulated a colour bar and it was this that permitted Beckett the privilege to compete for the championship titles. The interesting question remains, therefore, of whether it was Beckett’s reputation as an English boxer that was to be protected or was it more to do with the titles that he held. To this end, it was both his identity as an English and Empire boxing champion, along with his sufficiently ‘white’ racial makeup that needed to be protected: as we have seen, throughout Beckett’s career, a body in white superiority governed the international, national and boxing racial stratification. With this in mind, to permit a white boxer to compete with a non-white was unacceptable. The white boxer, therefore, was at the top of the racial stratification and even though Beckett had a heritage that was not classified as ‘Anglo-Saxon’, when he won the championship titles he had mobilised himself to become a sufficiently ‘white’ English sportsman. Consequently, the titles and his white identity needed to be protected.

It is clear that the NSC and the BBBC guaranteed that there were privileges for boxers with ‘white’ skin. It is also clear that there was a

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hierarchy asserted with regard to which white-skinned boxers were permitted to box in the rings of the elite clubs and arenas. Equally, it is explicit that there was a definitive racial stratification where the black boxer was differentiated from the white.\textsuperscript{168} Those perceived as white skinned, in spite of their ethnicity and heritage, would be permitted to fight in the championship titled matches held within the elite clubs. Indeed, there would also be a chance, as we have seen with regards to Beckett and other white minorities, of social mobility through the boxing vocation. In comparison, black boxers were not allowed to box in the standard boxing championships and would only be permitted to box in the prestigious clubs and venues when they were aware of his place within British racial stratification and only then if they competed with other black boxers.

The most intriguing quality of Beckett’s British identity is thus its ambiguity. When discussing racial, ethnic and national identities his status was complex. He did not easily fit into any of the prescribed ‘English’ or ‘British’ categories that were on offer then. In terms of his English status, his Showman/Traveller heritage associated him as an ‘outsider’, but as an ‘insider’ within those of nomadic heritage. However, as discussed, even his nomadic culture was not straightforward. Indeed, there were also complexities to groupings within the travelling communities. Combined with his Irishness that was assigned to his identity by the media and boxing material, further separated Beckett from Klug’s ‘White’ category. Beckett thus reveals the constantly changing and negotiated nature of racial identities in twentieth century Britain.

Conclusion

This chapter has discussed how ethnic and racial identities in Britain during the late nineteenth and throughout twentieth century and how this impacted on Beckett. The individual identities assessed were firstly, the nomadic communities, along with their fractured identities within the travelling groups. Secondly, the Irish character in Britain as seen by the Anglo-Saxon British identity and finally, the racial stratification that was asserted toward both the black community’s identity and the immigrant ‘white’ communities of Britain. More precisely, the analysis highlighted an identity based on white superiority which ultimately fuelled stereotyped ideals through the means of popular media, fashionable misconceptions and xenophobic rhetoric. The discussion analysed how the different migrant groups self-identified. It explored the dual identities that each ethnic and racial group adopted and how they socially mobilised and integrated their identities into what was considered the mainstream through the vocation of boxing.

The investigation has analysed ethnic and racial identities through the life of Joe Beckett. Beckett’s identity and that imposed on him, provides an insight into all three and further permits the discussion of how each individual group’s identity was constructed by an elite which considered itself superior. Beckett’s minority status was depicted, often negatively, by the media, even at the height of his career. At this point, his identity was neither represented as a travelling Showman, or as ‘white’ white, but as Irish.

To summarise, the first study of identity to be assessed was that relating to the nomadic communities and their identified group as seen by both from an ‘insider’s’ and ‘outsider’s’ perspective. It was asserted that there were boundary lines from the nomadic communities and the white dominant culture. Identities were split into three separate groups and there were clear parameters that defined who belonged to which specific group identity. In particular, the discussion assessed the identity of the members within the Showmen’s Guild and stressed the ‘insider’ boundary that was established and also acknowledged the separate identities within the community itself. There were two aspects that were associated with all three units: illiteracy
and travelling. The other difference connected the travelling characteristic of
the nomadic groups was that the Gypsies and Irish Travellers, journeyed as
part of their cultural and ethnic identity, whereas the Showmen’s Guild
members toured purely for business and economic needs. Finally, the
Showmen Guild’s identity prided itself on its connection and understanding
relationships with ‘outsiders’. Both in terms of the organisation and planning
of the fairs that visited the various towns, and furthermore, their character
prided itself on providing entertainment for ‘outsiders’. To that end, the
travelling identity and characteristics of all the groups that were (and still are)
associated with the identity of the sects, demonstrated their specific identity
during the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century in Britain.

The second identity to be explored was the Irish. As one would
expect, related to a cultural representation, linked furthermore to a political
agenda on the premise of how the Anglo-Saxon elite governed Ireland. The
discussion underlined how the Irish character was presented in evolutionary
form associated with the ape. The racial abuse that was delivered through
means of language and nicknames (for example, the ‘Paddy’ as the violent
alcoholic) aided the portrayal that the Irish were not fit to govern their own
land. A hierarchical Englishness at times scientifically categorised the Irish
identity. It highlighted that once again the Anglo-Saxon elite instigated a
hierarchical system where their race and ethnicity were placed at the top. It
associated their status as almost ‘God’ given and further connected it to
Darwinian science that elaborated the Anglo-Saxon identity as superior. The
research also explored why Beckett was portrayed sometimes as having an
Irish heritage and identity - for instance, how and why it was easier to
orchestrate Beckett’s identity as having Irish heritage instead of a travelling
Showman’s identity.

The third section and identity to be evaluated was the relationship
between ‘whiteness’ and Englishness/Britishness. White Anglo-Saxon
identity was further accentuated and elaborated to demonstrate the
differences within Britain and the British Empire. To that end, it was
discussed that the categorisation particularly impacted on the British Black
population. In relation to Beckett, it was discussed how the elite boxing clubs
and championship titles were limited to those perceived as being white-
skinned competitors. Furthermore, it was asserted that racial stratification influenced which competitors competed with whom. For example, the championship titles were classified and separated according to skin colour and moreover, the colour ban on white competitors fighting black pugilists. The examination also considered other white minorities and their experience within the professional boxing world. Of particular importance were British Jewish and Irish minority fighters that utilised pugilism as a means of social mobility and integration.

Finally, all migrant groups analysed used boxing as a means to socially mobilise and establish an occupation that had the potential to be profitable. Beckett certainly was no exception. Indeed, Beckett used his profession to construct a new identity and social status within the British racial and ethnical stratification systems. Beckett’s case is thus highly revealing. It is important because he does not fit easily into concepts of Britishness or any ethnic or racial category. Is he white or not? Is he Irish, or not? Is he English or not; is he a Showman or boxer, or boxing Showman? Beckett, whilst a victim of race and class snobberies at times, had more space to pursue his pugilistic career than, for example, black boxer Len Johnson. Beckett shows the complexity and fluidity in concepts of whiteness and national identity. Such ambiguity should be at the heart of any study of these aspects of identities in nineteenth and twentieth century Britain. To that end, Beckett’s heritage, ethnicity, ‘whiteness’ and race did not prevent him from an accomplished professional boxing career. Indeed, as it will be established in the next chapter he created a heroic and perfect masculine form, that facilitated a ‘manhood formula’ which shaped British hegemonic and homosocial masculine identities.
Chapter Two – Masculinity

Introduction

Throughout Beckett’s accomplished career his masculinity performed through sport was publicly paraded in boxing rings, media photographs and magazine articles, Pathé recordings of titled matches and public appearances. This chapter will explore what characterised Beckett’s
masculine identity through media representations, asking how these relate to national trends in concepts of masculinity. The discussion will emphasise the different stages of boxing - from training to post-bout - alongside images that have been careful selected to relate specifically to the analysis of Beckett’s boxing career and its representation of British masculinity. The visual sources and related descriptions are important and necessary to the research and the chapter because they highlight how masculinity was constructed and performed.

In boxing the human body is not only biology, it is entertainment. Indeed, the only biological indicator defined was the gender of the subjects within the ring. The boxing canvas was perceived as a male only space and the negative opinions toward female boxers made it extremely unlikely for women to showcase their pugilist skills. For instance, in Weimar Germany the Amateur Boxing Association (ABA) called for explicit prohibition of female boxing and argued that not only did the violence of the women within the ring promote ‘undesirable qualities’, it also impeded the efforts of men’s boxing to emerge into a respectable sport. Indeed, pugilism was a ‘man’s’ sport, particularly within the professional sphere and it evoked qualities of ‘manliness’. In fact, the male dominated sport was used as a medium to inspire the nation. Undeniably, pugilist entertainment provided a demonstration of aggressive masculinity that would not otherwise be permissible.

In turn, male social etiquette changed within the ring. In most modern cultures, physical violence in peacetime is not socially or legally acceptable. Instead, men were expected to become role models and self-consciously monitor their own behaviour. Moreover, ideas of what it was to be a man were maintained and consistently formed clear preferences for the perfect manly identity. In keeping with the ethos, professional pugilism developed a distinct gender definition, which in turn created a unique homosocial environment: women were discouraged and men were permitted to watch other men violently strike each other. For the sake of this discussion, what is meant by homosocial needs to be addressed. For our purpose, the term

means the social interaction between men, in particular, their participation in and outside the boxing ring. For example, the setting and portrayal of male physical aggression contributed a manly homosocial environment. The competitor’s brutal performance of masculinity in boxing adjusts and manifests itself as physical aggression. The relationship of the competitors on the canvas defies what is defined as acceptable in mainstream society. It was therefore deemed as ‘unmasculine’ or ‘ungentlemanly’ to display physical force *outside* the sphere of the boxing ring. The skill of self-discipline was taught within a boxer’s training and was a characteristic that distinguished him from a street or underground bareknuckled fighter. Boxing trainers differentiated the fighters who were unrestrained or demonstrated acts of aggression with boxers who mastered the identity of self-control.²

However, one weakness of boxing’s social regulation and self-discipline is that the control implies too dogmatically that there is a certain irreducible quantity of masculine aggression that must find an outlet.³ And that outlet was ordained violence on the canvas. However, fighters considered boxing not as displayed aggression or an exercise for violence, but as a competitive performance craft. The boxer, who was object and subject, as well as a product of aggressive sports entertainment, acted masculinity through the use of his body.⁴ In this sense, the performance of the pugilist affected his and other men’s self-identity.⁵ Therefore, the manliness of trained boxers consisted of both physical and psychological factors. It was one that required sophisticated technical know-how and an unbending moral commitment that would enable them not only to improve their material self but also and more significantly, to construct a publicly recognised heroic self.⁶ The leap from a masculine to heroic identity helped to craft the professional pugilist’s character. Yet, the identities together shaped and styled boxing professionals. Furthermore, the moral dedication to control the desire to defend one’s body against the onslaught of physical

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aggression was required for the bout - above all, to direct the emotion in order to obtain the appropriate physical forcefulness to win the match.

This chapter will be separated into four sections that will evaluate Beckett and his peers following a path of training to post-bout that mirrors that of the boxer. Each will sequentially analyse professional boxing and it will discuss boxers’ careers in conjunction with the history of boxing in Britain. The chapter will also evaluate other historic and contemporary fighters from different contexts to illustrate wider themes about masculinity and fighting, but will always return to the example of Beckett. Alongside the reasons why so many men appreciated a pugilist’s physique, this chapter will discuss why boxing created ‘heroic’ identity through the perfect aesthetic masculine form. The first section will evaluate the training routine of the professional pugilists. It will highlight the routine and exercises that allowed a pugilist to box professionally. It will also assess the training and its relation to manliness. The second will analyse the promotor’s role in the creation of a masculine presence. It will focus on the use of pre-match photographs to illustrate an ‘ideal’ image and whether this portrayal was initialised by the agent or whether it was the image the boxers wanted to publicise. The third will focus on the professional bouts. This section of the chapter has a higher focus than the others, primarily due to the aggressive nature of boxing and, therefore, has the most impact on the discussion. Principally, due to the fight itself was at the heart of what it was to be received as a boxer. Indeed, pugilism is a violent sport and its contribution to the creation of British masculinity is evident. Therefore, it will evaluate the psychological aspects needed to box professionally and how they relate to constructions of masculinity and the nation. It will consider why barbaric fighting for sport was acceptable to mainstream society. It will evaluate the paradoxes of boxing by highlighting how the sport demonstrated both positive and negative masculine attributes through public displays of codified brutality. It will explore whether there was a ‘manhood formula’ in British society and whether it established hegemonic and homosocial masculine identities. Furthermore, it will analyse the socially acceptable sexualities of men and highlight boxing as a ‘heterosexual’ sport. The fourth will evaluate post-match commentary. It will question the media’s representation of the hero and
identity of the winner. It will also assess how the vanquished were portrayed. This chapter will utilise a wide range of media imagery, such as cartoons, paintings, satire comics and photographs to highlight the representation of the professional boxing training, bout advertising and post-match representation.

Training: The Creation of a Professional Boxer

The professional heavyweight champions of the early twentieth century restructured their physique through a vigorous and strict training programme. Beckett’s image, from a purely public perception, represented an idealised physical form; idealised not only by the sporting professionals, but also by the general populous. He was originally a welterweight contestant and worked to reshape his physicality. Beckett rose through the boxing ranks and achieved the status of a heavyweight. A professional heavyweight boxer’s muscular form was demonstrated using the subtlety of his body language. The photographic representations of Beckett and other professional boxers can be split into two different categories: inside and outside the ring. The pre-match photographs will be discussed in the next section and will be related to an agent’s involvement - for example, the value of the images for promotional motives. With this in mind, a pugilists’ training schedule, along with the desired outcomes of the coaching, characterised the confrontational sport of boxing. An examination of the training routine will offer some insights into the legitimisation process allowing men to dominate their opponents by use of force and violence. Training for a confrontative sport such as boxing required maximum dedication. Indeed, pugilists in the gymnasium trained specifically for boxing. It is important to understand that the coaching a boxer received determined the outcome of the professional bouts.

The rigorously strict routine cultivated hitting ability, a strong neck, conditioned upper and abdominal body power and established the stamina to withstand the bout. The required equipment for pugilist training consisted of boxing ring, complete with canvas floor and corner requisites, an accurate weighing machine, several punch balls (light, fast swing balls on platforms), punch bags, skipping ropes, medicine balls (6lbs & 10lbs), 8oz boxing gloves and some 16oz for training, punch ball gloves or knuckle pads, and finally punch pads. The weighing machine would have been used on a daily basis to ascertain whether the boxer was the correct weight for his boxing category. Training was one of the most important parts of crafting a professional boxer. Beckett’s day would have included an early six mile fast walk or jog. When he arrived at the gym, exercises included ball punching work that avoided, as Gunner Moir stated, any ‘fancy’ work. The handbook of former British heavyweight champion Moir (1906 to 1909) insisted that:

both forehead, back and side head play were worth attention, seeing that were good neck exercises and a boxer needs a strong neck if he needs anything … But elbow play and pretty work

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9 Games and Sports in the Army, p. 226.
10 Moir, *The Complete Boxer*, p. 38 – Gunner Moir wrote that ‘certainly both forehead, back and side head play are worth attention, seeing that they are good neck exercises’, however, ‘elbow play, and pretty work generally are mere waste of time’. Gunner believed that the ball was chiefly there as a ‘punch cultivator’ and that the boxer should therefore, go in with that view and that other objects will in time achieve themselves.
generally are mere waste of time ... hit the ball as hard as you can and hit it true ... go three or four rounds ... never sit down to rest.\textsuperscript{11}

Gunner's brief description of just one of the training methods perfectly highlights the intensity of the training required. The 'never rest' was seen as crucial and clearly perceived as an important instruction. This extended the fighter’s fitness and created a mindset to keep going even if tired. Other training methods provided additional important aspects, for example, the medicine ball.

![Figure V – Joe Beckett training with medicine ball, source unknown, circa 1922.](image)

Although contemporary boxing training methods have evolved, the equipment that was used remains the same. For example, the medicine ball has progressed to include a variety of sized weights. For the most part, Beckett would have trained with the medicine ball standing up. Ordinarily, he would have had to think fast, as one man would have faced him whilst throwing several balls continually.\textsuperscript{12} In contrast, contemporary training with the ball is mostly considered floor work. The boxer lies down on his back as the trainer drops the ball into the outstretched hands and the pugilist pushes the ball back. All physical preparation led to the creation of a body able to withstand the physical pressures of the ring. Indeed, creating pugilists who, first and foremost, could stand on the canvas and not 'pull punches', but hit as hard as he could the whole time, was the main objective.\textsuperscript{13} Therefore, the

\textsuperscript{11} Moir, The Complete Boxer, p.38.
\textsuperscript{12} Games and Sports in the Army, The Army Sport Control Board (War Office), 1937, p. 228.
\textsuperscript{13} Ibid, p. 229.
The very best way of learning to box would be to spar daily. The opponents would vary in weight with the aim of teaching the pugilist to tactically understand different styles and instinctively know how to react.¹⁴

More precisely, the central essence of sparring was to imitate the professional match itself. Boxers would be gloved and clothed, just as they would have for the ‘real’ bout. The rounds would also be timed. Each professional pugilist would need to have been matched with a sparring partner that would challenge their sporting ability and attempt to oppose the champion’s domination through force. As noted, one of Beckett’s sparring partners included his brother George.¹⁵ George had a successful amateur career and had boxed with Beckett since his childhood. Whilst training for the British and European championship title fights with Dick ‘King’ Smith and George Carpentier, it was reported in January 1923 that:

Joe resumes training on Monday in a private gym in Southsea, with 3 sparring partners, including his brother George.¹⁶

Sparring created the environment for pugilists to physically defend themselves. In turn, it finalised a boxer’s training. Precisely, all the physical training that boxers endured would not mean anything unless they

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¹⁶ Ibid – Unknown newspaper source - Margaret did not always copy the newspaper source. It is obvious in her memoirs that this is another source that has been copied, because it is word-for-word and not stylistically her writing.
understood how to utilise the fitness of their bodies in the ring. Tuition in physical confrontation could only be taught on the canvas. In this sense, the outcome of all the training and preparation was to create a male body that would physically dominate their opponent. To that end, how this relates to the concept of masculinity needs to be evaluated.

It has been asserted that ‘in boxing, manliness is represented through the violence and physical force, however, pugilism permitted men in the safety of the game environment to validate their masculine identities, while remaining only on the periphery of actual violence’.\footnote{Andy Hochstetler, Heath Copes & Craig. J. Forsyth, ‘The Fight: Symbolic Expression and Validation of Masculinity in Working Class Tavern Culture’, \textit{American Journal of Criminal Justice}, Vol. 39., Issue. 3, (September 2014), p. 495.} Whilst this is true to an extent, the fact remains that boxing is a violent and dangerous sport. By this nature, a pugilist would not enter the ring without significant training. It could be argued that the training provided a platform for the boxers to demonstrate their masculinity. In contrast, the training was for the most part a private affair. Only a select few would have witnessed the physical preparation of the professional fighter. Throughout the majority of training, no spectators would have been present. However, professional prizefighting was a confrontational sport, designed for entertainment purposes. Indeed, the final result of all the training would be for the boxer to perform publicly. Indeed, professional boxing bouts were promoted extensively. Therefore, the prizefighter’s physicality, along with his ‘masculine’ body and tough persona would have been used to promote bouts. Significantly, agents and boxing promoters manipulated the pugilist’s characteristics in order to present the heroic identity of their champion. The next section will discuss how much influence the agents/promoters had on the pugilists’ public profile. After all, professional boxing was a highly lucrative entertainment and the fighters’ profile was developed in order to promote the professional bouts.

\textbf{Agents: The Promotion and Pre-Match Images}

Boxing agents and promoters had a huge influence over the profile of their pugilist clients. For obvious reasons agents campaigned for their champions and assisted in the public’s perception of the sporting entertainer. Boxing was a business and indirectly the economy was helped by the
staging of professional boxing events. For example, memorabilia branded with the names of the professional pugilist lined not only the promotors’ pockets, but also the businesses which created and sold the material. Likewise, incomes and taxes were paid to the government when an organised large professional boxing event occurred. Moreover, agents, managers and promotors had personal investments to consider; if the organised bout did not make any money, their profits too would be down. Matthew Taylor has argued that ‘alongside journalists and boxing writers, promotors, managers and agents, all played a part in buttressing the networks of the boxing world’. Therefore, Beckett was an ideal candidate, both in terms of his physical ability, and his character and personality which appealed to the hierarchies of the boxing commercial and ruling elites. He demonstrated that hard work and determination produced a transformed social status and his potentially problematic traveller’s identity could be used to market that anyone could become socially acceptable. Whilst this might not be too different from other professional boxers of Beckett’s time, Beckett also had body appeal which could be exploited visually. It was therefore not only his character that demonstrated his sporting and social mobility - in addition, his physical image promoted masculinity to the British masses.

His persona had two aspects. First, it had a commercial identity in terms of boxing becoming a consumer product, manufactured and sold in the market for profit. Second, Beckett’s body was used to promote fitness and well-being to the British public. It reflected the wider belief that the heavyweight division was (and still is) absolutely unmatched as a location for putting masculine aggression prominently on display. The primary focus here will be on Beckett’s career, but comparisons will be made with his competitors and other contemporary boxing persona. The discussion will also assess the status a champion boxer would have been raised to before the bout and the expectations on the outcome of the match. Finally, it is

important to consider the agent’s involvement as part of a professional champion’s career. In short, their engagement in a pugilist’s occupation cannot be denied. For this reason, analysing the influence of Bernard Mortimer (his agent for seven years) on Beckett’s vocation is necessary in order to understand his masculine/heroic/warrior identity. It is hard to analyse how Beckett perceived himself, because of his illiteracy and absence of testimony. Nevertheless, his persona and imagery provide some evidence. Media stories and family sources with regard to his agent at the end of their professional relationship are especially revealing in this respect.

The public’s perception of a professional pugilist was orchestrated by the boxing agents and promoters. Prizefighting was promoted in a particular way that sought to maximise interest and create business opportunities. The economic opportunities the professional bouts created were huge, both in terms for the fighters’ purses and for the agents involved. The early twentieth century promotion of professional pugilism transformed, modernised and legitimised the previously stigmatised practice of prizefighting. The promotional pre-match images presented a focused, physically fit, clean and sober pugilist – far removed from street and bar brawling. The portrait of the pugilist’s heroic identity shaped by the pre-match photographs and the ‘in the midst of battle’ images shot within the ring asserted two masculine sides to Beckett’s boxing persona, which will now be outlined and explored.

Linda Nead suggests that the still photographic representations of pugilists in the ring ‘belonged to a long tradition of the visual depiction of pain; the representation of the dynamic in action within the still image; the integrity of the human body, the relationship between form and beauty, disintegration and ugliness’. In contrast, the pre-match portrait images of Beckett reveal three identities of nakedness, masculine stances and exposed developed muscles that demonstrate the significance of a boxer’s physical profile. The purpose was twofold – one to validate the professional boxer’s

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match ready fitness and secondly to portray a sporting gladiator style manliness ready for battle. This in turn promoted the fighter, but also provided an elite masculine physique that men could adore. The pre-match advertisement of the pugilist, as opposed to the theatrical and spectacular violence within the ring permits insight into the presence of the professional *homo pugilisticus*. This enhanced the subtle voyeuristic spectatorship of the brutal violence that took place in the fight itself. The still images, photographic and artistic interpretations of boxers, as manifest in cigarette cards, media and boxing promotional photos, paintings and other interpretations, delivered a message of masculinity to the public. Cinema *Pathé* films of boxers and prizefighters also constituted one of the medium’s most conspicuous genres. Indeed, media recordings of title bouts accumulated huge profits for both the early motion picture trade and the promoters of pugilism.\(^{25}\) The many photographs and pre-bout portrait images, mainly distributed through the media, boosted the boxer’s public status. The pictorial representations provided a sportsman persona and ensured the spectators had knowledge of upcoming bouts, alongside the pugilist’s current bodily credentials. All these factors are well documented, but the interpretation of why and how the boxers were publicised still needs to be evaluated.

The exhibition of the pre-violence perfected gladiator contrasted totally to the photographs of bloodied and physically damaged bodies within the ring. The portrait of the lone sporting hero, with his exposed taut muscular strength, concentrated on proving that his fitness and physical strength would win him the match. Sporting media did not focus on men who failed to measure-up in sport, but revealed those who succeeded, the victory stories – tales of men who had fought in the face of adversity.\(^{26}\) Beckett’s own story of poor fairground traveller to professional British champion stands as an example of dauntlessness. It was well known that professional pugilists reached their sporting standing by hard work and pure determination, which was mostly done behind closed doors. Sporting heroes did, however, train

outdoors in their local public spaces. As noted previously, Beckett was a familiar figure running through Southampton’s streets and the Common. In contrast, training and preparation for professional bouts was a private affair; detailed knowledge would have only been available to trainers and sparring partners. The pre-match boxing portraits were therefore organised purely for the spectators and supporters of professional pugilism. As little knowledge of the training program was available to the public, image stills would have publicised the act of training and the physical results on the body of all the self-sacrificed hard work. To illustrate, the below image of Beckett is almost certainly of him in training. Although it cannot be categorically stated, due to the picture’s unknown origins, it is an almost perfect still shot of Joe in action. There are no physical injuries to his face or body. His aesthetic appearance is untidy, compared to the alternative pre-match pictures of Beckett, which revealed perfect hairstyles and cleaner appearance.

Figure VII – Personal collection, Joe Beckett, source and date unknown, but found in part of Joe’s personal collection, circa 1923.
Figure VII is an artist enhanced photograph and there are three strong elements. Firstly, the mindset of the preeminent ‘embattled’ figure, without the context being clearly illustrated – demonstrating Beckett had posed for publicity purposes, with a suggestion of him sparring an opponent out of shot. Secondly, the physically harried look of the boxer suggests the toll of training and sparring, ready to be locked in a matched battle. Beckett’s hair is not a perfected style, a focused upward glare confirmed a face of hard fought determination. Finally, and more subtly, the viewer is drawn to the image of the man posed in full stretched, battle stance; eyes focused and his muscular upper body and lean features draw the viewer’s attention. Essentially, this image was created for a purpose – to depict the virtues of boxing ethos and sporting mentality. The portrait focused on one activity, it emphasised ‘sport style’ and its associated practices.27

Michael A Wenner has argued that sporting images excluded women and made athleticism virtually synonymous with masculinity, providing opportunities for men to assert their dominance.28 The pugilistic posing, combined with the sporting attire, portrayed a definite sporting style. The photograph would have appealed to men of all ages. The lack of facial bruising, scarring or damage is a definite indication that this image did not represent the violence of the ring. In short, the physicality of Beckett exhibited a martial readiness to defend his titles and his masculinity. These images of pre-violence were vital to demonstrate the honour in professional boxing. It proved that the theatrics of the boxing ring were just that, a sporting entertainment and not an aggressive brutal battle between two men. The displays of the pre-match male perfection permitted the spectators to view the champions before the blood bath to come, to humanise and approve the violence that would take place on the canvas. More pointedly, it was to present their boxers as ‘superhuman’ and ready for battle – their bodies were sculpted and their fitness was displayed as such. The photographed boxer was an individual that became both object and subject, meaning he was the object of sporting icon demonstrated as the subject of

masculinity. Indeed, he was a product of training to deliver a sporting act within the ring, and provided structure and meaning to the violence to follow.29

Figure VIII is a pre-match profile that was specifically taken with the view to represent boxing as an exhibition. The full bodied photograph has only Beckett, along with his boxing clothing, as the subject. Again, there is no ring or canvas on display in this particular portrait. Yet Beckett is posed as if he is about to defend. The pugilistic positioning of Beckett in the pre-bout image was not accidental. Clearly, it not only conveyed the message of the man’s occupation, it also established his boxing ability, but more importantly, exhibited his well-defined muscular strength. Beckett’s face does not convey a message of pain. On the contrary, it is practically expressionless. His straight, non-smiling expression indicated his lack of emotion, his

fearlessness. This in itself illustrated a masculine quality of total control. Indeed, the tangible facial expression personified a lack of nervousness and composed emotional restraint. One of the most striking features of this photograph is Beckett’s low-cut vest. This display of body provided the spectator with a glimpse of his well-defined chest. The concept of this exposure, unlike figure VIII where Beckett only had bare arms, was to expose his classical musculature without the distraction of emotional facial features - it drew attention to both the image in the form of the professional boxer and Beckett as the masculine medium.30

What do these images of Beckett say about masculine physicality? If we look at Beckett as the object of masculinity – in particular in regard to the pre-match portrait photographs – the lack of emotion is evident. Certainly, there is not one image that represented a smiling Beckett. The only sentiment created in his character is one of sternness: a man who was undaunted by the coming bout. To illustrate further, in figure X Beckett has folded arms as a demonstration that he is a force that cannot be moved – a wall of strength. In this specific photograph, he is seen wearing his title belt, with a firm and single minded expression. In short, his masculinity was expressed and maintained without any flicker of emotion.31 The sparseness of facial expression and tough exterior (both physically and emotionally) asserted that the expectation of assertive confidence was what characterised manliness.

As discussed earlier, the pre-match promotion of professional pugilism was specifically designed by the agents/promoters to assert the idealised masculine and heroic position of the fighter. Indeed, it was utilised to advertise the physical qualities of the specific boxer in order to gain spectators for upcoming bouts. Therefore, it can be assessed that the public profile of a professional fighter was orchestrated – not only by the people backing the pugilist for financial gain, but by the media as well.
This cartoon was published the day before he fought and lost to Carpentier in 1923. Figure XI is a satirical representation of both Beckett and Carpenter’s perceived strength. It also provides an insight into the opinions of their competitor’s trainers. The artist has merged both Beckett and Carpentier into one character ‘Beckentcarpettier’. The managers of both sides insist that their challenger is the winner. Therefore, the cartoonist decided to create one ‘superhumanly fit’ boxer, rather than to decide which team was the stronger. The developed muscles, the fictional cartoon character’s animal opponents, along with his academic and hypnotic ability, mockingly demonstrate both agents, managers and trainers all fight for the publicity that their champion is the best. The cartoon parodies (and confirms) the influence that the backers of professional pugilism had on media representations.
Thus, the full identity of the professional boxer cannot be viewed from pre-match imagery alone. Each manager was responsible for finding partners, organising the finances for the bouts, how much each fight would cost, the purse, and so on. They were praised for sold out stadiums.\footnote{Rosca, ‘The Political Economy of World Heavyweight Boxing during the Great Depression’, p. 137.} Bouts between two heavyweights were the ultimate events for boxing fans. If done successfully, the pre-match images and promotion led to high attendances. Therefore, the promotion material aimed at the sports fans of the pugilist’s masculinity and warrior identity, was not controlled by the fighter himself. Indeed, the only input Beckett had with the creation of his public character was that he posed in front of the camera with his physical fitness due to the intense training routine for upcoming bouts. This is not to deny that he was not aware that the images would create his perceived masculine profile, but it was the promotor who styled and organised where and how the imagery would be advertised. This will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

Figure XII is a perfect example of all these tendencies. This carefully composed picture was distributed through *The Boys’ Magazine*. The photograph, therefore, was specifically chosen with the view to portray a dominant masculine identity to young boys. The audience was teenage boys and the image of a strong boxer maintained the social ideal of masculine
practices. For example, sport, or in this case boxing, promoted the idea that an identity in sport would inspire young teenage boys to get actively involved in physical activities. The images represented the pugilist demonstrating a full-bodied boxing pose – in sporting attire, including gloves. The focus is on the one sporting activity, boxing, which emphasises the sport ‘style’ that was desired for life and the relevance to sport being sold as a life enhancing package.\textsuperscript{33} Yet, in a more adult focused sports related articles and collectors cards, the boxers including Beckett are not often pictured with sporting vests on. Therefore, in this instance, a homoerotic or heteronormatively would not be the main issue, it was more a case of reinforcing and maintaining the strength that masculine sports, such as boxing, could benefit the individual.

The pose, imagery and every detail were carefully thought out. The photographic technique portrayed dramatised action, which accentuated the lean muscularity of the fit body image that was open to masculinised reading.\textsuperscript{34} Aimed at the younger generation, Beckett represented everything that the consumer could become: an idol. Elements that demonstrated an iconic image were twofold: the carefully coiffured hair – in the latest contemporary style, to offer that well-groomed look; the steely gaze – adding a certain mystery to the figure, but additionally, strength without aggression. The pose demonstrated and best displayed Beckett’s hard earned physique, defined musculature and clear battle readiness. With no ounce of fat present, there is a clear nod to the virtues of healthy eating and gainful sporting endeavour. Boxing masculinity, like other mediated sporting forms, was coded as being based on traditional markers such as sporting prowess and willingness to take physical risks.\textsuperscript{35} Furthermore, magazines that were crafted specifically with a focus to re-inscribe the traditional codes about masculinity, unconsciously or consciously, encouraged the young male minds in the twentieth century to desire to be a strong masculine character.

All the attributes were publicised to specifically assert Beckett as the strongest contender. The public images were purposely photographed with masculine explicit ideals to determine the male sports fan’s perception of the

\textsuperscript{33} Wheaton, ‘Lifestyle sport magazines and the discourses of sporting masculinity’, p. 197.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid, p. 2.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid, p. 215.
pugilist, directly orchestrated by the agent. This is not to deny that a professional boxer did not have any involvement in their public profile. Here a comparison with a late ‘outsider’ in British boxing is revealing. Chris Eubank, of black Caribbean origin, is a contemporary example of a fighter who orchestrated his own public persona. This is not to deny that other people were not involved in the creation of his professional character, but he and other modern boxers have more control over their outward public identity than was the case for Beckett’s generation.

Although the former World Boxing Organisation (WBO) champion fought in a different era to Beckett, his public image is worth further consideration. Eubank rose to fame by winning the WBO middleweight title in 1991. His self-confident reputation was and still is instantly recognisable. Eubank crafted his image not to gain public acceptance, but to put on a show. In 2014, ITV aired an intimate interview, documenting Eubank’s career in full. During the broadcast, he meets with his old contender Nigel Benn and they discussed their public profiles:

Benn – ‘you had your image and I had mine, and we worked the crowd’
Eubank – ‘perfectly’
Benn – ‘We brought England together, 18 million, 47,0000 whatever. He had his image. He had that ‘simply the best’, he was the ‘dark destroyer’, so we both worked it’.
Eubank – ‘Without you, I could not have been who I was’
Benn – ‘and without you, I couldn’t have been who I was’.36

The former champions’ dialogue confirms their acknowledgement of their personal contribution to their sporting public image and how, in Eubank’s case, he dealt with his ‘blackness’. The projected representation of their personalities was purposefully created to promote their individual personas. The clear objective provided entertainment for the sporting audience, with a goal to acquire a fan base and sold out stadiums. As The Sun sports writer and boxing promoter Barry Hearn asserted ‘without the fighter, there is no

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36 Chris Eubank and Nigel Benn in Simply the Best, 2014, ITV, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T0zlIMvqoBo [accessed 3 June 2016].
In contrast, Beckett’s masculine image was most likely driven by his agent. Mortimer was Beckett’s agent for seven years. As discussed in the Introduction, it was Mortimer who took forward Beckett’s career, from fairground booth fighter to professional boxing champion. However, their relationship was volatile. At the start of Beckett’s professional career when he was sixteen, Mortimer obtained illiterate Beckett’s signature on a contract, stating that he would benefit from 50 percent of the earnings from Beckett’s bouts. Seven years later, when Beckett asserted his authority and stated that he wanted to manage his own affairs, Mortimer refused him permission to leave his contract. A drawn out court case occurred and Mortimer tried to get an injunction on Beckett fighting until he conceded. Throughout the hearing, Beckett’s defence asserted his lack of understanding, due to his illiteracy, to the circumstances of the contract. It was stated:

Mr. Maugham read an affidavit by Beckett. In this Beckett had said he never had any schooling until he became acquainted with Mortimer, who taught him to write his name.

Although the public were aware of Beckett’s fairground heritage, many were not aware of his illiteracy. Beckett himself never spoke about his lack of education publicly and it was not the image that the promotors wanted to publicise. With this in mind, for Beckett to admit his illiteracy, he at the same time brought in his life story in order to rid himself of his professional relationship with his manager. Therefore, the declaration of Beckett’s lack of education provided the boxing and sports fans with an additional characteristic – one that had not been marketed. Indeed, it could be argued that the admission of his illiteracy removed Beckett’s perceived perfect masculine British identity. A proper education was a central element to British cultural values which shaped society and interpretations of masculinity. Equally important, it distinguished between differences in

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37 Chris Eubank and Nigel Benn in *Simply the Best*, 2014, ITV, [accessed 3 June 2016].
social class which Beckett had worked hard to eradicate. Clearly, Beckett’s perception of his manager and the profit Mortimer was earning from the matches he fought, was enough for him to assert his authority over his own public profile. One can only deduce, therefore, that he was able to assert himself and was not afraid to challenge perceived wrong doing, even at the expense of his public persona.

Lastly, Beckett refused to fight for a boxing engagement that Mortimer had arranged with Dick Smith to be held at the Albert Hall. It was stated in the court records that Mr. Maugham, Beckett’s solicitor remarked:

> Mr. Mortimer entered into an agreement for Beckett to fight next Friday. As I understand it Beckett will not fight under that agreement. This fight must come off and the public should know. He has already told Mortimer that he does not intend that he shall be his manager any longer.41

It is clear that Beckett stood his ground and demonstrated his authority over his profession and business. Mr. Emanuel, Mortimer’s solicitor continued:

> Beckett went to Glasgow and exhibited himself there and taken a great deal of money [sic]. Not a penny of which has been paid to Mortimer under the agreement … then he (Beckett) has announced that he will fight somebody in March through another manager.42

Beckett maintained control of his profession and who he fought. It was common knowledge in the boxing business that cartels were formed when two or more agents came to an agreement or how and when and how to stage fights, which boxer should meet another boxer, what purses to offer the fighters, at which venue to organise the fight.43 Indeed, Mortimer and his brother John, also an agent, had dreams of creating a stadium the size of New York’s Maddison Square Garden in England. Additionally, Mortimer managed other boxers. New Zealand’s heavyweight champion, Tom Heeney, had ambitions to match other pugilists in his class globally and

42 Ibid.
Mortimer grabbed the opportunity to acquire a new heavyweight boxer. Heeney travelled to England and Mortimer suggested a bout with Beckett.44

Beckett was keen to organise a bout after his quick loss to Carpentier, but the match never occurred. Beckett had suffered injuries and Heeney after a long journey became ill. A bout had been arranged between Beckett and Phil Scott that unfortunately had to be cancelled. However, Scott’s manager contacted Mortimer and he quickly rearranged Heeney to fight Scott.45 The bout was pre-booked for 7 July 1926 at Southampton’s football ground The Dell and 6,000 spectators came to watch the match, but it was speculated that it would have been twice as many if Beckett had boxed.46 Although supposition, due to the timings of the court case and the dates in which

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44 Rosca, ‘The Political Economy of World Heavyweight Boxing during the Great Depression’, p. 60.
45 Lydia Monin, From Poverty to Broadway: The Story of Tom Heeney (Auckland, New Zealand, 2008), p. 80 - Monin’s publication is interesting as it is a biographical account of the New Zealand boxer Tom Heeney and his bouts for the heavyweight titles. It provided further insight into Mortimer’s ambition for other professional fighters and gave an understanding what he was like as a promoter and manager.
46 Ibid.
Mortimer had arranged the bout with Heeney, it could be suggested that Beckett's injury claims were superficial and the real reason to why the match never took place was that Beckett refused to fight again for Mortimer.

The court case ended on 6 May 1920 with Beckett’s barrister stating that 'the contract was extraordinary and it did not bind Mortimer to anything, yet Beckett had done everything his manager had told him to'.\(^{47}\) To that end, the judge, Mr. Justice Russell, agreed and stated that the document 'lacked mutuality' and Joe Beckett was freed from his contractual bonds. \(^{48}\) However, it is unclear if anyone managed Beckett after the court case. It cannot be denied that such a public display of control over his career, Beckett’s perception of himself as a confident heavyweight champion, willing to take his manager to court, can only suggest his assertive characteristics. His masculine sporting profile was maintained when he went on to win several title championship bouts \textit{after} leaving his contract with Mortimer. It could be argued that a champion boxer was created by agents and their careers would not have been accessible without the orchestration of managers. However, the pugilist’s responsibility was to win the match. Therefore, the representation of masculinity in the ring and throughout the competition itself, also influenced the public’s perception of the sporting heroes. The display, performance and violent contest created an event in which men could compete physically for supremacy. The boxing arena and images presenting the competition permits further analysis towards pugilistic masculinity and identity, alongside the celebration of force.

\textbf{Violence and Sport}

The public exhibition of violence in the form of sport was popular entertainment in the early twentieth century. This chapter has so far demonstrated that the use of pre-match photography and publicity promoted the sporting warrior even before the bout begun. The unmarked and polished physiques set the professional pugilist apart from the brutality and aggressive persona that was adopted for the heavyweight matches. This


\(^{48}\) Ibid.
section, in contrast, will examine the brutality captured in the images representing the battle that took place on the canvas. It will situate the brutality of pugilism by evaluating images that portrayed boxing contests and transformed them into what George Bernard Shaw (who mentioned Beckett specifically) called the ‘noble art’. The discussion will analyse the performance in which men willingly enter into an agreement to compete for physical supremacy. The evaluation will assess the psychological intellect required to withstand the physical competition within the ring and gain credibility from spectators. The section will also evaluate the incentive behind the display of violence for sporting entertainment. It will discuss whether exhibition of professional pugilism denoted a ‘manhood formula’ to spectators. Masculinity was not simply signified by dominance to construct gender in the social order and was not a direct outcome of ideological factors. Indeed, the discussion will demonstrate that professional boxing advanced manly principles by displaying a combination of desired masculine traits. It will assess the captured photographic match images to demonstrate the masculine code of behaviour. Furthermore, it will evaluate whether boxing generated a specific homosocial sporting event, for example, it was achieved through socially constructed means in a specific social setting.

There have been generations of sporting arenas. Roman amphitheatres were filled with citizens who watched gladiators perform to their or the challenger’s death, to twentieth century heavyweight champions staging brutal fighting competitions. David Scott’s vision of the boxing arena describes thoroughly to the reader the contest’s environment:

The boxing ring is a cubist space in that it is fully three-dimensional and at the same time demarcated. It provides volume (approx. six cubic metres) sufficiently spacious for two human beings to move around freely, but not so large that they can escape from each other … the sense of containment is

51 Hochstetler, Andy, Copes, Heath & Forsyth, Craig. J., ‘The Fight: Symbolic Expression and Validation of Masculinity in Working Class Tavern Culture’, p. 493. – Although Hochstetler, Copes and Forsyth examined manhood performed through brawls in pubs/taverns, the ‘social setting’ aspect of their quote can easily be related to the boxing ring.
enhanced by the ropes, whose elasticity can marginally expand or contract the space of movement ... the cube is an open one, so that unobstructed view of it may be had by the onlookers: the wall of the prison in which the boxers are entrapped are transparent. The spectator's panoptical view is thus in radical contrast to the confinement and focus of the boxers.52

Scott's description of the ropes, in particular, is significant. It demonstrates the implication of a physical contest between both male competitors on the canvas and the role of the spectators and their view. Therefore, the ropes serve two purposes: one to contain the pugilists within their contest and secondly, to permit the spectators an uninterrupted view of the violence. During the Roman gladiatorial days, the violence was contained within the walls of the arena and was not dissimilar to the modern boxing stadiums. For instance, both the amphitheatres, coliseums and contemporary sporting areas were designed to ensure the audience was able to clearly see the combative sports. Comparatively, Scott noted that the Greeks promoted boxing as a general spectacle viewed in a public arena, with a defined space and the performance of the combatants became open to the public approbation. Both Romans and twentieth century professional pugilism performed a necessary function in civil society and an outlet for violent impulses as well as entertainment and amusement.53 For example, the Roman era named the violent sports as *panem et circenes* (Bread and Games). The coined phrase was used to describe the public's approval of the running of the Roman empire - not through good work, but through the distraction of violent sporting entertainment. The Roman leaders believed as long as food was cheap and entertainment accessible, citizens would remain loyal. The ancient Romans passionately followed the savage and murderous combat in the coliseums.54 The popularity of the violent fight to the death gladiator and modern professional boxing incorporated an aura of authentic heroism, whilst widely being supported by the public.55 The brutality of the

53 Ibid, p. 5.
heavyweight pugilist along with the performance of male violence, in an event when men competed for supremacy and celebrated the use of force was the twentieth century’s version of gladiatorial sporting entertainment. Indeed, Hochstetler, Copes and Forsyth have asserted that as a result of the exhibition of sporting violence, men created social arenas in which they continued to express and validate masculine identity.\(^{56}\) Therefore, the demonstration of force within the ring and the images which captured the violence permit insight into how boxing asserted a masculine character. Furthermore, violence, and whether it is sport related needs to be assessed. Did boxing become the natural way of venting the violent needs of men’s masculinity safely?

Joe Beckett’s professional bouts along with his peers were captured through a variety of modern media. For example, photography encapsulated intense physical moments and important turning points within the match, alongside cinema and Pathè Newsreels presented actual footage of the bouts. The art of ring craft and its presentation as Linda Nead asserts was to avoid the depiction of physical ugliness and present the beautiful bodies which detracted from the bloodied faces with closed eyes.\(^{57}\) For this purpose, match images captured action shots of the both boxers’ \textit{full} bodies during combat.


Figure XIV - Personal collection, Joe Beckett & George Carpentier, for the European heavyweight championship title on 4 December 1919, *Daily Mirror*. The writing states that Carpentier side-steps a rush by Beckett.

Figure XV - Personal collection, Joe Beckett & Dick ‘King’ Smith, for British heavyweight championship title held at the Royal Albert Hall on 5 March 1920, *Le Miroir Des Sports* titled ‘Beckett bad Dick Smith et reste Champion D’Angleterre’ which translates as Beckett beats Dick Smith and remains English Champion.
The images of the pugilists in midst of battle presented two separate spheres of the match: the first captured one pinnacle scene of the fight and the second exhibited several images telling the story of the bout ending with the final shot of the vanquished and victor. One reading of this particular image is that the purpose was to contend that the photograph led men to dream of becoming heroic warriors and reinstate order to the world and doing so re-establish their personal identities as men. More generally, Hochstetler, Copes and Forsyth assert that:

‘Fighting’ remains honourable because it precludes many forms of violence. The participants view their fights more as a sporting event or contest between willing participants rather than merely defence or struggles for survival. Males are socialised to express masculinity through sports, especially violent sports.

Several important parts are emphasised here. The authors recognise that professional boxing is entertainment and not fighting for survival. It is also accepted that the controlled violence on the canvas prevents or at least helps to eliminate other forms of masculine brutality. However, what is interesting is the term ‘willing participants’. The word participant could be interpreted to just mean the contenders in the ring. Nevertheless, the spectators were also engaged and partook in the violence of staged pugilism.

From each figure within this section, the stage – the boxing canvas – is clearly represented with the combatants fighting in the ring. Similarly, each image also presents the audience, demonstrating their participation. George Bernard Shaw suggested that it was not the pain to the pugilist, but the pleasure to the spectator that mattered and unquestionably many of the spectators believed that they witnessed acts of cruelty and paid for admission for this reason. The barbaric sport for staged amusement needs to be assessed, assessing how pleasure can be derived from someone else’s pain. The audience validated masculine identities on the periphery of

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60 George Bernard Shaw, ‘Joe Beckett and Carpentier’, p. 46.
actual violence, in the safety of the game environment and from a privileged spectator’s position.\textsuperscript{61} The voyeuristic participation can be divided into two categories; the spectator’s psychological pleasure and the boxer’s cognitive capacity to stand and fight.

The psychological appeal to watching the sanitised combative sports desensitised violence in boxing. What would have been considered inappropriate behaviour outside of the boxing arena was considered sporting entertainment inside the stadium. Nead has suggested that there is a responsibility in viewing the violence. Although Nead’s observations are of boxing photographs, rather than actual participation, for the sake of this discussion it highlights specific psychological points. She notes that the ‘horrible fascination addresses some of the central themes of looking at images of violence, including the nature of spectatorship, morality and propriety and the violated body’. \textsuperscript{62} Nead is persuasive, but the two most important aspects of her statement - conformity to conventional standards in terms of the violence in boxing becoming the norm and the morality of the spectators - needs to be examined further. The bout between Beckett and Frank Moran, the ‘Pittsburgh Dentist’, permit insight into the level of violence along with the responsibility of the spectator.

On 12 October 1922 Joe Beckett fought Frank Moran at the Royal Albert Hall in London. Beckett considered the contest to be his hardest. Gilbert Odd, of the \textit{Boxing News} narrated in an article titled ‘Champs I’ll Never Forget’ (1977) an interview he had previously conducted in which Beckett stated:

I know I won, but he gave me a bloody good hiding. He handed out the most terrible lacing I was ever made to take. By comparison, defeat by Carpentier was a picnic. I couldn’t sleep for three nights afterwards, I was in such pain and my ear swelled so badly it had to be lanced. \textsuperscript{63}

Odd recounted what he classified ‘the hardest-hitting contest between heavyweights he had ever seen in Britain’. Margaret Fosberry, Beckett’s

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{61} Hochstetler, Copes & Forsyth, \textit{The Fight: Symbolic Expression and Validation of Masculinity in Working Class Tavern Culture}, p. 495.
\item \textsuperscript{62} Nead, \textit{Stilling the Punch: Boxing, violence and the Photographic Image}, p. 306.
\item \textsuperscript{63} Gilbert Odd, \textit{Champs I’ll Never Forget}, No. 9 in a series, \textit{Boxing News}, 12 August 1977, p. 17.
\end{itemize}
daughter wrote in her memoirs ‘the fight lacked exceptional skill, but more than made up for it in excitement, clash and bravery’. Odd continued to narrate:

Filled with rage, Frank swiped his opponent on the chin with a might right. Beckett rose and they tore into each other and they fought like cavemen. There was blood all over Moran’s face and on Beckett’s chest and forearms.

It would seem that the contest between the two international boxing champions lacked self-restraint and demonstrated substantial physical violence. Beckett was driven by pure determination not to be knocked out in the second round, as he had been previously in 1920. This fuelled both men to fight so forcefully against each other in a performance that has been recounted by both the spectators and the pugilists.

Figure XVI – Personal collection, Joe Beckett & Frank Moran Vintage Original Programme, Oct 1922.

Whilst one cannot categorically state the exact reasons as to why the fight descended so aggressively, there are likely explanations. The first,

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64 Odd, ‘Champs I’ll Never Forget’.
65 Ibid.
comes from an article in New York, titled ‘Moran Fighter Nabbed with Booze’, which stated:

Frank Moran, a well-known heavyweight boxer, was released under $10,000 bail here today after being arrested for bootlegging. Moran, was arrested in Mechanville, where he had eight flour sacks containing 160 bottles of ‘Scotch whiskey’ in the back of a car. The whisky and the machine were confiscated by federal authorities.66

Moran’s connection to the criminal circuit and his release from prison suggests he was looking for self-respect. If he gained a victory in this international heavyweight contest, he would have secured a large winner’s purse along with a restoration of his reputation. The romance of pugilism as the masculine sport was inspired by stories of sporting heroes that entered the rings and placed themselves in physical danger for the name of entertainment. Beckett also experienced a death of a sparring partner.

Sergeant-Major Charles Willcox volunteered his services to Beckett in 1919. Willcox, was a distinguished military hero for his service during the Great War and was no stranger to the ring being an enthusiastic amateur boxer.67 When he heard that Beckett was having trouble finding partners to prepare for the upcoming match with George Carpentier, he responded to the call: ‘Nothing but patriotism’ was the reason he gave.68 Willcox sparred with Beckett for a number of days and refused to retire from sparring bouts. As a result, when he was struck on his head during the first round at an amateur boxing competition held at the NSC, he fell to the canvas and never recovered consciousness.69 During the inquest, the deceased previously had told a witness about ‘how hard Beckett hit him’ and added that he ‘did not spare his sparring partners’.70 It was further reported that Willcox had complained to his family stating that ‘he was not used to light gloves’ and that ‘Beckett hit him about the head and he was only a point off a fever’.71 The

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66 Source unknown, 1 March 1922 – this source is printed on the back of a laminated copy of the Moran and Beckett programme in Jennie Lewis-Vidler’s private collection.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
70 Ibid.
jury returned a verdict of ‘homicide by misadventure’ and Beckett expressed that ‘when he was boxing with a man, he did not know how hard he hit him or how much he hurt’ and that he was ‘very sorry to hear of this death, very sorry indeed’.72 Professional pugilists maybe were unaware of how powerful their punches were whilst in the midst of a contest, however, there was consciousness of how their physical strength and the exhibition of it on the canvas represented or altered other negative masculine characteristics.

With Moran displaying such physical determination in the ring, he presented a heroic character to counteract his criminal persona. However, both contestants revealed pure grit and strength of will throughout the bout and with no regard for their own defence.73 It was reported that Moran was by no means a good technical boxer, but he was tough and rugged.74 He relied heavily on his hard-hitting right hand – which he nicknamed ‘Mary-Anne’ - and his long reach. Yet, Moran’s arm extension proved to be more of a handicap than an advantage, as Beckett kept so close to his opponent and proceeded to continually body punch throughout the fight and by the seventh round Moran was a ‘bleeding, battered hulk’.75 He was a sorry mess, with an inflamed cheek and a long gash over his right eye that was swollen shut, blood mingled with sweat pouring from his face into his mouth.76 There are mixed reports as to the what happened in the final seconds of the fight. One account suggested that Moran’s support team literally threw in the towel, whilst another paper reported that the referee stopped the fight in the seventh round to save Moran from further punishment.77 The below set of photographs depict Moran’s team did indeed ‘throw in the towel’.

72 Ruth Beckett, Scrapbook of Beckett’s career.
75 Ibid, p. 23
Beckett reported earlier the injuries he endured and that his bout with Moran was the most physically aggressive challenge he ever fought. This match presented aggression to a substantial audience in the name of sporting entertainment. Nead has suggested that the theatrical and spectacular presentation of violence and physical aggression enabled a different scrutiny of the affects and aesthetics of violence. It is clear and has already been established in the previous chapter, that the ‘sanitisation’ of boxing was due to the Queensbury Rules and BBBC regulations. The governing and standardisation of professional pugilism placed boxing in the mainstream and promoted to the nation that this particular violent conduct was a sport. If the fight remained within the rules and laws, it formalised actions that would

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78 Nead, ‘Stilling the Punch, violence and the Photographic Image’, p. 310.
have otherwise been deemed as amoral or illegal. Therefore, the spectator was safe in the knowledge that the higher powers endorsed professional prizefighting and as a consequence, defused the violent aspect of boxing. Furthermore, the psychological risk and responsibility and emotional risks to the audience was minimal. Indeed, the sanctioning and codification of twentieth century boxing, ensured the onlookers felt no responsibility for the pugilist’s welfare at all. With this in mind, even if the result ended in a death, the burden would not be on the viewer’s shoulders. However, this does not answer the question to why witnessing such aggression was so appealing.

It has been discussed throughout this chapter that the pre-match promotion of the professional boxers advanced the martial, heroic and body beautiful image of the pugilists. Their unmarked bodies were physically attractive, prepared and poised for the battle ahead. The audience received glimpses of their sporting heroes before the violence of the match and the injuries that would be sustained. In the minds of the audience members, they pictured the contenders as they were before the fight. Additionally, Wacquant has argued that ‘the occupational morality of prizefighting was epitomised and celebrated with the notion of sacrifice’. Similarly, the Roman paradigm for redemption of honour was through ferocious self-destruction. With this in mind, the concept of pugilistic sacrifice, in terms of placing champions who positioned themselves in the ring for violent sporting entertainment, offers insight into the audience’s responsibility and participation. The patrons of the boxing stadiums engaged in the role of witnessing of the violence. In point of fact, the spectators’ accountability also required then to communicate their support for their chosen stoic champion throughout the bout, for example, cheering and applauding. Furthermore, the matches created a social bond for both the actor (pugilists) and observer (audience), as both groups ‘identified’ with a role that was acknowledged as voluntary.

Carling Barton, a scholar of Roman history and author of The Sorrow

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79 Nead, ‘Stilling the Punch, violence and the Photographic Image’.
82 Barton, ‘Savage Miracles’, p. 55.
of the Ancient Romans: The Gladiator and the Monster claimed that this particular participation from the witness, who sensed that another is acting freely, consciously observed the other was ‘authentically’ fighting and that the action was ‘real’. Barton continued that, for this reason, the excitement of the audience and the sense of ‘participation’ was heightened. Heather Reid has further asserted that the atmosphere in the coliseums of Rome encouraged the crowd to engage further. For instance, she argued that ‘if the loser had performed valiantly then the crowd with call out mitte (Let him go); if they thought he lacked valour, they would call for his death’. This clearly demonstrates the crowds’ participation in the violence from a bystander perspective. This is not to say that twentieth century boxing is directly comparable to the Romans’ gritty gladiatorial coliseums - in particular, the level of violence presented in the arenas, differs greatly, as well as the equality of the fighters. For example, the weight divisions in twentieth century professional boxing ensured a ‘fair’ fight. However, if the focus remains on the perceived ‘sacrifice’ of the boxer’s bodies, it cannot be denied that there were elements of bravery. Beckett and Moran relinquished their physical selves stoically. Stoicism, clearly present during this particular fight, cultivated the relationship between audience and pugilist. Barton recognises:

The sacred is something ‘set apart’, but this setting apart demands an opposition or inversion: the transgression is necessary for the existence of the boundary. To demonstrate one’s will, one’s boundaries had to be recognisably broachable, permeable. The audience had to recognise that the taboos that surrounded and protected one could be violated.

If Barton’s analysis is broken down, it asserts that the inversion of the permitted violence was not of the ‘normal’ order. When the competitors entered the ring, they demonstrated that they temporarily amended the ‘status-quo’ of violent conduct. Their sacrifice was recognised and the ‘normal’ rules that governed day-to-day aggression could be violated. Therefore, the participation of the audience was vital to the success of

84 Barton, ‘Savage Miracles’, p. 49.
twentieth century professional boxing. The pugilist became the ludibrium - an object of sport.\textsuperscript{85} In order for the violent sporting entertainment to be possible, both competitors would have to psychologically prepare themselves for their battle. Thus, questions about how the professional pugilists withstood the violence and retain self-respect need to be evaluated and how Beckett and Moran were able to withstand the self-sacrificing brutality for six, three-minute rounds, when their bodies were beaten. To this end, the psychological characteristics of pugilism needs to be analysed. Equally important the fighters’ control over their natural reactions of instinctual self-defence and its suppression- in particular, fear and as fear inhabits aggression, anger, will be assessed.

To be a skilful boxer, fear needs to be harnessed. Both Beckett and Moran fought to the end. Fear of bodily injury was the issue rather than the anxiety of death, combined with the apprehension of losing. In 2011, Vaccaro, Schrock and McCabe analysed the psychology of modern cage fighters and revealed that amongst ‘mixed martial art (MMA) fighters most commonly talked about fear of injury or losing’.\textsuperscript{86} Indeed, the humiliation of a loss in front of a large crowd that had paid a high price for their seats would have also enhanced the boxers’ angst. In contrast, Beckett and Moran’s matches were competitive high ranking professional bouts. In fact there were not enough seats for those who wanted to watch the British Heavyweight Champion have a second shot at the American Dentist.\textsuperscript{87} With this in mind, organised fights were either international championships or in defence of titles that champions already possessed. This in turn made bouts high with motivation. Therefore, the trepidation of vanquished titles, along with the glory and purses they brought would have been prominent both boxers. It was considered perfectly normal to fear losing a much anticipated match. Modern professional boxers such as Muhammad Ali and the current British Heavyweight champion Tyson Fury acted out such convincing degrees of self-confidence, that both the spectators, media and opponents are left

\textsuperscript{85} Barton, ‘Savage Miracles’, p. 43.
\textsuperscript{87} Newspaper source unknown, Margaret Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’ – Jennie Lewis-Vidler’s personal collection.
convinced of their upcoming victories. Indeed, Muhammad Ali fought over sixty fights over twenty one years and only lost five. Likewise, Tyson Fury has never lost a professional bout. When Fury is in the ring, he is able to express his self-confidence and he skilfully applies it to his boxing style. It could also be argued though that professional boxing matches today do not normally end in a knockout or bloodied towels being thrown onto the canvas. Consequently, modern professional matches are won on points and very rarely end in opponent’s unconsciousness.

To illustrate how fear affected fighters, Casey and Mike, American cage fighters, highlight how they are frightened that they would ‘look like chumps in front of people if they were knocked down in the first three seconds’, coupled with the concern that ‘then that’s all they would remember’. In relation to Beckett, we know this also to be true. For example, after he lost to Carpentier in seconds of the first round, the consequence was that many people remembered (and still do today) how his career ended, rather than the championship titles and matches he won. It has been suggested that competitive sportsmen feared losing because they felt ‘embarrassed and ashamed’—emotions that characterised unattractive cultural definitions of manliness. Certainly, as we have seen in the previous chapter, men in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century went to some length to suppress emotional displays. This consequently led to the fear of revealing what was deemed to be ‘negative’ feminine responses. For example, women were perceived to be highly emotional and incapable of controlling their sentiments. Therefore, the dominating ‘manly’ role performed was to curb emotions. It is no great surprise, therefore, that boxers were perturbed by the thought of a loss and the consequent feelings that followed. This could go some way to explain why boxers were able to physically hurt their competitors. Indeed, the fear of a loss enhanced the boxers’ endurance. If we view the ring as a stage and the boxers as actors, this would emphasise how fighters were able to control or ‘act out’ their roles as pugilists, almost as if it is their alter ego within the ring.

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89 Ibid.
although Becket fought without regard for his challenger's welfare (or his own) throughout the fight, he switched personalities as soon as the match was over and demonstrated remorse and compassion. Indeed, Beckett modified his mental attitude after the bell was heard and hurried to his corner and grabbed a bottle of champagne, he then proceeded to thrust it into the lips of his beaten opponent. Additionally, after Beckett lost to Carpentier in 1919, his support team left him sprawled on the canvas. George Bernard Shaw wrote:

Beckett’s seconds, by the way, so far forgot themselves as to leave their man lying uncared for on the floor after he was counted out until Carpentier, indignant at their neglect, rushed across the ring and carried Beckett to his corner.

Clearly, this demonstrates the paradoxes of boxing. Pugilism brings together both positive and negative – even pathological – tendencies.

David Scott has stated that boxing encourages ‘the promotion of fitness, the purest expression of masculine friendship, implying mutual respect and to test oneself through the other’. Certainly, Beckett’s post-match reaction to his opponent’s injuries demonstrate the contradictions within the ring, along with his respect for his opponent and sportsmanship. In contrast, the obvious negative characteristic was the physical brutality. It cannot be denied that pugilism is violent. Indeed, the dominant interpretation of boxing is primitive and uniquely savage. Nead has stated that pugilism’s ‘violence makes an intriguing case study since it is unlike other forms of violent action’, continuing ‘it is regulated, held back; it sets limits rather than being excessive and beyond control’.

Nead’s argument highlights that the codification of boxing is what transforms physical violence into a sport. When fighters disobey the principles of the ring, the audience become aware of the pure brutality of the sport.

Beckett and Moran performed for their audience; both contestants refused to be the victim of embarrassment or shame and therefore, found the

90 Treharne, British Heavyweight Champions, p. 23.
91 Shaw, ‘Joe Beckett and Carpentier’, p. 44.
92 Scott, The Art and Aesthetics of Boxing, p. 147.
inner-strength to keep fighting. This proud ‘not going down’ sportsmanship is highlighted in the latest Rocky Balboa motion picture. Although fictional, in 2015, Sylvester Stallone’s new multibillion dollar movie franchise released *Creed* - a continuation on a dramatic boxing story. Thirty years after the last film and based on the young son of one of Rocky’s old challenger and friend, Apollo Creed, the old champion trains Creed to compete professionally. Through dramatic life events and turbulent storylines, Creed quotes ‘It’s not about how hard you can hit, it’s about how hard you can get hit – keep moving forward’. Not only does it highlight the argument in this chapter, the film reveals how popular culture represents manliness. This Hollywood display of a tough, risen from the ashes, hero reinforced idealised masculine qualities.

All pugilists know how painful injuries are and how the subsequent damage from fighting could potentially end their careers or worse still, impact their physicality throughout the rest of their lives. Therefore, the prizefighters’ mental discipline required for reactive control over their fears is paramount in their performance. To demonstrate this, Vaccaro, Schrock and McCabe in their interviews, questioned one hundred fighters to analyse their ability to ‘manage emotional manhood’. They recounted one of their stories:

As the paramedics carried Juan off on a stretcher, Mike, his opponent, leaned against the wall and talked with his trainer. As blood flowed from his nose and mouth, Mike began to sob. His trainer handed him a towel, which he brought to his face with shaking hands. When asked if he was upset about Juan, he pulled the bloodied towel away and said, ‘I don’t like losing’. What is interesting about this dialogue is that the victor Juan was carried off on a stretcher. Indeed, post-fight he had:

Shiny contusions under both eyes and made it to a folding chair where he sat staring into space. As two paramedics tried to

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95 *Creed*, dir. by Ryan Coogler (Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer, 2015).
97 Ibid, p. 414
keep him conscious, he cracked a smile with swollen lips and tried unsuccessfully to communicate meaningfully’. 98

Similarly, Mike Tyson’s trainer Cus D’Amato suggested:

the hero and the coward feels the same fear, but the hero uses his fear, projects it onto his opponent, while the coward runs. It’s the same thing, fear, but it’s what you do with it that matters. 99

Likewise, Beckett and Moran were reported to have battled ‘the like of which had seldom been seen in the British ring, with no regard for their own defence, both men hammered away toe to toe’. 100 To that end, the fighters who regulated their fears to win their bouts stood a better chance of being the hero and a winner. It is not in any sportsperson – either professionally or amateur – to lose. Indeed, all the training, self-sacrifice, hard work and pure determination lead to a moment when they are able to demonstrate their skills to the public. In fact, coaches and parents of young boxing talent often ostracise boys who express fear, pain, empathy or sadness. Boys learn that they are supposed to exhibit emotion restraint and quiet control. 101 Therefore, to suffer a defeat, regardless of the sport, will cause emotional discomfort. For the most part, there are not many sports that require their competitors to purposefully injure their challengers in order to gain glory. This is the obvious reason why boxing and other seemingly physically aggressive sports require an additional mental ability. To not let the better of you, exhibiting bravery, was a culturally rendered quality of manhood that was required for sports such as boxing. 102

If fear inhabits aggression, the anger would have also been emotionally managed within the ring. The perseverance of Beckett and Moran required mental self-determination, self-discipline and emotional reticence in order to convince their bodies to be continually exposed to physical brutality. They had the presence of the crowd that carried them

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100 Newspaper source unknown, Margaret Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’ – Jennie Lewis-Vidler’s personal collection.
through the boxing showmanship and performance, however, their adrenaline would have been limited. Physically aggressive situations arouse human emotions such as anger and fear. Anger is an unpleasant and negative emotion that typically occurs in response to threat, disruption of ongoing behaviour or deliberate unjustified harm. Fear is a natural reactive response to life threatening or apprehension to physical bodily harm. In terms of masculine ideals, anger and fear when enhanced with violence or expressive aggressive behaviour, could lend to ungentlemanly conduct. In contrast, when both emotions appeared to be channelled and controlled in sports such as boxing, it can complement a fighter’s competition, rendering it advantageous, rather than allowing it to interfere with their performance. The boxing entertainment value and aim, as Carryn Smit has suggested was to ‘seriously injure the opponent so that they are not able to fight back, ideally through a knockout’.

There are obvious differences between an aggressive street fight and a staged professional boxing bout. The most apparent reason is the controlled environment in which an organised fight takes place. With set parameters and a referee to dictate when the match should be stopped, the boxers know that there are limited chances of a ‘fight to the death’ scenario. With this in mind, anger, as it is understood, had a different meaning. Indeed, there would be no hostility or wrath, just sportsmanship and a desire to win the match. In short, boxing represented masculine physical power, as well as desirable control over one’s mental skills. The physical competition required aggression to be expressed and directed toward other men who challenged a particular sporting competence and was not a personal attack. This is not to say that anger did not appear in professional bouts. Indeed, boxing angrily exhibited extraordinary violent behaviour and indicated a level of psychopathy. To illustrate one only need to look toward the Mike Tyson and Evander Holyfield match on 28 June 1997. The fight was the competitors’

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103 A. Campbell, ‘Sex differences in direct aggression: What are the psychological mediators? Aggression and Violent Behavior’, Durham University, [http://dro.dur.ac.uk/2622/1/2622.pdf?DDC47+DDD27+dps0acc+dps0adm+dul4ks](http://dro.dur.ac.uk/2622/1/2622.pdf?DDC47+DDD27+dps0acc+dps0adm+dul4ks) [accessed 13 January 2016], p. 239.


second meeting, the first resulted in Holyfield flooring Tyson in the sixth round. Their second bout was billed ‘The Sound of Fury’ and was for the WBA Heavyweight Championship title. Labelled the ‘furious’ fight is in itself revealing. It carried an air of expectation on what was to come. Mike Tyson was unable to contain or control his anger with a refereeing decision that he considered to be unfair in the second round. Consequently, in third, he bit off the side of Holyfield’s right ear and made a play for his left ear when the fight was resumed. Eventually, the match was stopped and Tyson was disqualified. Tyson’s performance was deemed outrageous and unsportsmanlike – both qualities were anathema to the expression of a positive masculine identity inside and outside the ring. The demonstration of constructive manliness requires control of intense anger. Significantly, images of boxers in battle can reveal a pugilist’s involuntary reactions during the bout.

Figure XVIII Personal collection, Joe Beckett & George Cook, unknown source, April 1922 – This photograph emphasises that Beckett had a perceived brutality to his performance as a boxer

Figure XIX– Mike Tyson & Evander Holyfield, October 1997, http://espn.go.com/sports/boxing/photos/gallery/ /id/9595386/image/2/mike-tyson-evander-holyfield-i - [accessed 22 January 2016] – It is clear this picture that Holyfield is in defence and Tyson is the aggressor.

106 Mike Tyson & Evander Holyfield, MGM Grand, Las Vegas, 28 June 1997, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ICMNIy57c [accessed 14 January 2016] - The whole match was fraught Tyson’s with uncontrolled emotion. It is interesting that when Tyson comes to the centre of the ring in the third round, he is able to control his anger and box with amazing skill. The point in which Tyson is unable to dominate his anger is clear half way through the third round.
Analysing and juxtaposing figures XVIII and XIX the facial expressions of Beckett and Tyson - both appear to have the dominant position within the ring: they have their fists raised ready to punch. Their faces have a look of determination. However, Tyson’s facial expression is pure anger. Due to the quality of the Beckett photograph, it is hard to distinguish the boxers with these specific representations. Indeed, Beckett’s head is down and his strength is composed, but his emotions reveal his determination to win this heavyweight championship bout. There are many reasons as to why anger drives irrational behaviour. Exploration as to why Tyson’s conduct and the position which he thought it appropriate to over step the rules of the ring needs to be considered. In fact, Tyson considered his action as a moment of retaliation for decisions he believed the referee incorrectly judged. Therefore, his ego was bruised and in the heat of the moment, he reasoned his harmful actions were justified. There are events and responses that are typically present when dealing with anger - for instance, misrepresentation, making excessive demands, overstepping one’s authority, showing personal animosity, questioning and seeking to undermine a representative’s authority.\textsuperscript{107} It cannot be denied that Mike Tyson’s mental health is unstable and consequently future events in his life confirmed that he was indeed ‘unbalanced’ and therefore, did not conform to normal human emotions or behaviour.

If we consider the justifications for Tyson’s anger and compare them to Beckett and Moran’s bout, neither of the contestants was perceived to have demonstrated unreasonably aggressive actions that moved past the codified boundaries or referee decisions. Boxing is far from natural. It is a highly evolved combat sport. Robert Anasi, author of \textit{The Gloves}, a memoir about his boxing experience, stated that a ‘boxer must learn to continue reasoning when adrenaline and instinct are washing away his mind’.\textsuperscript{108} Although brutal and both fighters fought until neither could barely stand, they maintained control and fought by the rules. Indeed, both boxers did not feel undermined or misrepresented. Their objective was to win their match and


gain glory with the reward of being crowned the victor. In a sense that although they displayed the necessary aggression within boxing, just as with their fear, they were able to emotionally frame the fight, stay calm and strike to win points or knockout their opponent. This permitted each boxer to go the distance and fight to the point where one was not able to stand. Each fighter mastered their aggressive response and skilfully harnessed this particular emotional reaction in order to win the international match.

Both contestants had fought for ten years and were towards the end of their professional careers – Moran had one match and Beckett two after their battle together. Moran lost to Marcel Nillies in Paris’ Velodrome D’Hiver on 30 December 1922 and Beckett’s final bout was with Carpentier in October 1923. But both Beckett and Moran proved worthy of each other in the ring.

For this purpose, both fear and anger have a place in the boxing ring, but only in a composed and controlled manner and strictly adherent to rules. It would seem that the adrenaline rush that was gained from a win far outweighed the need for Beckett or Moran to respond unjustifiably. The pugilists proved that when harnessed, anger and fear can conform to the perceived psychologies of manliness on a boxing canvas. This in turn orchestrated an improved sporting masculine presence. Even when the stakes were high, emotions escalated and the intensity of the ring, both proved that powerful psychological urges can be used to define sportsmanship and masculinity. If both the audience participation and the self-control of the pugilists ensured sporting entertainment, although violent, the representation was seen as a positive influence on men and manliness, albeit aggressively. Therefore, the images captured during the violent bouts demonstrated this to a wider audience. Indeed, professional bout photography portrayed masculinity and the ‘manhood formula’ to spectators who did not participate in the live action.

Match Imagery

The presentation of violence in boxing match imagery addresses a different form of spectatorship. Nead has suggested that the representation of brutality offers valuable insight and ‘it would seem that the relationships between photography, violence and the spectator were formulated at a level of generality and that many questions remain to be asked’.\(^{110}\) It is clear that match photography and other artistic interpretations were created for the display of violence to a broader audience. For example, action shot photographs of challengers fighting were placed in newspapers. This broadened the spectatorship and presented titled matches to an audience who were not able to attend the high-priced bouts. Therefore, generally speaking, boxing photography represented key moments within the matches. In contrast and as Nead has suggested, the images that represented professional pugilism also permit insight into violence. Equally important, Rosca suggested that professional boxing fights were produced by athletes and their staff, who acted as production factors, whereas the spectators - who were the consumers - paid a ticket and received instead the product: the boxing bout.\(^{111}\) With this in mind and considering the suggestion previously asserted, the spectator’s responsibility evolved to include the masses who did not attend the live bouts.

An evaluation of the images will show further complexity. The depiction of the boxers provided a homoerotic angle under the guise that building a muscular body could overtly eroticise the male physique under the semblance of aggression and competition.\(^{112}\) In this sense, sport, in particular boxing increased the representation of masculinity and due to it being a completely male dominated sport relating to the environment in which the matches took place limited a female audience. George Bernard Shaw recounted of the Beckett/Carpentier fight:

> Here and there a lady. Not any particular sort of lady or no lady; just an ordinary lady. The one who happens to be sitting by me

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\(^{110}\) Nead, ‘Stilling the Punch, violence and the Photographic Image’, p. 308.

\(^{111}\) Rosca, ‘The Political Economy of World Heavyweight Boxing during the Great Depression’, p. 133.

is one next to whom I might find myself in stall of any theatre, or in church. The girl at the end of the next row would be perfectly in place in any West End drawing room. My lady neighbour watches the weary breadwinners on the scaffold and tries to feel excited.\footnote{Shaw, ‘Joe Beckett and Carpentier’, p. 42.}

Shaw’s interpretation of the female audience members is indicative of the era. There is an insinuation that the women present were ‘amoral’ because they attended the boxing bout. He proposed that the women should be found in a place of worship not the boxing stadiums. With this in mind, it is clear that professional boxing promoted prominent homosocial values. Sharon Bird notes that ‘homosocial interaction contributes to the maintenance of the hegemonic masculinity norms by supporting it with identities that fit hegemonic ideals’.\footnote{Bird, ‘Welcome to the Men’s Club: Homosociality and the Maintenance of Hegemonic Masculinity’, p. 121.}

The ‘manly conditions’ that boxing offered contributed to the idealistic homosocial environment required for male interaction. The masculine climate influenced not only the heterosexual masculine attitudes, it impacted on attitudes towards homosexuals.


A homosexual man was not perceived to symbolise manliness. In short, the idea of a ‘gay man’ was seen as a contradiction in terms; the homosexual male became understood as an ‘invert’, a woman’s soul trapped in a man’s body.\footnote{Nigel Edley & Margaret Wetherell, Men in Perspective: Practice, Power and Identity (Hemel Hemstead, Hertfordshire: Prentice Hall/Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1995), p. 156.}

A common anxiety of the time was the apparent decline of an accepted masculine sexual identity. Homosexuality challenged an already fragile norm and pressed the boundaries of a changing social stratification of acceptance. Heterosexuality was not normally acknowledged as a social identification – similar to the ‘whiteness’ discussion – or as a sexual category.\footnote{Diane Richardson, ed, Theorising Heterosexuality (Buckingham & Philadelphia: Open University Press, 1996), p. 13.}

To be heterosexual was to be seemingly ‘normal’ of in the realms of British society. Attending a boxing match provided an arena for masculinity to be watched by the audience and performed by the boxers,
thus provided a perfect environment to indoctrinate men. To this end, a hierarchy of masculinities grew directly out of homosexual men’s experience with violence and prejudice from straight men. The association of manliness linked to pugilism propelled the sport to assert idealised masculine qualities. Homosocial events, such as sporting competitions and in this case, boxing matches, infused the social realm of masculinity; it represented the idea of normal behaviour, which is central to the concept of the social and the process of socialisation into the social realm. Boxing fused a man’s physique and combined the sport with the ‘warrior’ identity created the perfect formula. Indeed, boys appropriated the gender ideal of ‘efficaciousness’, being able to affect the physical and social environment through the exercise of physical strength or appropriate skills, it institutionalised heterosexuality as the norm and became an important means of social regulation, enforced by laws, family, social policies and schools.

Whilst socially and politically homosexual acceptance evolved, so too did the imagery and representative forms that substantiated gay male culture and more importantly sexuality. The very culture of the time affected, dominated by the ever shifting social codes and values. The admired muscular image carved a new identity for the homosexual male. It transformed a homosexual’s personal identity from the heterosexual public interpretation that homosexuality was a negation of masculinity and that homosexual men must be effeminate. In short, the muscular appearance created the ‘manhood formula’ for both heterosexual men and for homosexual men alike and society adopted the idea of what constituted a perfect masculinised man. This is not to say that the idea that homosocial interaction did not incorporate homosexuality, but it would have not been encouraged or noticed. Within this timeframe, a ‘typical’ homosexual would have had a stereotyped character. Nigel Edley and Margaret Wetherell have

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119 Richardson, Theorising Heterosexuality, p. 13.
suggested that ‘the stereotypical gay man was seen as rather a gentle and pathetic man, whereas the warrior, for example a boxer, is portrayed as someone who is fiercely heterosexual’. Homosexual social identity has evolved. As Stefan Hagemann has noted ‘the notion that men are ranked according to their sexual orientation and that the fear of ‘deviant’ sexuality is systematically employed to discipline not only sexual deviants but other marginal masculinities, is fundamental to hegemonic masculinity’.

The idea of ‘marginal masculinities’ is significant. It asserted that anyone who did not fit what was believed to be normative masculinity and other perceived ideals of manliness did not fit the national ‘norm’. Subjectively, what was seen as not acceptable in 1920s Britain, is seen as more acceptable now. Indeed, if we analyse the male physical body and the relationship between heterosexual and homosexual masculinity in today’s world, the social categorisation is completely blurred. But when Beckett competed professionally, to be less of a man was to be effeminate, which in turn, was to occupy the degraded position of a women in the gendered social hierarchy.

Moreover, to be gay was considered a medical condition and treated as a mental illness that needed to be eradicated like a disease. Today, the modern social formations of masculinity have progressed, but at the same time, some homosexuals have adopted certain constructions of masculinity that were considered hegemonic – specifically in relation to their physical bodies. As Messner has argued ‘manhood required proof and sports provided a place where manhood was earnt’. In order for homosexuals to be considered men within the British society, a demonstration of normative masculinity was highly important; to build the masculine ideal of a perfect body would enable homosexual men to transform their masculine identity from effeminate to manly. This is still evident today. The subculture of Southern Californian bodybuilders, under the guise of ‘superior fitness’ has created an identity that to a certain extent is ironic and a form of resistance,


124 Stefan Dundink, Karen Hagemann, & John Tosh, *Masculinities in Politics and War: Gendering Modern History* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), p. 46. — Dundink continues to explain that ‘pacifists & pansies’ – one of the many wartime slurs on manhood of conscientious objectors in Britain – expresses this point perfectly. ibid, p. 98.

for it was believed that homosocial institutions such as sport would masculinise young males, thus preventing homosexuality. The fabrication that ‘muscled’ men denoted a specific sexual orientation, as well as ‘brawn’ represented superior heterosexual males, has been discussed. The next set of images will interpret how the ‘burly’ defeated boxing opponent is portrayed.

Imaginary of Joe Beckett, alongside his contemporary competitors, as well as other artistic interpretations provides able insight into an identity for men in the first half of the twentieth century. It will also demonstrate that the homosocial environment, alongside the physical force used to become champion, asserted aggressive tendencies of the ‘manhood formula’. Comparatively, other boxing images, for example, paintings and drawings, will further elaborate how pictures enhanced masculinity.

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There are many boxing bout images that capture ‘manliness’. Figure XX depicts a boxing match held in a private athletic club in New York, similar to the NSC in London’s Covent Garden. The boxers’ posture and almost
choreographed positioning draws the observer to address the definition of their muscle tone. The gendered image permits insight into the physically designed body and the nurtured masculinised building of muscle, for men are not born with a muscular appearance. Indeed, to create a body that is fit enough to survive and win in the boxing ring, the male body had to be physically designed. More distinctly, one fighter in particular is wearing very brief sporting garments. This expresses the point perfectly, with the addition of his outstretched leg, accentuates the toned muscle definition. To highlight the muscular bodies further, the background outside the boxing ring is dark, alongside the competitors’ lack of clothing, the skin pigmentation pulls the eyewitness attention to the fighters themselves. The spectators are male, which provides evidence for a strong homosocial environment and dominant masculine presence within the audience. Some of the spectators depict typical masculine contemporary activities, for example, smoking cigars. As an example, George Bernard Shaw recounted the atmosphere at Holborn Stadium throughout the Beckett and Carpentier bout in 1919 that ‘four thousand people all smoking as hard as they can; and the atmosphere which will be described in morrow’s paper as electric, is in fact murky stifling and fumesome’. Furthermore the image portrays the people in the front row are directly looking at the fighters, which could allude to a homoerotic nature. There is a black man in the audience, by the closeness of the person in position to the ring; he could be the coach or other official support for the fighters. The significance of this person further highlights the arguments raised in Chapter One that ethnic minorities were prominent in the boxing world. However, this particular image demonstrates the barbaric nature of the sport - as shown by the stretched, taut and strained figures at the centre of the fracas, or the avarice with which they are observed. The audience, cigars being puffed and rosy cheeks indicating intoxication. David Scott argued that the imaged represented a ‘painting of two men trying to kill each other’. The artist has deliberately obscured the fighter’s faces indicates his own feelings towards the sport: to the crowd the victors and indeed the

128 Scott, The Art and Aesthetics of Boxing, p. 73.
vanquisher’s identity have no deep meaning but pure aggression. The violence holds and draws the attention of the crowd.

The very title of the painting itself provides an insight into masculinity. Indeed, the stag is an animal that has embodied masculinity over the course of history. Both competitors in the ring, although together, stand alone; there will only be one victor. Much like a fight between two dominant stags in the wild, the battle for mates and territory through a demonstration of pure aggression, the boxer’s masculine assertiveness and strength can too claim their comparative wilderness space on the canvas and be claimed the winner. Just as a deer uses his antlers as a weapon to assert his masculinity, a boxer uses his fists and can stake his manly presence, affirming his status of a determined, strong male character within the boxing ring. Noble prizewinner in literature, Maurice Maeterlinck asserted that ‘just as animals use the appropriate strength or attributes of their bodies – the horse’s hoof, the bull’s horn – to defend themselves, so the principal form of human self-protection should be the fists’. In short, on the canvas, masculinity is an accomplishment and not a birth right, just as it is in the deer’s wilderness. Among the similarities of the natural battle of wild stags, is the fact that sport, in this case boxing, develops muscle and muscle equates to power. Therefore, the identity of the boxers within Bellows’ depiction asserted that masculinity was perfectly natural. By its nature, all male species, including animals, established the customary tendency toward strong and physically aggressive masculinised identity. In sum, a monomorphic male form was required for the continuation of the perfect male specimen. For instance, evolutionary science theories determined that only the strongest survived. Therefore, the connections with nature with this particular painting, further indicated the sexual orientation of the aggression in male stags, that consequently proved strength and won his mate; this in turn continued his heritage. Two boxers may be friends outside the ring, but once in combat will try to knock the other out in a bout. Despite the fact that Bellows’ artistic interpretation of a boxing bout at Sharkey’s was an American interpretation

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of pugilism, it has resonance in comparison to British bout images. Indeed, the image illustrated the requirement of men, not only in terms of how their bodies should be nurtured physically, but furthermore indicated that only the strongest men are needed to father the future generations in nations. Bellows’ depiction is comparable to official photographs of professional boxing matches held in similar establishments, including those linked to Beckett.

Figure XXI – Personal collection, Carpentier & Beckett, 1923, National Sporting Club, Covent Garden, London. postcard Real Photography,

The photography of George Carpentier and Joe Beckett has very similar aspects to that of Bellows’ painting. The angle of the camera has obscured Beckett’s face, therefore making his identity irrelevant. Comparatively, it also alludes to the winner of the match and the strength of Beckett’s opponent. Equally, both fighters are in the prime of fitness and their perfectly toned bodies provide the viewer with no doubt of their masculinity.

As with Bellow’s painting, the role of the public (the audience) versus the actors (the champions) in this photograph is made clear. Here the public are consciously watching the actors maintain their masculinity, through a
masculinised sport: the actors are performing their manliness. The only difference is the lack of homosocial interaction within the audience. Although the onlookers are obviously all male, they are dressed smartly. Their identity, therefore, provides a distinct difference in character compared to that of the audience depicted in Bellows’ painting. Equally, this could be associated with the difference with the British male audience, compared to that of the American experience. However, the clothing of the audience did not change the image or identity of the competitors within the ring and their battle remained the same. The fighters’ mental attitude would have been on the bout in order to win, and their triumph would have needed an aggressive tone. The emotional state of the sportsmen is one of aggression and competition. The intimacy of the pugilists’ embraces as shown here, can lend itself to the mutual respect they have for each other. Equally, although we may only see the face of the French champion, the lack of anger written in his expression indicates a determination to succeed but not at the cost of losing his own self-control over his emotions and more importantly his actions.

Comparatively, Beckett – though facing away from the camera – seems to reciprocate in his return to Carpentier’s jab, though somewhat more stoically, with a greater reliance on brute force. It is clear that each want to win the bout, but are there two battles being fought – a physical versus a mental one. Yet the difference between boxing and other competitive sports, such as rugby, is that it inhabits a cultural boundary of a kind; both mimetic activity and physical practice, it ‘safely’ replicates single hand combat and physically aggression, but directly admits the dangerous excitement of physical contact.131 Supriya Chaudhuri has argued further that the ‘male boxer is trapped in a structure of expectation that dehumanises and ultimately destroys him, like a gladiator in the Roman arena’.132 Her suggestion that it destroys the boxer can be interpreted in two different ways; firstly, there is the obvious physical destruction of the body, there can only be one winner and the loser will ultimately suffer injuries that will cause damage

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and in some case irreparable. Secondly, the psychological destruction of the natural male tendency of physical aggression – the curtailing of this emotion that will destroy is overarching masculine identity. However, the dehumanising element of the quote is interesting. Chaudhuri suggests that male human nature is defined by aggressive tendencies and the social regularising, along with the rules of the boxing ring, which in turn dehumanises competitors. Moreover, there is the insistence that the physical aggression itself is the destructive element.

Figure XXII – Personal collection, Beckett & Goddard, 1919, Olympia, London. Presented with The Rocket’ No.9, 14 April 1923 under the collection titled ‘Famous Knock Out.
Figure XXIII – Personal collection, Joe Beckett knocks-out Bombardier Billy Wells at London’s Olympia in 1920, photographed appeared in *Boxing News* on 12 August 1977.

Figure XXII, a postcard titled *Famous Knock-outs* [sic], are pictures of champions in the moment that they defeat their opponents. Figure XXIII is a still taken from the Beckett and Well’s match in 1920. Both images reflect the representation of physical aggression. In both depictions, the losers are lying on the floor. In particular, figure XXII, Goddard appears to be performing a cowardly pose. Though an artist enhanced photograph, the dynamics are still clear to the viewer. The image shows Beckett the victor standing over his quarry, fists dropped, the danger no longer evident to him, whereas Goddard, the contender, is left in no uncertainty as to who the better boxer was. In both images, the crowds are depicted as elegant male onlookers keen to watch the violence, this further enhancing the masculine environment. Goddard’s pose, whilst still defensive, appears disillusioned, not only physically, but furthermore mentally defeated. Beckett’s emotions are well hidden, an indifferent demeanour in contrast to Goddard’s own. Goddard’s facial expression in the image further emphasise that emotions were for the physically weak. In figure XXIII, ‘Bombardier’ Billy Wells is knocked out flat on his back. Beckett stares down at his contestant, whilst the
referee declares him the winner. In figure XXII, there seems to be a focus on
the artist's interpretation of the boxers, which would invariably confirm and
support the title of the photographs. Beckett appears to strike a far ‘manlier’
pose in that his physique is accentuated. He is thus describing the title of
boxing hero. Similarly, the pugilistic poses in photography conveyed
messages of strength and manliness. Likewise, in figure XXIII, Beckett’s
posture is not aggressive, but clearly the sweat from the battle is evident on
his figure. Equally important, a fighter’s body was also emphasised by the
expressions and vocabulary that elevated a boxer’s physique. It is significant
that the boxer’s physical public presentation of defined muscular strength
was an image for the collective to aspire to. The physicality and the tangible
muscularity needed for a professional boxer’s endurance, along with the
benefits of physical preparedness, was construed as a reliable empirical
indicator of moral commitment and mental resolve.

The terminology that trainers and fighters used to describe boxers’
physiques and the physical preparation invoked military and industrial
metaphors, such as weapons and armoury or machines and engines. The
figurative expressions permit insight into the boxer’s mental distancing from
his own physical body. In order to prepare himself for the battle within the
ring, the fighter could not view himself as a man who experiences pain. This
inorganic notion qualified his heroic or warrior status and transformed his
physical body into an inanimate object - an instrument that had been fine
tuned in preparation for the ring – all in the name of sporting entertainment
for the masses. This physical transformation from human to machine was
employed in other arenas in society, for example, the British armed forces. If
a man could view himself as an apparatus specifically engineered mentally
and physically to do battle, then the human physicality would be able to
withstand it – akin to gladiators. Boxing civilises a form of fundamental
human action – violent combat. Therefore, the heroic status that would have
otherwise been reserved for warriors and men who defended British
territories, men who achieved greatness for the benefit of all citizens and
men who placed themselves in harm without regard of their physical selves,
were men who deserved the nation’s praise and iconic status.
Comparatively, the violent actions of the British armed forces were
dehumanised. Both the military and boxing professions educated their fighters to view their bodies as tools or instruments to perform violence. Indeed, the homosocial environment of the boxing stadium supported the continuation of violence, which included harmful acts toward another man, but as a spectator and not a participant. This effectively removed the element of danger for the observer, but furthermore, in a ‘controlled’ sporting environment. Whilst the publication of professional match photographs and images in newspapers widened the audience and additionally increased the spectatorship, the gender of the audience remained predominately male. However, the demographic inevitably expanded to include other members of British society, which included homosexuals and female citizens, purely due to the mass publication of the photographs. Therefore, the violent images captured in boxing competitions, published through mediums such as newspapers and Pathè newsreels established an additional genre to sporting imagery. Fortunately, the abundance images of Beckett fighting or in training clarified this argument and further demonstrated his contribution to the field of pugilistic representation.

Conclusion

Early twentieth century professional boxing reverberated dominant masculinity. The audience witnessed how men harnessed skills, both physically and mentally, to perform violence and aggression publicly. It was not simply just a case of observing a sport. In reality, professional boxing utilised the presentation of violence as a craft. Indeed, commercial bouts orchestrated pugilism as an aggressive performance mastery, which in turn made aggressiveness visually appealing. Joe Beckett channelled his boxing skills to fulfil his professional vocation. He validated his perceived masculinity publicly and performed, posed and promoted boxing as a dauntless occupation.

An agent’s involvement could not have been avoided with commercial boxing. It was evident that management’s association with professional boxers was profitable, for both pugilist and agent, but also essential in the creation of a ‘heroic’ and idealised sporting personality. It is relevant that Beckett’s relationship with his manager, although turbulent, was fundamental
in orchestrating his sporting status. The organisation and promotion of Beckett's career, alongside winning the bouts, demonstrated his enhanced masculine identity. The audience's participation insured professional pugilism a place in sporting arenas. This in turn, advanced public appreciation of organised violent sports. As a celebrity of this era, Beckett clearly demonstrated that aggressive manliness was an attribute that male sporting enthusiasts would gladly pay to watch. Therefore, it can be asserted that boxing contributed to a 'manhood formula'. However, violence outside the ring was deemed to be unmanly. It is fitting to suggest that the audience's involvement was crucial. Without a paying audience, the matches would not have taken place. Beckett and his professional peers were the actors in the presentation of violence as a sport. He exhibited a fabricated notion of a true masculine identity. Whether he was aware of his influence is open to debate. However, as a twentieth century sports personality it cannot be denied that Beckett's exhibition of perceived national manliness, either deliberate or not, was evident throughout his boxing career. It could also be stated that Beckett's confrontational and dominant personality continued after his boxing career. Indeed, as it will be demonstrated in the next chapter, Beckett's calling to become a member of the British Union of Fascists, potentially substantiates an additional element of violent masculinity.
Chapter Three – Fascism

Introduction

British politics during the 1930s was dominated by the Conservatives. Indeed, Ramsay McDonald was the only Labour Prime Minister during this decade, with his reign heading what was a coalition government, ending in June 1935. Even within the mainstream right there was largely animosity toward fascism. Conservative leader Stanley Baldwin had only disdain for the leader of the British Union of Fascists (BUF). He stated after the 1934 Olympia rally that Mosley was a ‘political maniac and that all decent English people must combine to kill this movement’. Nevile Chamberlain followed Baldwin until May 1940, when he was succeeded by Winton Churchill who served throughout the remainder of the Second World War. Southampton mirrored national politics, its Conservative MP, William Craven-Ellis, retaining his seat from 1931 until the General Election of 1945. The Conservatives also had a substantial majority on the local council.

The British Union of Fascists had branches throughout the UK with its headquarters in London. Southampton’s division, although small, was considered by party members an example to follow in the British Union of Fascists’ districts and its candidates ran in local elections. For example, Southampton’s Mosleyites gained success in BUF competitions, winning the yearly contest showing the largest increase in selling the Blackshirt in 1935.

In reality, the coastal branch consisted of a limited number of local traders. This in turn suggests that Southampton’s fascist group was not as affluent or successful as party members asserted. It did, however, have some success within the region including recruiting in the elite Winchester School. Nationally, the BUF membership fell in 1939. G.C. Webber asserts

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2 Blackshirt, 21 June 1935, p. 3.
4 Eaden & Renton, p. 49 – Other UK higher education establishments included Stowe School in Buckingham, Beaumont College in Windsor and Worksop College in Nottinghamshire.
that due the nature of the movement’s overall decay ‘even Special Branch had to admit that the position of the BUF was rather obscure’. In the context of this decline, it is important to recognise the lateness of Beckett’s membership of the BUF. The timing of Beckett’s interest into the movement suggests that his involvement was due to the imminent danger of another world war, which he himself stated was the case. However, a more detailed investigation will reveal that its peace campaign was not the only reason why Beckett became a Mosleyite.

This chapter will focus on what Beckett found attractive about the British Union of Fascists. His attitude to Mosley will be included, as will the BUF’s anti-Semitic and anti-war appeals. Finally, this chapter will discuss the consequences of becoming a Mosleyite and especially detention under Regulation 18b. The purpose of evaluating the themes is to give a clear and concise picture of Beckett’s relationship with the British Union of Fascists, and his wider political identity.

The British Union of Fascists’ Southampton branch was not notable in size compared to London, Leeds, or Manchester. Southampton was a town and was not established as a city until 24 February 1964, with a population of approximately 180,000 in 1939. By mid 1934 and 1935, the south and south east’s (what Webber termed the ‘southern zone’) support for fascism fell dramatically from about fifteen percent of the total BUF’s national memberships to almost nothing. Indeed, limited information is available regarding Southampton’s involvement with fascism at this point. For instance, the local press provided minimal indications that the BUF existed in Southampton, with one exception that of Mosley’s notorious meeting on the Common in the summer of 1937 and the altercations between the crowd and BUF members. The British Union of Fascists were quick to accuse both ‘Reds’ and Jews for the trouble and violence during Mosley’s visit to Southampton. In Action, it was asserted that:

a crowd of about two hundred Reds and Jews, many recognised as London dwellers imported for the occasion,

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5 Webber, ‘Patterns of Membership’, p. 586.
6 HO 144/2180, Joe Beckett’s appeal to the Regulation 18b Advisory Committee, National Archives, Kew.
8 Webber, ‘Patterns of Membership’, p. 588; 589.
gathered near the front and did their upmost to create a disturbance. One Red came through the crowd pretending to be a supporter and then attacked Mosley from the rear.\textsuperscript{9}

Indeed, both national and local newspapers reported a level of violence and stated that:

a selection of catcalls and boos could be heard from men with clenched fists and reinforcements were needed to calm down the situation. There was a strong hostile element and during the speech missiles were thrown at Sir Oswald Mosley.\textsuperscript{10}

Five anti-fascist men were arrested for ‘breach of the peace’, but only two were charged: Southampton’s Harold Gorse, a lorry driver, was fined 20s for committing breach of peace and Alfred Pallet, a joiners’ mate, was also fined 20s and ordered to pay for the costs to repair the broken window on the tram which amounted to 15s 2d.\textsuperscript{11} There were no other clashes reported with Southampton’s BUF members and its local citizens.

Additionally, the local Jewish population were not publicly concerned about the presence of the British Union of Fascists in Southampton. However, in 1934 the minutes from the Southampton Hebrew Congregation meetings do indicate a sense of insecurity and a progressive awareness that they were marginal and were reminded of their religious nonconformity. Moreover, a suggestion was made by its executive committee for a meeting between the Southampton Hebrew Congregation and the local fascist party. The committee discussed whether a ‘Jewish body’ should represent the local Jewish community, but it was decided that ‘they cannot take part in a political discussion’.\textsuperscript{12} Apart from this entry the BUF or any other fascist parties were not discussed again.

British Union of Fascist followers mostly consisted of lower and middle-class men and women. Similar to Southampton, Oxford’s BUF unit never recruited widely amongst the working classes.\textsuperscript{13} In Southampton, it

\textsuperscript{9} Action, 24 July 1937, p.3, British Online Archives, \url{https://microform.digital/boa/documents/720/july-to-december-1937} [accessed 6 June 2016] – detailed evaluation of who was to blame for the disturbance was reported in both Action and The Blackshirt for the next couple of weeks.
\textsuperscript{10} The Hampshire Advertiser, 24 July 1937, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{11} Western Morning News, 27 July 1937, p. 7.
\textsuperscript{12} Southampton Hebrew Congregation minutes, 19 February 1934, The University of Southampton Archives, Hartley Library, Southampton.
\textsuperscript{13} Dave Renton, Red Shirts and Black (Oxford: Ruskin Library, 1996), p. 4 – Renton’s detailed research of Oxford’s British Union of Fascists branch is comparable to the Southampton district. Primarily because the Oxford Mosleyites
included Richard Knop who owned a tobacco shop in Oxford Street and Charles Cuthbert-Smith who was a governor in the juvenile prison. In short, the only people who wrote about the Southampton branch were the BUF themselves in their ‘local news’ section within the organisation through the weekly and monthly newspapers Action and The Blackshirt. On 29 May 1937, Action noted that in Southampton the ‘sales drive and dock gate meetings as usual’ took place and that the gathering was ‘glad to notice a party of engineers from Thornycroft in audience’.14 However, the same article stated that the crowd was smaller and Richard Reynell-Bellamy, a prominent party member who was interned with both Mosley and Beckett, suggested too that Southampton had:

always been a tough place from a British Union viewpoint in terms of the number of members, but the quality of its local membership was the best and it had to be to survive.15

From this it can be deduced that Southampton’s branch could not boast of being high profile and therefore was not seen as a force in local mainstream politics. In fact, the movement’s candidate finished bottom of the poll with only 29 votes out of 110,376 in Southampton’s municipal election in 1935.16

As mentioned, Joe Beckett’s fascist activities in Southampton were very late in the movement’s history. In May 1939, both Joe and his wife Ruth became members of the BUF. They were introduced to it by a friend, Mr Weston, who served with Joe during the Great War. Weston promoted his Mosleyite affiliation and encouraged the Becketts to come and see the ‘great’ leader. Later, Weston also provided the Becketts with a character reference to petition the Home Office for their release.17 Indeed, their internment details too were not perceived as a threat to everyday politics of the city. Furthermore, just as Southampton, Mosley visited Oxford and spoke of the British Union of Fascists’ ‘physical prowess’ and his visit was received in a similar way to when he spoke in Southampton. Indeed, clashes would end in street violence, especially with anti-fascist political parties. For instances, Oxford’s Socialist party or the Communist Party when heckling at Mosley’s speech ended in physical altercations.

17 Weston was known to the Home Office as a Mosleyite, therefore, the Advisory Committee responsible for the release of internees, dismissed Weston’s reference.
highlight the level of involvement that the Becketts had with the British Union of Fascists and provide a valuable case study to discuss everyday life as a Mosleyite.

Although limited at a national level, there were several appeals of British fascism to the wider public. For Beckett, it was the BUF’s nationalism, its anti-Semitic and anti-war rhetoric, combined with a sense of belonging that drew him to the movement. Each of these elements will help provide an understanding of Beckett’s attachment to the fascist party. The chapter will assess Beckett’s level of involvement with the BUF. It will consider his private participation, as well as his public demonstration of fascism in Southampton and the surrounding area. It will examine the subjective nature of his patriotism, reflecting on when and how ‘patriotism’ in his case developed into a more exclusive and violent ‘nationalism’. The chapter will analyse whether the appeal of Mosley as a strong leader was an additional attraction to the BUF for Beckett, especially an idealised masculine identity, thus building on the previous chapter. The chapter will further reflect on the themes that were most prominent in Beckett’s Home Office file: anti-Semitism and anti-war. These matters Beckett admitted were to him positive qualities of the BUF. The final stages of the chapter will assess the Becketts’ detention under Regulation 18b. The examination will investigate why Beckett chose the BUF to represent his objectives, instead of alternative groups associated with patriotism or pacifism. The British Union of Fascists offered the mentality of ‘progress’, but so did other British political organisations. It was, therefore, a bold step for Beckett to become a Mosleyite. After all, he was a sports celebrity and a public figure and the public portrayal of his British Union of Fascist identity is a crucial part of his character. Beckett publicly articulated his fascism which demonstrated a level of involvement that he was never embarrassed to show and yet tarnished his reputation thereafter.

Due to his direct relations wishing not to retain evidence of his connection with the British Union of Fascists, there are significant personal details and documents that are missing in the private archives relating to

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Beckett. Indeed, this amnesia and silence extended throughout generations of Beckett's immediate family members. Consequently, there are elements of Beckett's story that cannot be fully untangled, but by investigating his Advisory Committee and Home Office files alongside brief mentions of his involvement in private diaries and memoirs an intricate analysis can still be made. It remains that within his Home Office files, there were suggestions of other high ranking members to which Beckett was said to have been associated, but their files have not been released. These include Reginald Jarman and Alexander Thomas who were Southampton's BUF District Leaders, as well as Frank Grove its treasurer who were all associated and named in Beckett's Home Office file. Despite this absence, Home Office records and the Regulation 18b Advisory Committee interview archives, along with the Hampshire police records, as well as local and national newspapers, combined with the BUF's own papers *Action* and *The Blackshirt* will assist in compiling a nuanced account of Joe Beckett's relationship with the British Union of Fascists.

**Attractions of the British Union of Fascists**

As fascism increased its power on the continent of Europe, tension in the British political climate was heightened with the prospect of the impending threat of global war. The British Union of Fascists attempted to harness the atmosphere in Britain and channel it into their political agenda and public appeal. With the use of propaganda and public demonstrations the movement canvassed the UK with an ultimate intention to gain power. Whilst its success was limited, for those attracted, what was its appeal for both men and, increasingly, women?

In this last respect, Ruth, Joe's wife, also needs to be considered when analysing his involvement in the BUF. There are several specific reasons for including Ruth in this exploration. Firstly, she was interned at the same time as her husband and this is revealing about their daily lives as Mosleyites. Secondly, both of their Home Office and Advisory committee

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19 HO 144/2180, Joe Beckett's appeal to the Regulation 18b Advisory Committee, National Archives, Kew.
transcripts corroborate each other’s daily activities and the presentation of their fascist identities as a *couple*. Finally, and most importantly together, they represent the daily interaction as a pair, as well as a family unit. Ruth’s prominence in this section of the chapter is thus necessary in understanding Joe’s involvement in fascism. Although Ruth features throughout the chapter, detailed analysis of her will only be within this section. Her contribution to the couple’s BUF connections was largely through socialising and hosting meetings. The social climbing element was an enormous attraction for the Becketts and therefore, it is appropriate to analyse in detail her participation - Beckett’s *private* fascist identity cannot be discussed without the inclusion of his wife. Moreover, Ruth was also reported for exhibiting her fascist identity publicly, which in turn received attention from the Security Services and added to the decision to detain them both.

The Becketts participated in fascist activities inside their home. Indeed, in both Joe and Ruth’s Home Office files, evidence of daily activities in the private domestic sphere was scattered throughout. The Beckett household was an affluent environment and neither worked: as noted in chapter one this led to an abundance of leisure time for both, allowing plenty of time to privately express their fascism, or organise meetings with other prominent British Union of Fascist members. In fact, when Beckett was questioned by the Regulation 18b Advisory Committee they asked:

Q. Did you ever use your home for fascist meetings?
A. On one occasion they did come to tea, but not as a meeting for fascists. There were other people who were not fascists.
Q. It was a tea party?
A. Yes
Q. No doubt they talked about British Union matters
A. That and other things.  

Beckett continued to deny that these gatherings were specifically BUF events. However, the Home Office document also asserted that he attended similar meetings in other members’ homes. Significantly, regardless of how Beckett denied that they were not specific Mosleyite meetings, what must be

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20 HO 144/2180, Joe Beckett’s appeal to the Regulation 18b Advisory Committee, National Archives, Kew.
understood is that Southampton’s high ranking British Union of Fascists officers converged and discussed fascism in his home. Beckett’s daughter, Margaret, confirmed and suggested that this was not a singular event. In her memoirs, she recalled that such meetings occurred regularly. She recollected that:

They would have meetings in our house, mum would bake ham and give coffee. They would talk about how the government was not doing enough to stop the trouble.21

Margaret’s reminiscence is revealing. First it proves that the whole household were aware of the fascist activities that occurred in the private space of the Beckett home with the social combining with the political. Secondly, it shows that BUF gatherings occurred frequently. Thirdly, and most importantly, she clarified that Beckett had imbued elements of the British Union of Fascist agenda and had a knowledge of its politics - party political knowledge he categorically denied in his Advisory Committee interview. This element of Beckett’s character will be explored later.

There were further suggestions that the family were involved in other private BUF gatherings. Just prior to Beckett’s detention, the family took their caravan to Cadham in the New Forest. The Advisory Committee probed:

Q. Did you have any British Union meetings at the caravan?
A. No, sir. We used a caravan for our holidays in the summer time.22

Nevertheless, statements which led to this line of questioning suggested otherwise. Beckett was reported to the local police to have had visits from District Leaders Reginald Jarman and Alexander Thomas whilst they stayed in the New Forest. Indeed, it was noted that ‘it was not long before complaints came in that the local fascists were meeting there’.23 Beckett continued to refute the extent of his involvement with BUF members. The degree of his daily activities that included fascist interaction cannot be categorically determined. Although the Home Office pressed them on the degree of contact he had with the British Union of Fascists, Beckett

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22 HO 144/2180, Joe Beckett’s appeal to the Regulation 18b Advisory Committee, National Archives, Kew.
23 Ibid.
persistently played down his involvement. Ruth Beckett also insisted that the couple attended only a few meetings and never suggested that BUF gatherings were in her home. This insinuated that the Becketts were conscious of the fact that fascism was not a ‘safe’ political stance to hold. Beckett went as far to state that he did not tell his character referees Sir Russell Bancroft, Colonel Dore and Mr. Glee, that he was a member of the BUF. He stated, ‘those are the people I would not let know that I was a member of the British Union’. It signifies once again, that Beckett did have a political awareness and an understanding that fascism was a controversial and potentially damaging political identity to possess.

Another element of the Becketts’ right-wing characters, was the admission that they listened to Lord Haw Haw’s (William Joyce) British Broadcasting Station (BBS) in the first year of the war. The BBS aired fascist programmes from a secret location in Hamburg, broadcasting Nazi propaganda at radio’s peak time of 9pm nightly into British homes. These consisted of pro-Nazi material and asserted that other news of the British war effort was exaggerated. Joyce’s radio station had a wide audience which included non-BUF members. As Colin Holmes has stated the British Broadcasting Station was established specifically with British listeners in mind and Joyce played an important role. Though Beckett’s admission of listening to the propagandistic station has special significance, it must be noted that ordinary British people tuned to listen to Joyce. In 1940, the British Institute of Public Opinion carefully distributed a questionnaire to those who tuned in regularly to Haw-Haw. It ascertained that the audience ‘tended to be most favourable to the Radio War Lord’ and continued to stress that due to the strength of the station’s radio transmitters ‘it took only a slight tuner adjustment after having listened to the BBC news bulletins’ to tune into Joyce’s broadcast. The Nazi radio station also took advantage of the timings of their programmes. Indeed, they carefully started immediately after the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) had finished their nightly news

24 HO 144/2180, Joe Beckett’s appeal to the Regulation 18b Advisory Committee, National Archives, Kew.
broadcast benefitting as a racist from the large audience that had already tuned in.\textsuperscript{28} To that end, this element of Beckett’s private fascism was minor compared to the organisation of meetings in his home and suggestive gatherings at his holiday caravan. Yet, there is evidence in his Home Office record that asserted his participation was potentially more dangerous. During his Advisory Committee interview, it was implied on 25 April 1940 at the Meadowbank Hotel in Eastleigh, that before leaving Beckett ‘handed someone a green label advertising the new British Broadcasting Station’.\textsuperscript{29} This revealed that Beckett’s relationship with the news station was more than just as a casual listener. Undeniably, he understood the BBS’ agenda and inkeeping with the pseudo-missionary ethos of the British Union of Fascists, indicating that he was more than a sleeping member of the BUF. In summarising Beckett’s interaction with the fascist radio station, it is important to note the content of the British Broadcasting Station’s programmes. Above all, the substance of the broadcasts consisted of the denial of Nazi aggression and that Germany’s desire was to continue the ‘maintenance of peace’ with the insistence that ‘Britain and France were spreading false rumours’.\textsuperscript{30}

Another point which cannot be ignored is the National Socialistic subject matter of the announcements. The shows were organised by a team of British pro-Nazi sympathisers in Berlin, such as Mrs Eccessly and her son James Clark. Clark, a young devoted National Socialist, was sixteen years old when he convinced his mother that he needed to be educated in Berlin. These pro-Nazi Anglo-German sympathisers stayed when war was declared and dedicated their loyalty to Hitler. Frances Eccessly was crucial to the BBS propaganda programmes and she trawled through all the British newspapers to seek out material for the show.\textsuperscript{31} The programmes’ content had a huge impact on its co-ordinators. Her son became one of the station’s broadcasters at just seventeen. Clark commented that anti-Semitism was part of ‘one’s outlook’ as well as that he ‘grappled with the ‘Jewish question’

\textsuperscript{28} Durant, ‘Lord Haw-Haw of Hamburg’, p. 444.
\textsuperscript{29} HO 144/2180, Joe Beckett’s appeal to the Regulation 18b Advisory Committee, National Archives, Kew.
daily and that he was ‘entirely in favour of what it meant, the elimination of
the Jewish influence in all spheres’. The broadcasts blamed Jews for the
war and accused Jews of cowardice and being unpatriotic. Joseph
Goebbels, Hitler’s official Propaganda Minister, was the high ranking Nazi
who commanded and edited the content of the broadcasts. There can be
little doubt that Beckett’s active listening meant that he was sympathetic
toward Nazi Germany and their policies. It also raises additional questions
about Beckett’s nationalistic outlook. Which will be discussed in more detail
later in the chapter. In sum, Beckett was not clear himself about nationalism
and where his political loyalties lied. He trusted the conspiracies that were
being fed to him via the BUF, as well as the BBS and combined them with
his deep rooted anti-Semitism. Beckett’s conviction that Britain’s news
stations did not deliver an honest evaluation of the war or the Nazi agenda
was also confirmed by his admiration for the BBS.

Subsequently, the lines between a private and public expression of
Beckett’s fascist persona become blurred. Beckett developed his private
fascist identity, one that remained within the home, to one in the public
sphere. Although he continued to categorically deny the accusations of the
public validation of the British Union of Fascists’ philosophy, the evidence
against him was assembled and asserted throughout his Advisory
Committee appeal. Ruth Beckett also publicly demonstrated her
understanding of the BUF principles. Ultimately, by taking their views outside
the walls of their home and expressing them in Southampton’s open and
public spaces, along with their national prominence as celebrities, it led to
their detention. Indeed, the complaints made to the city’s police department,
along with the alleged barring from local bars and hotels, alerted the Home
Office and MI5 to the Becketts’ membership of the British Union of
Fascists. Therefore, an account of the Becketts’ public fascism needs to be
confronted.

In the Becketts’ Regulation 18b ‘Statement of Case’ there were many
complaints about their public articulation of fascism, particularly that of Joe.

32 BBC Archive, ‘Propaganda Broadcast from Germany, Lord Haw-Haw’,
33 HO 144/2180, Joe Beckett’s appeal to the Regulation 18b Advisory Committee, National Archives, Kew.
The evidence was overwhelming and grievances had been brought to the attention of Southampton’s Constabulary. This in turn led to their investigation by the British security services and ensured their internment under the emergency defence regulation. The case offers insight into Beckett’s daily interaction and expression of his relationship with the British Union of Fascists. It also revealed his public activity and participation in organised British Union of Fascist events. The file discussed further a regular boasting of his membership in public spaces in Southampton establishments, unconnected to the British Union of Fascists. In fact, according to the police reports and Home Office records, Beckett articulated fascist propaganda along with its racial, pro-Nazi and political agenda. Here, the focus will remain with the public actions of both Joe and Ruth Beckett’s political extremism. It is important to divide the public exhibitions into two sections: organised British Union of Fascist events and the expression of fascism in Southampton. Both offer insight into the Beckett’s everyday interaction with the BUF and fascism, but the latter is of high importance because Beckett chose to demonstrate his Mosleyite identity in his local community. Therefore, together, they will compose an image of the Becketts’ public demonstration of fascism.

The British Union of Fascists organised regular events in exclusive and as well as open, larger venues across London. The gatherings ranged from all-encompassing political rallies in huge arenas to private dinner functions in ‘high class’ hotels. The Becketts attended both types of assemblies and both admitted in their Advisory Committee meetings that they participated in the events. To illustrate, in her Regulation 18b interview Ruth was questioned and confessed to attending the British Union of Fascists July 1939 ‘Peace Rally’. This mass meeting was organised in protest against any war against Germany. Spurr has detailed that ‘it incorporated fascist aesthetics, that were dominated by the use of BUF banners, flags and slogans, and music underscored the content of the

34 HO 144/2180, Joe Beckett’s appeal to the Regulation 18b Advisory Committee, National Archives, Kew.
‘sermons’, highlighting the nation as the central tenet of faith to which fascism was directly coupled.\textsuperscript{35} The record stated:

Q. You did go up to this Earl’s Court meeting in July 1939?
A. Yes

Q. Because I see in your statement you know that you went to the Earl’s Court Exhibition for the day’s outing to hear Sir Oswald Mosley speak because you were interested.\textsuperscript{36}

The rally had a large attendance relating to the fear of the imminent war. It is significant that both Becketts attended the event. Firstly, it established their enthusiasm to see Mosley perform - something that Ruth freely admitted to. But more importantly, their attendance was a political statement. Undeniably, Beckett was a celebrity. Indeed, other rally attendees would have recognised him. This was a bold move and one that publicly displayed his appreciation of the British Union of Fascists’ ideals and political agenda. In his appeals interview, Beckett stated that he was used by the BUF because of his popularity. He asserted ‘I am not trying to climb out the back door, but as a public figure I have been used for this’.\textsuperscript{37} Beckett’s daughter too resounded her father’s beliefs in her memoirs that ‘to have Dad’s name on the list of members was an asset to the movement’\textsuperscript{38}. However, the list of actions that were held against Beckett do not simply represent a man being ‘used’. For example, Beckett wore the British Union of Fascist pin on his jacket. On 27 April 1940, whilst drinking at the Hippodrome in Southampton, the manager, a Captain Story, asked him to take the BUF pin out of his lapel. The Advisory Committee asked:

Q. Were you wearing a fascist badge on that day in your buttonhole?
A. I could not tell you. I had a badge
Q. Did anyone tell you to take the badge out?
A. Yes
Q. Who told you?


\textsuperscript{36} HO 144/21839, Ruth Beckett’s appeal to the Regulation 18b Advisory Committee, National Archives, Kew.

\textsuperscript{37} HO 144/2180, Joe Beckett’s appeal to the Regulation 18b Advisory Committee, National Archives, Kew.

\textsuperscript{38} Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’.
A. Mr. Story  
Q. Your friend? What did you do?  
A. Took it out  
Q. Do you remember whether you put the badge back into the lapel of your coat as you went out? And as you went out said “I suppose I can wear what I like in the street”?
A. No, Sir.  

Although Beckett denied that he placed the pin back onto his coat after leaving the Hippodrome, the fact that he wore the pin out in his community and home town is significant. In sum, Britain was already at war with Germany. By wearing the badge, it showed that Beckett supported the BUF’s link to Nazi Germany, as well as its well-known anti-Semitic, pro-Nazi and anti-war policies. It was suggested in Beckett’s notes that he had purchased pins for all his children to wear. This demonstrated that he was highly supportive of the British fascist cause and was not ashamed to indicate this in his local community and in his immediate family.  

Beckett was also accused of an extreme exhibition of his loyalty to the BUF. Indeed, evidence from the Southampton Constabulary in his interrogation led to Beckett being told that he had been ‘barred from almost all the public houses in Above Bar Street in Southampton, because of the Fascist propaganda which you attempted to spread during your visits to licensed premises’. Beckett continued to deny this level of involvement, but the evidence argues otherwise. Furthermore, Beckett paraded his association with the British Union of Fascists. For example, in The Sussex Hotel on Above Bar in Southampton, he was accused of proudly displaying his connection with the BUF. In fact, he had admitted to attending a Mosleyite gathering at the Criterion Hotel in London on 24 February 1939. In the statement of case held against Beckett, it asserted that he ‘produced a menu card of a fascist dinner which he showed to an Army Officer and a Metropolitan Policeman and started running down the Jews and said he hoped that Hitler would win the war’. Clearly, this does not demonstrate a

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39 Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’.  
40 HO 144/2180, Joe Beckett’s appeal to the Regulation 18b Advisory Committee, National Archives, Kew.  
41 Ibid.
person who was ashamed of being a member of the BUF and was not afraid to publicly assert his affiliation, including its controversial anti-Semitism.

Thus, before their detention, both Joe and Ruth Beckett proudly demonstrated their connection to the BUF in their home, on the streets of Southampton and in various buildings in and around the city centre as well as in the New Forest and London. Throughout their Advisory Committee hearings, both denied the degree of involvement and considered it as a false accusation. Yet, as illustrated, the Becketts were not sleeping members of the British Union of Fascists. Beckett believed that he had been used for his celebrity status. If that was true, then he would not have publicly demonstrated his connection with the BUF. Whether there is a degree of naïveté, as both Beckett and the Advisory committee emphasised, is open to debate. But it cannot be denied that Beckett was proud to display his connections the British Union of Fascists suggests otherwise. Conversely, it is interesting that he concealed his membership from certain elite members of Southampton’s community. He was, however, well known and took a risk to be associated with the Mosleyites.\(^{42}\) With such a public display of his allegiance to the BUF, it was only a matter of time before his connection was noticed by state security. To that end, what was the attraction of the British Union of Fascists for Beckett and his wife? Was it purely for an opportunity to socially associate with some of Britain’s elite, or was it the party’s policies and world view? Both Becketts proclaimed that their motives for subscribing to the BUF were purely patriotic, but this is a loaded term open to many different interpretations as the next section will explore.

The Problem with ‘Patriotism’

In his own mind, ‘Patriotism’ was one of the primary factors that led to Beckett’s membership of the British Union of Fascists. To him the suggestion, therefore, that he was a traitor was incomprehensible. In fact, in his appeal statement to the Regulations 18b Advisory committee that was handwritten by his solicitor, Beckett asserted that:

\[^{42}\text{HO 144/2180, Joe Beckett’s appeal to the Regulation 18b Advisory Committee, National Archives, Kew.}\]
having always lived in England – I have not been abroad – and served in the H.M. Forces during the war, my loyalty could not be questioned on any grounds whatsoever. My wife and I joined the British Union for no other reason than its extreme patriotic motives. 43

What is important in this statement, is the phrase ‘extreme patriotic motives’. Beckett believed that the BUF adhered to the right strain of patriotism. Nevertheless, the subjectivity of ‘patriotism’ as a concept needs to be acknowledged. The definition is adapted and shaped to suit an individual or group’s situation. The British Union of Fascists’ newspapers, as well as discussions at the meetings, had an emphasis on an unproblematic patriotism, which meant that few fascists supporters perceived themselves as operating outside the boundaries of conventional political norms. 44 The members were encouraged to read (and distribute) the BUF’s own newspapers Action and The Blackshirt, reassured them of their loyalty to the nation. Indeed, jingoism flowed through every issue of the British fascist press, particularly in the build up to the war. For example, on 29 May 1939, Action printed ‘The Ten Points of British Union’: ‘Patriotism and Revolution, Action, The British Union Movements, The Corporate State, Work and Wages, The Empire and Peace, Export Trade, Agriculture, British Credit and Jewish Finance and Leadership, and Liberty’. It is no accident that patriotism is first in this list. In this edition of Action, this heading has been expanded further:

British Union is loyal to King, Country and Empire…we are determined to build an empire of worthy patriots … Conservative patriotism is submerged in subservience to international finance … (in contrast to the)[sic] love of country, love of people meet in National Socialism … which alone can restore Britain to the forefront of the nations. 45

43 HO 144/2180, Joe Beckett’s appeal to the Regulation 18b Advisory Committee, National Archives, Kew.
As war approached, the BUF’s emphasis on the movement’s understanding of British patriotism was printed more frequently. The reassuring weight on important national markers (King, country and Empire) indicated that the BUF strain of patriotism was different from any other form of loyalty to Britain. However, the added ingredient to the British Union of Fascists’ patriotic motives was National Socialism. This component revealed the fascist and xenophobic tone to their form of patriotism. As Stephen Cullen has highlighted, ‘patriotism was the hallmark of the BUF from the outset, as with all fascist movements. For many Blackshirts, it was the BUF’s love of country and Empire that was the deciding factor in their adherence to the movement’.46 There can be no denying that Mosleyites truly believed that they were loyal citizens. However, the word ‘patriotism’ as noted is subjective, primarily because it is based on an individual’s interpretation on what characteristics they perceive represent the best way to serve their nation or how it is represented. In 1941, George Orwell asserted that although patriotism takes different forms in different classes, it still ran like a connecting thread through nearly all British citizens.47 Therefore, most British citizens considered themselves to be patriotic. Beckett’s political allegiance to the British Union of Fascists was his way of demonstrating his devotion to Britain. Though distorted, the ‘extreme patriotic motives’, as stated in the Advisory Committee file, were one of the attractions of the British Union of Fascists to Beckett. Yet, two issues have arisen from analysing Beckett’s ‘patriotism’: first, service to our country and second, when does patriotism become nationalism? For example, did Beckett demonstrate disloyalty in relation to his pro-Nazi views? And can the BUF’s strain of patriotism be brushed off as ‘extreme patriotic motives’ like Beckett stated in his defence concerning his internment?

If part of being a true patriot was demonstrated through service for your country, then Beckett proved his loyalty through the military during the Great War. His active armed career is, however, vague. Some evidence suggested that he was a mechanic in the Royal Air Force, but other sources

assert that he was a physical trainer. Nonetheless, there can be no doubt that he had enlisted and there are many sources, which have been reviewed in Chapter Two, that assert that Beckett’s boxing career also benefitted from his service from 1914 to 1918. For this reason, he considered himself, along with many other Mosleyites, to have actively defended his country during the Great War. Additionally, Beckett represented Britain, and her Empire throughout his professional boxing career. Therefore, having fought (both in sport and for national defence) for his country, there is evidence to demonstrate Beckett’s patriotism. Military service was considered greatly patriotic for the British Union of Fascists. Indeed, many of its members were ex-servicemen and women. At the same time, a military career was considered patriotic by most British citizens and this attribute was no different to a ‘normal’ demonstration of patriotism by the average British citizen: many men in the 1930s would have defined a devotion to their nation through active military service two decades earlier. In contrast, the BUF popularised military duty and combined it with its anti-war campaign to illustrate the movement’s patriotism. The discussion on the anti-war rhetoric will be analysed later in the section. The focus now is on how British Union of Fascists’ patriotic affirmation consisted also of anti-Semitism and xenophobia.

The BUF proudly declared their patriotism through campaigns titled ‘Britons First’: this crusade was dependent on anti-Semitism and xenophobia. The movement harnessed and interpreted that to love Britain necessitated an opposition to Jews and other ‘foreigners’. The slogans and the titles of its literature asked the audience to choose between ‘looking after its own’ by stating questions such as ‘Alien or Briton?’. For example, in its 14 January 1939 edition, *Action* declared that the Saturday cinema businesses had been exposed and that:

> the Jews who are in control of the cinema industry are attempting to coerce every cinema owner throughout the country to give 10 per cent of their takings on that day to the Lord Baldwin’s iniquitous Fund for Refugees … There are many cinemas which have British managers. These managers would dearly like to have nothing to do with this fund.
Unfortunately, many of them are not in a position to stand out against it, for if they did, the Jewish controllers would see that in future no good films went to their theatres and they would be ruined.\textsuperscript{48} The language articulated their distaste for British cinemas financing refugee aid. For instance, words such as ‘coerce’ and the insinuation that the ‘Jewish controllers’ were threatening cinema managers, emphasised the BUF’s conspiratorial view of why there was support for refugees. Furthermore, the stress on the ‘British’ cinema workers not wanting to contribute their takings to the fund highlighted that these ‘Britons’ had to go without whilst refugees took advantage. In stark terms the headline queried ‘Shall British Money Go To Jews While Britons Starve?’. This was even in the case of those Jewish refugee children in the \textit{Kindertransport}, who were subsequently cemented in British memory.\textsuperscript{49} The evacuation of Jewish children to Britain from Nazi occupied Europe offers a disturbing insight into the British Union of Fascists’ depth of disgust for Jewish refugees despite the limited notion of entry policy at the time. Jennifer Craig-Norton asserted that ‘the British government’s decision to bring only children and not their parents left a majority of them orphans after their families were murdered in the Holocaust’.\textsuperscript{50} This reveals many issues and questions about the British Union of Fascists. For example, not only were the refugee children fleeing from a life-threatening situation, they were also traumatised by coming to Britain without their families. Although, the BUF had no idea of the looming threat of genocide, the complete absence of sympathy for the Jews of Europe and their children is blatant in its propaganda.

The BUF emphasised that the ‘Briton’ held specific characteristics: they were not Jewish and/or immigrant. The racial mindset was accentuated with slogans that were printed at the bottom of their newspaper pages, for instance, ‘Britain for the British’. Other catchphrases published on each page of \textit{Action} assured its readers that British Union of Fascists’ motives were

\textsuperscript{49} Ibid.
pure and patriotically proclaimed again ‘that the British Union stands for Crown, Empire and its People’. It reassured Mosleyites and other readers that its nationalistic ideals had their foundations in cultural and traditional British values. Furthermore, by printing these types of slogans, the BUF wanted to prove that they were not treasonous and that their loyalties were still to the country’s King. Whether the monarchy would have stayed if the British Union of Fascists had gained governmental control is open to debate. However, Mosleyites emphasised their patriotic value through loyalty to the crown and even went as far to state that if anything were to happen to Mosley, then it ‘would be the King’s duty to choose a successor’ to the fascist government.\(^{51}\) Equally important, as asserted, the BUF mixed patriotism with racism. The movement’s anti-Semitism and racial code will be discussed again in depth later in this chapter. Now, the relationship between patriotism and nationalism needs to be further addressed.

Orwell asserted that by ‘patriotism, it is meant a devotion to a particular place and a particular way of life, which one believes to be the best in the world but has not wished to force on other people. Patriotism is of its nature defensive, both militarily and culturally’.\(^{52}\) Orwell also insisted that patriotism should not be confused with nationalism. He avowed that nationalism was ‘inseparable from the desire for power. The abiding purpose of every nationalist is to secure more power and more prestige, not for himself but for the nation or other unit in which he has chosen to sink his own individuality’.\(^{53}\) Orwell’s view of Mosleyites was emphasised in *The Road to Wigan Pier* where he argued that they were ‘pimpled followers’ and he clearly meant to present them as mindless nationalists.\(^{54}\) More generally, his division between patriotism and nationalism are appropriate for the analysis here: what Beckett and other Mosleyites considered patriotism was, for Orwell exclusive and potentially dangerous nationalism. For example, the dialogue between Beckett and the manager of the Meadowbank Hotel in

\(^{51}\) Colin Cross, *The Fascist in Britain* (London: Barrie and Rockcliff (Barrie Books Ltd), 1961), p. 72 – Cross also asserted that the job of a fascist government would be to advise the King through the ‘Grand Council’ of fascist veterans and that the Privy Council will be abolished.


\(^{53}\) Ibid.

\(^{54}\) George Orwell, *The Road to Wigan Pier* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1937), p. 197 – In chapter 11, Orwell completes his social study by sharing his political ideals. This includes his Socialistic opinions, views on the British government including their financial control and his distaste for fascism.
Eastleigh proved that he wanted to ‘force other people’ to aspire to a British Union of Fascist nationalism. It was asserted in the ‘Statement of Case Against’ Beckett that he:

endeavoured to draw Mr. Green, the manager, into their talk. They asked him if he believed in the war and showed him anti-Jewish postcards. Beckett asked Mr. Green to consider the question of joining, but to treat the matter as confidential.\textsuperscript{55}

This example not only provides evidence of the ‘missionary’ style that the British Union of Fascists’ adopted, it further implicates the differences between patriotism and nationalism. Undeniably, the BUF was anti-Semitic, which signifies that it proudly believed that the British race could not include Jews, or any group deemed ‘un-British’. George Mosse emphasised that nationalism centred upon the human form. He underlined that ‘the human body itself became the prominent racial symbol, and a great deal of racist literature was devoted to an explanation of how one could recognise on sight one’s own as against those of a different race’.\textsuperscript{56} It is clear that Beckett demonstrated the BUF’s strain of nationalism. If Beckett is related to Mosse’s model, then it was his body that was used as a symbol of the British Union of Fascist’s nationalism. As an ex-heavyweight champion and a recognised figure, Beckett affirmed that his British, ‘white’ male body represented the desired nationalistic society of the BUF ideal. He understood that a true Briton would not be of foreign descent, would not be Jewish and would clearly be racially white. Orwell argued that nationalism was a ‘habit of assuming that human beings could be classified like insects and that whole blocks of millions or tens of millions of people can be confidently labelled good or bad’.\textsuperscript{57} Beckett and other members of the BUF clearly classed certain British citizens as ‘non-British’ and therefore, their form of self-declared patriotism was actually exclusive nationalism, with a leader who was power hungry. As Orwell suggested it was difficult for a nationalist not to conceal their allegiance. Significantly, Beckett could not avoid demonstrating

\textsuperscript{55} HO 144/2180, Joe Beckett’s appeal to the Regulation 18b Advisory Committee, National Archives, Kew.
\textsuperscript{57} George Orwell, Notes of Nationalism, \url{http://orwell.ru/library/essays/nationalism/english/o_nat} [accessed 20 May 2017].
his commitment to the BUF, thus exhibiting not only an awareness to the Mosley’s political agenda, but also to the movements’ racial programme. Equally significant, Beckett, along with many other Mosleyites, admired the British Union of Fascists’ leader. Mosley asserted the image of the one and only man who would lead the BUF. Beckett and his wife Ruth were attracted to the BUF because of Mosley’s leadership qualities. After all, Mosley himself considered the only man who could lead the British fascist movement. This arrogance and confidence attracted many members, including the Becketts.

Attitude to Sir Oswald Mosley

Many historians have discussed Mosley’s domineering leadership. Thurlow asserted that it was Mosley who brought the tablets down from the mountain to the membership.58 Cross suggested further that the party members saluted pictures that hung on the walls of every headquarters.59 More generally George Mosse asserted that fascist leaders, aided by methods of self-representation directed it into ‘proper’ channels.60 Undeniably, Mosley was the one and only leader of the British Union of Fascists. The assumption of his leadership will be evaluated to debate how and why he assembled his Mosleyites (accurately named) and surrounded himself with celebrities and aristocrats, including sporting personalities.

Julie Gottlieb emphasised that ‘Mosley was fascism as fashion, a peculiarly British brand of fascism that embraced the latest in modern technology, stole the intellectual property of continental fascist aesthetics and fused British populist politics and celebrity culture’.61 Gottlieb further stressed that Mosley was a megalomaniac and transformed political leadership into a form of cult celebrity. This assertion accounts for the attraction of appointing professional sports celebrities into the BUF fold. Even so, the BUF was Mosley’s political venture and he was the one who supplied its policies and themes. He controlled political meetings, evening

58 Lunn & Thurlow, British Fascism, p. 243.
59 Cross, The Fascist in Britain, p. 70.
60 Mosse, The Fascist Revolution, p. 18.
entertainment and sporting spectacle. The political flamboyance provided Mosley with the perfect platform to orate topics enthusiastically to fascist supporters.

Unsurprisingly, given Mosley’s need to perform, the celebrities involved in the BUF would have supplied him with reflected kudos within the party and enabled him to provide his version of fascism. The rich and famous would have also orchestrated the right membership and class; those with affluence and a disposable income. It also accounted for the tone of the BUF assemblies; the large scale, highly advertised rallies held in huge stadiums and public spaces. Gottlieb further suggested that BUF marketing schemes surrounded the party with cultural elites, the emergent mass consumer and celebrity cultures and mainstream public opinion. To that end, Mosley’s desperate desire for power and his need to parade himself as the leader will be assessed in conjunction with the issues of why celebrity members of the BUF were not prominent in the public sphere. With these explorations in mind, this section will highlight how the leader of the British Union of Fascists appealed to the Becketts and other British citizens.

Mosley made himself the centre of the British Union of Fascists. There was no doubt to anyone connected with or anybody who knew of the BUF that Sir Oswald Mosley was the party’s leader. More boldly stated, Mosley was the BUF. Gottlieb suggested that ‘Mosley was understood to be the irreplaceable leader of his movement, the personification of the movement’.

There are questions that occurred during the evaluation of the research associated with this chapter – why did the BUF not advertise or utilise more of their celebrity memberships? More specifically with regard to this thesis, why did the British Union of Fascist not exploit Beckett’s fame - especially as it was linked to one of the BUF’s more prominent and promoted past-times? It is true that Beckett was in his late forties and had retired from professional boxing years before his subscription to the BUF. Yet, this does not account for the lack of presence of other celebrity members. As has been discussed, Mosley selected acclaimed members from sport, who promoted the racial

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63 Ibid, p. 55.
64 Ibid, p. 40.
and political ideal of his propaganda. However, although he assembled such figures, their presence within the BUF and its literature was marginal. There was one obvious answer to these questions. Undeniably, there was a fine line between advertising the sports’ celebrity or cultural elite for the sake of the party and its policies and detracting from Mosley’s utterly dominant leadership of the British Union. It was his, and his alone, iconographic status which stood him out as ‘the leader’ and ‘men amongst men’, as well as his physical fitness, health and vitality which were asserted as the tradition of manhood.65 The Union’s idealised manliness were constructed by Mosley and the fascist male’s aspirations was not to be focused elsewhere.


Mosley’s regular column in *Action*, which was written by A. K Chesterton until his resignation in 1937 and titled ‘Portrait of a Leader’, regaled weekly the ‘heroism’ of the British Union’s figure head.66 It highlighted his courageous political leadership and stories of the BUF beginnings. Equally important, Mosley’s high morals were discussed and

compared to whichever ‘low standard’ Prime Minister in office at the time.\textsuperscript{67} To that end, there was a constant tone that proclaimed Mosley as not only the heralded leader, but furthermore, an inspirational manly figure that many aspired to become. For instance, on 15 July 1939, \textit{Action} reported ‘Mosley Shapes History’, the propagandist article covered topics such as ‘war betrayal’ and ‘leaders unworthy to lead’. It finished the piece declaring:

Now the new generation have created Britain their National Socialist Movement. You have a leader, a man who will never let control pass to professional politicians.\textsuperscript{68}

G. De Burgh Wilmot, an elite BUF member, further asserted under a column called ‘Blackshirts are the Warriors of the New Age’ that:

\begin{quote}
We can put our faith in Mosley, where other leaders have failed us … he is a man who is not ashamed of physical fitness, of health and vitality. He is a man in the tradition of manhood.\textsuperscript{69}
\end{quote}

The tone and language contained in the articles discussed is further evidence of Mosley’s alleged masculinity. Indeed, Collins has accurately labelled it ‘the cult of Mosley’.\textsuperscript{70} The language of both the \textit{Action} and \textit{Blackshirt} pieces asserted Mosley’s manliness. Furthermore, Mosley was a leader that would not relinquish control to other politicians, or other members of the BUF. It was this leadership model, combined with the BUF’s utopian and racial ideals that attracted the Becketts.

To compound Mosley’s leadership, words like ‘faith’ were given spiritual and pious tones, particularly when deliberating on masculinity. The reader could unconsciously connect the leader’s bodily characteristics as ‘God given’, especially, when Mosley was presented as ‘tradition of manhood’, asserting his British superiority.\textsuperscript{71} The British Union insisted on a healthy male body and the template was Mosley. However, it is important to assert that it owed less to Mosley being used as the ultimate male body and more to heralding him as the strongest man to lead the party. In the adoring

\textsuperscript{68} \textit{Action}, 15 July 1939, No. 177, p.3, British Online Archives, \url{https://microform.digital/boa/documents/724/july-to-december-1939} [accessed 4 April 2017].
\textsuperscript{69} \textit{Blackshirt}, 8 June 1934, p. 6, British Online Archives, \url{https://microform.digital/boa/documents/728/january-to-june-1934} [accessed 4 April 2017].
manner of the texts, Mosley’s defined physical fitness and manly attributes reflected the belief that he was the only leader fit enough to lead the BUF. Therefore, no one could challenge his authority. It created an atmosphere in relation to masculinity that focused solely on him. Macklin emphasised that Mosley was ‘frequently surrounded by an air of hysterical veneration’ and members claimed, ‘I’ve touched him, now I have the strength to carry on’. This is apparent in all texts written by BUF members. It also extended to female members who idolised his manliness. Woonok Yeom argued that ‘women found the leader’s Blackshirt uniform and his well-trained body sexually attractive and that sublimated sex appeal created a sense of unity with him’. Subsequently, Mosley perfected the honed masculine identity for both sexes to worship. His outdoor public protests and political rallies provided an additional opportunity to emphasise his manliness. He was the public orator, the showman of the party. He dominated the attention at mass rallies that had developed a liturgical and military structure. Linehan asserted that there would be a ‘sea of patriotic and fascist flags; a rendering of patriotic and fascist songs; the leader’s grand entrance amidst great fanfare’. Even with the smaller public demonstrations, for example, the Southampton Common rally on 18 July 1937, Mosley paraded through the streets of Southampton before assembling on the Common. His celebrity status and need for attention blinded him from the incident which resulted in him fleeing for safety. The need to publicly display his dominance, both in the internal network of the BUF and externally to unsuspecting citizens, prohibited the extensive use of other male British Union members with claims for enhanced manliness such as Beckett. Clearly, there can be no doubt of Mosley’s objective. The celebrity and elite culture in the BUF was primarily to bolster his reputation as a public political figure. Therefore, the use of Beckett, or any other male celebrity, would have been limited to the

72 Graham, D. Macklin, “‘Hail Mosley and F’ Em All’”, p. 2.
75 Southampton Advertiser, 24 July 1937, ‘BUF Leader under Police Protection’, Southampton City Archives – However, Mosley’s visit to Southampton was not a success. It ended with clashes from groups of anti-fascists and the local newspaper reported that ‘Mosley then descended from his motor parapet and wondered among the crowd. Many stones continued to be thrown from the crowd and the Fascist Leader was struck on the face. The police present hurried Mosley and BUF members into a tramcar and directed it back into town. More bricks smashed the windows and men started to rock and shake the tram. Eventually, the car managed to pull away’. 191
boundaries that did not interfere with the understanding that Mosley was the only male superstar. This is not to deny that there were no other dominant male role-models within the party, but they were not in competition or perceived to be in opposition to Mosley.

In contrast, female affiliates of the BUF were perceived not to be a threat to Mosley’s hegemony, primarily due to the patriarchal political climate of the era, further accentuated by opinions on women’s roles within the movement. However, the British Union of Fascists appealed to women, like Ruth Beckett, because of the attraction of Mosley as a leader. His aura and charm fascinated many British women. And by engaging in both men and women, Mosley not only increased his membership numbers, but also created a unique political group who were actively engaged in implementing his political and racial ideals.

Joe and Ruth Beckett’s fascist association started with an invitation to watch Mosley ‘preach’ the values of the BUF movement. When Ruth was questioned by the Advisory Committee they asked:

Q - Have you ever taken any real interest in politics of any sort?
A – Never before. I do not know anything about it only I went to this meeting.
Q – and then you were attracted by what? Sir Oswald Mosley?
A – That is just it.  

This line of enquiry is speculative and open to many interpretations. On the one hand, it stresses that Mosley was a lure to the BUF for the Becketts. On the other, the line of questioning specifically inquired whether Ruth had been interested in politics before. Consequently, Mosley was an attraction for all of the qualities that were previously discussed. In contrast, although the movement’s strong leader was an attraction of the BUF, for the Becketts, it was also the opportunity to socialise with Britain’s elite. Mosley orchestrated an environment within the movement that promoted ‘Fashionable Fascism’. Bearing in mind that Beckett was a celebrity, his immersion into the BUF was easy. Indeed, he had already enjoyed the celebrated culture both in Southampton and nationally. However, his popularity had dwindled after his

76 HO 144/21839, Ruth Beckett’s appeal to the Regulation 18b Advisory Committee, National Archives, Kew.
professional career and as he grew older. The British Union of Fascists provided an opportunity to socially and politically associate with some of Britain’s elite and to gain the acceptance he craved. Equally important, Beckett approved of the BUF’s political, racial and anti-war rhetoric. His transition into a Mosleyite was thus remarkably smooth. The movement offered the Becketts more than the Conservative party, especially in terms of acceptance. Beckett’s sporting fame ensured his status in the BUF was placed higher than it could have ever been compared to his earlier Conservative party membership. Above all, the British Union of Fascists offered Beckett a strong leader, both in terms of political and strength. It was the iconic BUF leader that enticed Beckett. The allure of a resilient leader, who was socially attainable, was too much of a temptation for Beckett to resist. More pointedly, Beckett was not a leader. In short, his absence of political knowledge, combined with his lack of education, meant that Beckett psychologically required a forceful and dominant leader. Also, there was no fear of being expected to take a leading role, for Mosley was understood to be the irreplaceable leader of his movement, the British candidate for dictator and the personification of the movement both in its public image and in terms of its day-to-day administration and running. For Beckett, Mosley’s party offered a politically active role, one that did not require him to lead but provided an opportunity to socialise with elite, likeminded people.

Membership of the Conservative party offered Beckett the opportunity to advance socially and extend his political understanding, but it had its limits for Beckett. Mosley’s leadership, oratory skills, strong physique and his creation of a fashionable political alternative, led to Beckett’s membership. There were also the ideological lures such as anti-Semitism, as well as its anti-war and pro-Nazi campaign.

The Draw of Anti-Semitism

Beckett’s anti-Semitic and nationalist stance were elements of his identity before he joined the British fascists in 1939, but they had not found

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such a blatant political platform. However, like other components that made the essence of the BUF, Beckett was attracted to the BUF because of its anti-Semitic, xenophobic and anti-immigration attitudes. The BUF’s anti-Semitism was prominent throughout its political lifespan. Equally, toward the dawn of the Second World War, it became heightened. Indeed, by 1939, anti-Semitism was a blatantly prominent feature of its political agenda. The BUF implemented all forms of anti-Semitism to convey its abhorrence of the Jews. More generally, Milton Shain has argued that there are three theories of anti-Semitism: psychoanalytical, socioeconomical and cultural. The British Union of Fascists pushed the psychological anti-Jewish aspect with a displaced reinforcement of the national, or even global, issues of unemployment. Thus, the Jews became a scapegoat. The BUF also deployed the socioeconomical factor in literature to assert that the ‘rich’ Jews were to blame for national financial difficulties. Finally, culturally, Mosleyites affirmed the Jew were to be considered the ‘other’. Thus, the British Union of Fascists’ declaration of all the categories of anti-Semitism identified by Shain appealed to Beckett.

For the most part, the BUF focused on Jews having no national allegiance. It was also argued that the Jews were the cause of the impending war with Germany influenced by ‘alien Yiddish finance’. Beckett’s strand of anti-Semitism came to light during his professional boxing days. As discussed in Chapter Two, he believed the boxing matches and money from bouts was controlled by Jewish racketeers, although there is no evidence to suggest that Beckett was involved with Jews during his professional career. For example, his manager, who was with him throughout most of his professional pugilist days, was not Jewish nor were any of the professional bouts he fought organised by Jews. It is more than possible that at the beginning of his career in the East End of London, he met Jewish boxing managers. Other professional boxers were also attracted to the British Union of Fascists. Indeed, British light-heavyweight boxing champion Tommy

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78 In Shain’s *Antisemitism* (London: Bowerdean Publishing Company Ltd, 1998) - in Chapter One about Concepts and Theories he outlines his ‘theories of Anti-Semitism’. It is split into three subheadings: psychoanalytical/psychological, socio-economic/political and cultural/historic. The theories are discussed between pages 7 through to 15 in *Antisemitism* which was published in association with the Kaplan Centre for Jewish Studies and Research at the University of Cape Town.

Moran was drawn to the BUF and in the movements last days held a significant position. Remarkably a Jewish welterweight Ted ‘Kid’ Lewis was a member of the British Union of Fascist in the early 1930s, but left or was removed once the fascists became more openly anti-Semitic. What is significant, is that as with his patriotic and nationalistic feelings, Beckett was vocal in his dislike for Jews.

It has been suggested that Beckett’s ‘dislike’ of Jews stemmed from his professional pugilistic days. In this respect, the propaganda of the BUF fuelled his anti-Semitism. Moreover, the movement had an emphasis on what it argued was the Jews’ negative involvement in sport and naturally this appealed to Beckett. David Dee has highlighted the BUF’s ‘notion of a sporting “Hidden Hand”’ in Britain part of its anti-Semitic conspiracy belief. As an ex-British heavyweight champion, Beckett obviously had an association with national sports. Beckett in particularly enjoyed the participation as an audience celebrity member at the horse racing arenas around the south coast. Beckett was also involved in local boxing charity events. Consequently, his interest and passion were still stimulated by the sporting world. The movement’s newspapers confirmed Beckett’s belief in Jewish criminal activity in the boxing world. On 10 July 1937, for example, Action suggested that there was a ‘Jewish Boxing Racket’. The piece suggested that ‘first class professional boxing involves large sums of money and is naturally controlled entirely by Jews’. The article asserted the socioeconomic basis of anti-Semitism and confirmed Beckett’s belief in Jewish racketeering in the world of boxing. Dee notes that the British Union of Fascists believed that ‘professional boxing was controlled by a Jewish “racket” and therefore just another aspect of the international ‘Hidden Hand’ then supposedly in existence’. With suggestions of ‘where there is money there are also Jews’ accentuated the BUF’s insistence of Jewish financial corruption. Here as elsewhere the BUF tried to blame the Jews themselves

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81 Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’.
84 Dee, Sport and British Jewry, p. 167.
for anti-Semitism. The article stated that Jews had the audacity to perceivably ‘turn this fine sport (boxing), a product of Britain, into a Yiddish medium for revenge against Germany’.85 Dee further noted that this British Union of Fascists’ assertion was specifically related to the professional boxing world.86 It mixed the fascist notion that Jews were driven by money and control of all lucrative businesses, including professional sports. For example, Action on 4 September 1937 an article entitled ‘Jew Promoters In Boxing’ suggested that when a ‘Jewish promoter enters the sport it ceases to be sport, but a world of business’, coupled with the insinuation that the Jews could never miss an opportunity otherwise ‘money slipped through their fingers’. Such accusations stated that the boxing was in ‘the hands of ‘Alien tricksters’.87 As has been discussed in Chapter Two there was a commercialisation of British professional boxing during the 1920s and 30s and marketable boxing bouts were organised by the British elites and other hierarchies but not by large numbers of Jews. It has also been asserted that boxing was a consumer product, manufactured and sold in the British market for a profit. Therefore, the assertion that ‘Jews’ drove British professional boxing market was an utter distortion fed by the BUF’s prejudices.

It was not just the professional boxing industry that the BUF’s anti-Semitism and paranoia of the Jewish world conspiracy focused on. There were many other sporting examples scattered throughout the British Union of Fascists’ literature. For instance, on 11 December 1937 Blackshirt declared that ‘Jews had discovered another profitable racket!’, explaining that rabbit skins were in great demand and that ‘smelling this opportunity of making money, Jews had been turning their attentions to the countryside’.88 The Mosleyites’ anti-Semitism did not stop at the stereotypical financial jibes. Indeed, their articles also criticised the Jews ‘unsportsmanlike’ and suggested that the ban on Jewish golfers on German courses was due to their behaviour of ‘where Jews were in front of them (non-Jewish) hold them

86 Dee, Sport and British Jewry, p. 166.
up and will not let them through; where Jews behind them drive into them without apology; and where Jews on adjoining fairways pull and slice into them without apology’. This supposed sporting dishonesty was an addition theme for critical analyses of Jewish involvement in other British sports. Weekly articles related to Jews in sport and their apparent lack of respect. Items covered several sports ranging from hunting, golf, horse racing and boxing to ensure that readers were under no illusion to the BUF’s anti-Semitic world view. In particular, a horseracing article was entitled ‘Sport of Kings’. Which announced that:

Horseracing is not exclusive to one section of the people. It is enjoyed by office boy to executive, by peer and pauper alike. It is a sport that draws its financial support as much from the shillings of the people as from the sovereigns of the wealthy.

The BUF warned that the whole nation was thus to be concerned with Jewish infiltration of the ‘King’s Sport’. By placing emphasis on the sovereign’s sporting past-time, it furthered their concern that horseracing should not be influenced by the ‘alien race’. The tone and language of the article unmistakeably labels the sport as British. In reality, the real racketeers of the horseracing circle were not Jewish. In fact, some of them were descendants of Italian immigrants. The Sabini gang ruled the southern race venues throughout the 1920s and 30s. There were potential links to other racketeering gangs, but it was the Sabini brothers who tried to rule the tracks. Ironically, Harry Sabini was interned under Regulation 18b in June 1940. As an ‘Italian’ he was perceived as a threat with hostile and violent intentions to Britain. However, whether he was involved in Italian fascism cannot be categorically answered as his Home Office record appears to have been sanitised. An additional coincidence is Harry Sabini’s connection to Beckett. Beckett was a keen horseracing fan and often pulled his youngest son John out of school on race days. John recounted that on one trip to

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90 Spread throughout both Action and The Blackshirt between 1936 to outbreak of the Second World War, both papers published articles that asserted anti-Semitic statements and themes relating to a variety of sports and sporting competitions in Britain.
Ascot, Beckett met Sabini in the restaurant and he introduced his son to him.
Beckett and Sabini chatted over a drink and then continued with their day.93
Throughout Beckett’s boxing career and his retirement, he frequented the
horse racing tracks as often as he could, and it is of no surprise that he knew
Sabini. Beckett never expressed any belief in Jewish involvement of the race
tracks - his focus remained on the supposed boxing racket. Sport, with its
anti-Semitic narrative, heavily featured in BUF newspapers until the
movement’s demise and it came to play a significant role in instilling the idea
that Jewish influence was exerting a negative impact on British society.94
The undertones of fair play, racketeering and alien infiltration were presented
as themes to highlight the BUF’s hostility to the Jews. Its anti-Semitism was
also reflected in the BUF’s coverage of other occupations.

The livelihoods of the Jews in Britain became a primary focal point for
the British Union of Fascists’ political campaign both, in relation to the
allocation of jobs, but also how Jewish citizens ‘performed’ in the workplace.
As an example, during the 1930s domestic service provided opportune
propaganda material. Most Jews fleeing Nazi Germany required a work
permit to come to Britain. Kushner asserted ‘the major attraction of placing
refugee women in domestic service for the British government and the
refugee organisation was that it was one of the few occupations with a
shortage of labour, minimising the risk of claims that ‘aliens’ were stealing
‘British jobs’.95 Nevertheless, the BUF challenged the Jewish refugees’
ability in their service vocation. For example, an article on 8 July 1939 titled
‘Refugee Domestic Servants’ highlighted the British Union of Fascists’
distaste for Jewish servants. The piece highlighted the vehement dislike of
Jewish refugees with the suggestion that ‘every housewife in Britain should
be warned against Jewish maids that simply get into this country as
domestics as an excuse and once they are in are prepared to do nothing’.96
The articles encouraged audience members, such as Beckett, and
normalised anti-Semitism.

93 Oral testimony from Joe Beckett’s youngest son John Beckett.
94 Dee, Sport and British Jewry, p. 164.
96 Action, 8 July 1939, p. 19, British Online Archives, https://microform.digital/boa/documents/724/july-to-december-
1939 [accessed 6 March 2017].
Beckett insisted that his British Union of Fascist membership had no political strain. Yet, his argument lacks all credibility when discussing anti-Semitism. For instance, for Beckett, the Jewish question was linked intimately with the anti-war campaign of the BUF. Indeed, its propaganda related to the Jewish refugee crisis, combined with the movement’s anti-war rhetoric, nurtured Beckett’s world view (especially on blaming Jews for high profile British social problems, such as unemployment). It was clear that the immediate concern for members like Beckett was in regard to the protection of British jobs for the ‘right’ kind of citizen and curbing the influx of Jewish immigration, encouraging Mosleyites to judge that British and refugee Jews not only took the jobs from the rightful people, but once in an occupation, did not perform to the ‘correct’ standard of British morality.

It is worth exploring the BUF’s campaign against Jewish refugees further. Indeed, the ‘refujew’ debate received high publicity in the BUF newspapers. Nigel Copsey confirmed that ‘during the first six months of 1939, the BUF sought to whip up hostility towards the ‘refujew’ and ‘repeatedly drawing accusations of financial racketeering’.97 Specifically, relating headlines to the perceived influx of Jewish refugees, the BUF argued that any number of Jewish immigrants was unwelcome. The timing of the high profile ‘refujew’ propaganda is fitting for Beckett’s official link to the British Union. In fact, Beckett asserted his opinion as early as 13 May 1939 in Action under the title ‘Mongrelisation of the British People’ in what was a rare articulation of his fascist views in print. He remarked:

As I go along and meet people daily, I bring up the Jewish question. I begin to discuss them to my Christian friends and my friends say shush, they will hear you. Now can you tell me what we are afraid of? I am not afraid of any Jew and I don’t care how much they hear me.98

Beckett's anti-Semitism and his membership to the BUF was clearly articulated here. Likewise, and considering that Beckett officially joined the British Fascists in May 1939, the party wasted no time in advertising that the

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ex-British Heavyweight Champion was a member of their organisation. And Beckett was not ashamed of his anti-Semitism. Indeed, he needed little encouragement to express his opinion. His racism was part of his personality and now became a political identity. Therefore, the BUF’s focus on anti-Semitism in the late 1930s stimulated Beckett’s spirit and invigorated his belief that ‘Britain was for the British’. With a high focus on refugee Jews and an attack on the established Jewish community regarding the ‘racketeering’ of finances, the BUF maintained that the impending war was linked to Jews. To this end, in Action on 8 April 1939 an article entitled ‘Drive for Peace’ argued that the ‘suicide pact’ of war did not mean that ‘we do not believe that the British people have any wish to fight the German people for Jews, Poles or anyone else’. Beckett fully subscribed to this analysis.

Anti-war Sentiment

The BUF’s anti-war campaign was emotionally loaded, both in terms of specifically expressing the British fascist anti-war reasoning to women, but also in propaganda aimed at men. Kevin Passmore has suggested that the ‘charismatic charge, met with the demand for the belief on the part of the mass [sic] in circumstances of collective trauma, thus creating an emotional bond between charismatic leaders and the led’. This is true in terms of the propaganda that was aimed at both men and women. By drawing on the horrors of the Great War and combining it with the emotional pull of human loss, the BUF created propaganda that could relate to both genders. In July 1939, the British Union of Fascists held a ‘Peace Campaign’ rally held in Earls Court, London. As noted, Joe and Ruth Beckett attended the assembly in support of the BUF’s crusade. Both of the Becketts admitted to their presence at the peace demonstration during their Advisory Committee interviews. Their aim, both stated, was to meet Mosley for the first time and to show their support for the anti-war movement. The anti-war assertions

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101 HO 144/2180, Joe Beckett’s appeal to the Regulation 18b Advisory Committee, National Archives, Kew.
from the Becketts were used to defend their reasoning for becoming Mosleyites. They suggested that it was the anti-war characteristic of the movement that made the BUF an attractive political alternative. Thus, this section of the chapter will evaluate how the British Union of Fascists movement used the anti-war rhetoric to propagate their policies and political agenda. As Ruth Beckett asserted that this was the ultimate reason behind her membership, the evaluation will also focus on the women’s involvement with this particular cause. Furthermore, there will be a brief discussion on the alternative to the anti-war movement, the Peace Pledge Union (PPU), and why the Becketts did not opt for this form of pacifism. More generally, the anti-war movement of the BUF during the late 1930s, extending into the outbreak of the war, became a prevalent motivation for subscribing to the movement, not just for the Becketts, but for many other British citizens as there was a minor revival of the movement.

The BUF’s anti-war propaganda ensured that both male and female members argued that war with Germany was not desirable, especially as it was argued that war was instigated by the Jews. This was the backbone of the BUF’s argument. Yet, as war approached, another tactic was deployed to the same end. To initiate the women members into action, high-profile elite women were involved in writing articles and organising public demonstrations. Indeed, Olive Hawks, assistant to the Director of Research George Sutton, wrote articles for both Action and The Blackshirt. She asserted ‘Women! You can stop this war! Women, as the givers of life, must hate the insensate destruction of warfare. You must prepare to devote tireless energy to the prevention of war in the future’. With the focus on the maternal role of women (with a patriarchal tone), the BUF emotionally commanded their anti-war message. The aim was to unite their female members to campaign. As Pamela Russell wrote on 6 May 1939 in Action:

It is our children who will be bombed, our homes that will be destroyed, our husbands and fathers and sons they will take from us. They will be led like sheep to the slaughter …We must

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102 HO 144/21839, Ruth Beckett’s appeal to the Regulation 18b Advisory Committee, National Archives, Kew.
ask ourselves, do we want this thing to happen? Because of some unknown country, must we, the men and women of England endure this frightful holocaust? …Shall we be proud and happy …when the living, breathing person who bore your name is no more? 104

The language in this extract is revealing. Not only does it invoke images of men being deployed for pointless sacrifice, it subjectively connects the message by using family loyalty. The tone of the final sentence was sensitive and designed to provoke emotion. Additionally, the wording was designed to unite men and women. The suggestion, therefore, that men and women should not tolerate the dreadful 'holocaust', referencing the loss of men during the Great War. Anne Brock-Griggs, Chief Women Organiser for the BUF (Southern), as well as author of *Women in Fascism* which was sold on behalf of the British Union, also played her part. On 1 October 1938 in *Action* Brock-Griggs called for women to demand peace as is illustrated in Figure II.

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The wording is again inflammatory. Indeed, it accused Whitehall of being warmongers, and using the anti-Semitic message that the war was backed by ‘Jewish’ money. It was not accidental that the word ‘democracy’ was used three times within two sentences, all dismissively. It urged women to fight for their children, their homes and husbands. The peace crusade within the British Union of Fascists was in full swing. The women organised their own ‘mass' meeting to demonstrate their desire for peace in the name of the BUF.

On 13 April 1939, the Women’s Peace Meeting assembled in London. Martin Durham has confirmed that the ‘mass meeting in London addressed by Mosley and three prominent women members’ was to declare that women were ‘the new generations' to win peace'.

Although women were highly involved in the July Earls Court peace campaign, to hold a separate female led rally was significant. It demonstrated that women were united and

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competent, in the name of fascism, to denounce the British war effort in public. This continued after the conflict had started. Aristocrat Anne Brock-Griggs stated on 23 October 1939 that ‘we do not need to send our sons to fight them (the Germans)’.106 Rallies, led by female Mosleyites, significantly encouraged women such as Ruth to participate and relate to BUF ideology. Indeed, Ruth Beckett was adamant, like her husband, that the reasoning for her British Union of Fascist membership was she was convinced that war with Germany was going to be disastrous. Even though the Advisory Committee’s ‘Statement of Case’ and the ‘Petition’ against internment asserted that Ruth was ‘known to the police’ and that ‘it is known that the Beckett house was used for tea meetings’, Ruth’s insisted that the meetings were aimed toward the soldiers stationed by the house to support them before they left for the war. Somewhat disingenuously, she justified the Fascist meetings held in her house was to support the men going to fight. Ruth also admitted freely to attending the Peace Rally in July 1939. She stated that ‘before the war started I went to the Earls Court Exhibition for the days outing and to hear Mosley speak. I was interested’. This is further evidence that Mosley’s anti-war protests appealed to both genders in the British Union of Fascists.107

The anti-war rhetoric was established within the BUF before 1939. Certainly, the campaign culminated in July 1939 with the ‘Peace Rally’, but throughout 1938 Action and The Blackshirt printed articles aimed toward the male members of the British Union. For example, in the August 1938 edition of The Blackshirt an article titled ‘Youth in Flames – What did you do for us in the Great War Daddies?’, the BUF adapted the tone and language of the articles created for men and concentrated on the experience of war. To demonstrate the atrocities of war, personal experiences were shared. An anonymous ex-soldier reported that ‘from the school they sent me to, the boys went out, and half of them were dead six months after they had left’.108

There are links between the articles separately written specifically for the

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107 HO 144/21839, Ruth Beckett’s appeal to the Regulation 18b Advisory Committee, National Archives, Kew.
male and female audience; the female tone is one of loss and of kin, in particular, sons. In contrast, that for the male they discussed the actual experience of warfare and their fascism was built on war experience - an experience shared together including fellow soldiers dying in action.¹⁰⁹ Both had the same agenda: to illicit fear as the offensive antidote to war. Conversely, there is a suggestion that the BUF anti-war campaign and the timing of that message helped to stop the decline of the party before the Second World War.¹¹⁰ It was aimed to attract new members who wanted to avoid conflict with Germany, those such as the Becketts who were passionate about evading a battle with the Nazis. It does not explain, however, why they chose the British Union of Fascists instead of a pacifist movement, most prominently the Peace Pledge Union.

The PPU was founded in 1936 by the Anglican Reverend Dick Sheppard and soon made its presence known with anti-war books and plays, parades, petitions, boycotts, demonstrations, pamphleteering and speech-making, all employed to awaken people to the evils of war.¹¹¹ On the surface, it would seem that the pacifist’s anti-war movement had a similar missionary style to that of the British Union of Fascists. The PPU was anti-war for religious and moral purposes and so perceivably was the BUF. However, the Peace Pledge Union had only a limited anti-Semitic rhetoric or desire for political advancement. Martin Ceadel emphasised that the PPU was primarily a moral phenomenon that sprung from the human conscience.¹¹² The importance of the ‘non-political’ stance of the PPU is significant when searching for reasons why the Becketts were not attracted to pacifism. The couple’s assertion that they had no political knowledge or understanding is lost when evaluating their anti-war attitude. If they strongly believed that war with Germany was wrong, because of the loss of lives, then why did they not join the PPU? Simply put, the pacifist could not offer the Becketts the anti-Semitic strain, nationalism and anti-democratic impulse that attracted them to

the British Union of Fascists. Furthermore, the Peace Pledge Union could not provide the elite and aristocratic connections for their social climbing. Although the PPU boasted of 130,000 members in 1939, compared to the 22,500 of the BUF, the pacifists obviously did not have the ‘right’ type of members for the Becketts. Neither could the pacifists offer a leader as strong as Mosley. Therefore, contrary to the Becketts’ Advisory Committee statements, the anti-war argument was not the only attraction of the British Union of Fascists to them.

Throughout this section, it has been demonstrated how deeply involved both Joe and Ruth Beckett were in the British Union of Fascists movement. This included everyday fascist participation, both in the private sphere and paraded publicly in Southampton and the surrounding area. They attempted to argue that their memberships were primarily due to their patriotic motives and anti-war attitudes. However, closer examination has exposed that these were not the prime motivations. In sum, there can be no doubt that both Joe and Ruth Beckett were fully immersed British Union of Fascists members. To that end, it could be assumed that the Becketts were not the naïve and easily led BUF sheep that they claimed to be. Nor were they unaware of the political and anti-Semitic ambition of the movement. It was thus for the public and private Mosleyite activities and Joe Beckett’s prominence, combined with the list of complaints to Southampton’s Police department, that they were subsequently detained under the government’s Emergency Powers.

The Consequences of Regulation 18b

On 3 September 1939, Britain declared war on Germany. Just over twenty years since the end of the Great War, the Home Office, along with the British security services, drafted an emergency Act of Parliament to take measures against people who were considered a danger to success of the war effort. Similar to security procedures in the First World War, the Home Office were keen to classify the individuals who were considered a threat to

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the state. In 1914, drastic legislation was implemented, and 20,000 German civilians were expelled and approximately 32,000 interned in Britain. The 1939 Act had the same objective but would also incorporate British people considered to be engaged in political activism measured as a danger to security. Significantly, selected British Union of Fascists’ members were classified as a threat to national security. Jennifer Grant has assessed that there were three courses of action considered jointly by MI5 and the Home Office. The first was to detain only the leaders of the BUF and the staff of its National Headquarters; the second, to detain the leaders, National Headquarters staff and the chief district officials and finally the third, to arrest and detain all known members of the movement. In May 1940, the second option was selected and the Becketts, along with other members were detained. It is debatable whether Beckett should have been considered a district leader. No evidence uncovered suggests that he was a salaried member and neither is there to state that he was considered as Southampton’s district leader. Indeed, that position was held by Reginald Jarman. However, the records to confirm that Jarman, along with other Southampton’s leading members, met at the Beckett’s home.

114 Kushner & Knox, Refugees in an Age of Genocide, p. 45.
116 The Defence Regulation 18B British Union Detainees List, compiled by the Friends of Oswald Mosley (F.O.M), November 1988, p. 2.
Figure III – This photograph was published in The Defence Regulation 18B British Union Detainees List, compiled by the Friends of Oswald Mosley (F.O.M), November 1988. There are several men who were from the Southampton district – highlighted in bold - Peter Atkinson – Official BUF photography, JJ Davies, Frank Grove BUF treasurer. Reginald Jarman (bottom 2nd from the right), Southampton’s District Leader, Richard Knop, had a tobacco shop in Oxford Street, Charles Cuthbert Smith (top 4th in from the left), Prison warden for Young offenders, Roy Smith, Alexander Thomas, 'Old' Fred Thomas who sold the Action Magazine on the streets of Southampton.

To that end, it was only matter of time until the British Security Services detained the Becketts for their allegiance to the BUF. Indeed, his sports celebrity status, along with the evidence of his BUF activism, were the factors leading to his arrest. The internment of so many Mosleyites, including the Becketts, is significant in the discussion of identity, and based on whether the BUF members’ political character changed during their internment. Clearly confinement for the BUF impacted deeply on those affiliated. Whilst some did not change their political outlook, many BUF members adapted their beliefs. Imprisonment affected Mosleyites differently; some became ever more resolute whilst others’ political faith crumbled. Macklin emphasised that the sense of martyrdom was a key component in the liturgical rite of the British Union of Fascists’ sacred history and many internees ‘subconsciously revelled’ in the privation and misery they
endured.\textsuperscript{117} In contrast, Grant argues others who had easily been persuaded by the movement’s apparent patriotism no longer wanted anything to do with it once it was banned.\textsuperscript{118} The discussion will explore these two models in relation to the Becketts. They led to two contradicting strategies: one toward the British Union of Fascists and the other to deny any involvement with the it. As soon as detention took place, it became clearer which path would be followed.

The Home Office’s strategy to stop the British Union of Fascists’ political campaign was immediately effective. After the detention of so many members in May 1940, a skeleton crew of associates rallied to keep the sinking ship afloat. Followers such as Thomas Moran, ex-light-heavyweight boxing champion, stepped up as temporary leader and strained to keep operations at Black House moving forward. Unsurprisingly, two weeks after the initial arrests, the final \textit{Action} was published on 6 June 1940, alongside the last monthly edition of \textit{The Blackshirt}. The discontinuation of the British Union’s propagandistic newspapers proved not to be the only problem the BUF members faced. Macklin asserted that ‘those who were not interned also had to contend with the suspicions of their comrades, who frequently regarded their non-imprisonment as proof of collusion with the Security Service’.\textsuperscript{119} The Home Office had thus succeeded in removing the British Union of Fascists from the public domain. To some BUF affiliates, the implementation of Regulation 18b was a shock. To others, it was of no surprise. Nevertheless, incarceration in Brixton and Walton prison for the male followers and imprisonment in Holloway for the female members unsettled the whole movement.\textsuperscript{120} Joe was taken to Walton Prison in Liverpool and Ruth to Holloway along with her four week old son, John. The Becketts’ family had been completely dispersed.\textsuperscript{121}

With husband and wife separated and taken into custody, their other four children were left at home to fend for themselves. Joe’s sister, Amy, collected the children from Southampton four days after their parents’

\textsuperscript{117} Macklin, ‘“Hail Mosley and F’ Em All”, p. 11.
\textsuperscript{118} Grant, ‘The Role of MIS’, p. 514.
\textsuperscript{119} Macklin, ‘“Hail Mosley and F’ Em All”, p. 4.
\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{121} Fosberry, ‘Memoirs on Beckett’s Boxing Career’.
detention and the Beckett children travelled until December 1940 with the Showpeople and their fair. Their identities as middle class privately educated children was shattered. They left their large Southampton house with servants and were ushered off to tour England in a caravan returning back to Beckett’s Traveller origins and his earlier marginal status. For Joe and Ruth their status as parents and respectable British citizens was undermined. Even Joe’s popularity as a great sporting celebrity was questioned, all because of their support of the British Union of Fascists and Joe Beckett in particular. This section of the chapter will analyse the impact of internment on the British Union of Fascists. The discussion will focus on the initial detention and then the transfer of Mosleyites to the detention camps. Specifically, attention will be given to the internment site of Ascot in Berkshire, primarily because that is where Beckett was placed after his initial internment in Walton. It will analyse how the different BUF members responded to their incarceration – did it unite or divide Mosleyites? Did imprisonment challenge the members, as it did the Becketts, and make them see the errors of their ways (or at least superficially so to gain their release)? Undeniably, the custody of the British Union of Fascists demonstrated that Regulation 18b tore the movement apart. In short, Mosleyites became either genuine stoic supporters or those ready to expose and deny the British Union of Fascists for the sake of their freedom.

Initially the incarcerated members experienced close to total isolation. Indeed, prisoners were held in solitary confinement for the first three weeks, for twenty three hours per day. Their identity as a collective unit had been temporary disbanded and prisoners were locked in their individual cells. Richard Reynell Bellamy, the last director of propaganda for the BUF recalled:

> When in the morning, after our arrival we were let out of our cells. The screws opened the doors, then quickly stepped back, in much the same way as animal keepers might with a pack of dangerous beasts.123

123 Reynell Bellamy, *We Marched with Mosley*, p. 247.
Significantly, the prison environment resulted in the alteration of how the detainees perceived their identities, because it had transformed them from patriotic heroes to ‘beasts’. Bellamy wanted to represent his and other comrades as non-confrontational and loyal men; polite and not aggressive. In fact, he confirmed that:

When the door of the cell that contained the former Heavyweight boxing champion of Great Britain was opened, three apprehensive warders stood in readiness to deal with almost every eventuality. Instead of some berserk creature rushing out, one of the kindest and most thoroughly decent fellows to have represented his country strolled out.\footnote{Reynell Bellamy, \textit{We Marched with Mosley}, p. 247.}

The impact was dependent on how deep and strong Mosleyite identity ran, as well as an individual’s mental state. For example, a man known as Mr. R.A.H in a (pro-Mosleyite) special investigation report on 18B written in December 1943 provocatively titled ‘\textit{It Might Have Happened To You}’ recalled:

I was in solitary confinement for 23 hours out of 24. This affected my nerves but the medical officer merely told me that I should have to put up with it.\footnote{Wynn, \textit{It Might Have Happened To You}, p. 6.}

Beckett struggled too with being locked in a cell for hours on end, especially considering his Traveller heritage which whilst changed with the purchasing of a house in Southampton, was still reflected in his caravanning holidays. He did not conform to the identity of the martyr. To illustrate, it was recalled that:

some men went to pieces very quickly in prison. Joe Beckett, former British Heavyweight boxing champion, had a cell close to John [Beckett], and night after night John and the others could hear him crying and weeping to be let out.\footnote{Francis Beckett, \textit{Fascist in the Family} (Oxon & New York: Routledge, 2017), p. 262.}

It is evident from Beckett’s Advisory Committee records that he did not believe that he deserved to be in prison. He also did not potentially demonstrate any support or loyalty to the BUF after he was imprisoned.
Equally, if consideration were given to his childhood travelling with the show and fair, it is of no surprise that Beckett struggled to be contained in a cell for most of the day. More importantly, he did not now consider himself a comrade of, neither did her want to assign himself to, the BUF. His period in Brixton shocked him to the core. However, there were distinct differences between the early internment days in the prison, to life in the detention camps. This altered identities once more. The isolation of cell life to the routine of camp life provided an opportunity for the collective BUF to reunite idealistically and venerate Mosley as their leader.

In the immediate days of detention, British Union of Fascist members experienced life as prisoners. The experience completely limited their freedom, separated them from loved ones and disconnected associates from the each other and the outside world. Nonetheless, holding BUF supporters in prisons was only a short term solution. The decision to move the Regulation 18b inmates housed in prisons, to larger detention centres, brought the Home Office and the Security Services time to decide which detainees were an actual threat to national security. The Regulation 18b Advisory Committee had direct contact with the Home Secretary and heard petitions for release from the detained. The interned were denied access to all normal channels of the judicial system. Therefore, the Advisory Committee was the only method to appeal their detention. By the end of May 1940 there were 131 detainees, by the end of June 953 and by the end of July 1,378. The increase in internees was not all linked to the BUF. Indeed, the Home Office had originally five classes of detainees, but later narrowed it down to two: people with hostile association, plus where appropriate, hostile origins and people who had committed recent acts that were considered prejudicial. Therefore, the British Union of Fascists members were not the only people to be interned and the overwhelming numbers of prisoners meant long delays for hearings. To that end, Regulation 18b internees were moved from their prison cells to two different camps, Ascot and York. Beckett was transferred to the Ascot detention

127 Wynn, It Might Have Happened To You, p. 12.
128 Simpson, In the Highest Degree Odious, p. 135.
129 Ibid, p. 130.
centre. Ironically for Beckett, the Ascot detainees were housed in the winter quarters of the Bertram Mills Circus.\(^{130}\) The ironic nature of his detention location and the connection to his Showman culture is not lost, and although he did not travel with the Bertram Mills company, it is fitting that Beckett was placed where other showpeople lived when they were not travelling. In 1943, an account conducted by John Wynn who was interned for his connections to the BUF described in detail Ascot's camp. This was published in *It Might Have Happened to You*:

> the camp lay some 1 ¾ miles south of Ascot … the soil in that district is of light surface loam and sand, and the loam quickly wore away, so that dust and sand pervaded … two parallel barbed-wire [sic] entanglements surround the camp, sentries patrolling between them night and day. On three sides turrets had been erected between the wiring and from these Bren guns pointed towards the camp.\(^{131}\)

Conditions were cramped with huts holding anywhere between thirty four to ninety seven bunks. Internees could ‘take plenty of open air exercise’ which provided opportunities for BUF detainees to socialise. Other people perceived to have potential to act against Britain were held alongside the BUF supporters. Therefore, fascist detainees lived alongside Anglo-Italians, Anglo-Germans, and the Irish Republican Army (IRA).\(^{132}\) Like prison life, the camp had a strict routine. Internees, however, were given more freedom than that in prison. This in turn, provided opportunities for BUF members to reenergise their fascism and support for Mosley. Consequently, camp life environment inspired British Union members to reunite for their collective political cause. Yet, as Macklin has asserted, ‘wholesale internment created an ideological melting-pot, whereby fascist dissenters were interned alongside loyal Mosleyites’.\(^{133}\) This atmosphere, Macklin argued, caused the diminution of Mosley’s political currency. Although it reduced the number of

\(^{130}\) Macklin, ‘‘Hail Mosley and F’ Em All’’, p. 4.
\(^{131}\) Wynn, *In the Highest Degree Odious*, p. 19 – Wynn was interned from 1940 – 1943 for being an active member of the British Union of Fascists. The main reason for collating and compiling *It Might Have Happened To You* was primarily because he believed that Regulation 18b took away liberty and rights of the internees. For example, liberty for a trial. He also helped write and publish *Magna Carta in the Dustbin* in 1943 that argued 18b took away the ‘bill of rights’.
\(^{132}\) Simpson, *In the Highest Degree Odious*, p. 131.
\(^{133}\) Macklin, ‘‘Hail Mosley and F’ Em All’’, p. 5.
people who rallied and proclaimed Mosley’s form of fascism, it also created an environment that encouraged extreme loyalties to both the party and Mosley. The conflicting tendencies of the dissenters, which included Beckett, further developed the BUF internees’ identities. Some devotees revitalised their fascist passion, whilst others asserted their loyalty to Britain by discarding their connection to the British Union of Fascists. On the surface, Beckett evidenced the latter tendency.

There is also one other significant factor in the camp which characterised the BUF members as martyrs. Indeed, MI5’s building close to Ascot detention camp, became synonymous with the BUF. On 10 July 1940, Latchmere House on Ham Common became Camp 020, home to MI5’s interrogation centre. Macklin has emphasised that ‘nowhere was this sense of martyrdom more apparent than in those fascists detained in camp 020’, especially as in the first few weeks of its opening, it was primarily concerned with the interrogation of BUF members. The duration of questioning for the Mosley supporters varied and afterwards they would be returned to their former detention centres. Access to government sources related to the MI5 investigations of specific BUF members and other prisoners held under Regulation 18b are restricted (for example those records relating to Latchmere House interrogation centre). However, there is limited documentation of Camp 020. It includes testimonies of the internees, public histories of the British Secret Services (including official history of Camp 020), which all provide some level of proof about the interrogation of Mosleyites. The limited access to the MI5 Mosleyite records has restricted the understanding of how the members reacted to the interrogations. With this in mind, the discussion remains to a degree speculative and provides little clear detail. Yet how the stoic Mosleyites reacted to the knowledge of Camp 020 and to their leader’s time at Latchmere can still be tentatively explored. With restrictions relaxed inside the camps, compared to that in the

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prisons, such inmates were able to express their loyalty to the British Union of Fascists.

The ability to socialise within the camp completed the BUF detainees’ unity. Significantly, BUF members relied on each other to bolster the image of the martyr. Indeed, their ‘torture’ not only needed the comradery of other internees, but together, they represented the BUF sacrifice. The detainees’ awareness of their pre-captivity collective identity came into fruition. As examined previously, large rallies and public fascist displays, along with steady canvassing of propaganda, ensured that the BUF was highly visible in British society. Such public performance continued within the perimeter of the camp walls. They could now meet and practise their politics almost religiously. For example, Macklin noted that an empty chair was symbolically placed, both as a sign of deference to their missing leader and to stress their conscious bond of martyrdom.\textsuperscript{136} Furthermore, the production of \textit{Unity}, the camp’s fascist newspaper, continued the performance and propagandistic pattern associated with British Union of Fascist’s identity. The title alone offered an insight into the mentality of inmates. Cullen noted that the Blackshirts’ style of politics consisted of mass meetings, flags, songs, coloured shirts and the speeches of their leaders and meetings started with magnificence.\textsuperscript{137} However, their identities were tested when MI5 singled out members for interrogation at Latchmere House. The bravado of self-sacrifice for the fascists’ collective greater good only worked for the minority of staunch captive BUF members. For the majority, Camp 020 successfully deterred individuals from continuing and articulating fascist ideology.

On 10 July 1940, MI5’s Latchmere House became one of the most important sources of information because of the ‘successful’ interrogation of people considered enemy spies and threats to national security.\textsuperscript{138} As noted, the first weeks were dedicated to the cross examination of British Union of Fascist internees. Information was classified and only MI5 was privy to the results. Once the BUF members were discharged from Latchmere, the Advisory committee was permitted to meet and discuss each individual case.

\textsuperscript{136} Curry, \textit{The Security Service}, p. 9.
\textsuperscript{137} Cullen, ‘Leaders and Martyrs’, p. 425.
\textsuperscript{138} Curry, \textit{The Security Service}, p. 228.
If MI5 decided individuals still posed a threat, they made sure that individual was not freed. Conversely, it was the collectiveness of the British Union of Fascists’ identity that provided MI5 with difficulties and interrogation was not very successful. Individuals that did not inform on others or the movement were not released and were later transferred to the Isle of Man detention camp for two years and some, once freed, were placed under house arrest. The power of the collective frustrated the security services and thus their identities as martyrs for the movement’s cause remained throughout their captivity. Alternatively, others had become reticent about associating themselves with the party or former colleagues, because it endangered their newfound liberties. The same displacement was felt by other interned BUF detainees who did not feel the comradery or the strength from the affiliation of other BUF internees. These members were considered dissenters and were not only isolated from the outside world, but also by the BUF’s devotees. Indeed, the British Union of Fascists amplified values and fascist virtues, especially the ideals of discipline and loyalty. In short, to the interned BUF members, any associate who lacked the specified qualities was considered a traitor.

It has been demonstrated throughout Beckett’s Advisory committee statement and interview, that he distanced himself from Mosley and his political and anti-Semitic campaign. Beckett did not deny his membership, only that he was unaware of its significance. It was apparent that once Beckett was interned, he was quick to distance himself publicly from the British Union of Fascists. However, as it has been demonstrated, Beckett was more than just a sleeping member of the BUF. Consequently, an evaluation on whether his membership in the movement can be pointed toward his naïveté or if he was able to use his celebrity and lack of education to an advantage, needs to be evaluated further. Undeniably, Beckett’s internment affected his state of mind, furthermore, it also affected his relationship with the BUF. Clearly for Beckett, his lack of freedom was too high a price to pay. With this in mind, Beckett’s Home Office record will be

140 Macklin, “Hail Mosley and F’ Em All”, p. 4.
141 Cullen, ‘Leaders and Martyrs’, p. 121.
examined in detail to understand how he managed to convince the Advisory Committee and MI5 to release him after ‘only’ seven months.

On 28 November 1940, the Advisory Committee released the order for the Becketts’ discharge, though Joe and Ruth Beckett did not return home until the second week in December. Their liberation from the internment camp and Holloway prison came quicker than for most other detained comrades. For example, Reginald Jarman the Southampton BUF unit leader and Frank Grove its treasurer, were transported and remained on the Isle of Man camp until 1942. As stated in Beckett’s Home Office file, he was in regular contact with Jarman and Grove and both of these Mosleyites mentioned Beckett in their Advisory Committee interviews. Therefore, Beckett’s release did not reflect his level of involvement in the BUF. It has been apparent that throughout his statements to the Home Office, interviews by the Advisory Committee, of letters begging for his release and his insistence of his lack of understanding of the British Union of Fascists’ cause and of their intent, that Beckett considered himself innocent. What cannot be categorically stated and for this reason, can only speculatively be asserted, is that Beckett’s ‘naiveté’ was the image that he wanted to be portrayed. The demonstration of his apparent gullibility and the insistence of his innocence won over the Advisory Committee. In fact, on 5 November 1940, the Advisory Committee stated that Beckett had been ‘exploited by the British Union of Fascists’.142 Indeed, detailed information has already been stated and exhibited to demonstrate Beckett’s apparent deficient understanding and demonstration of his ‘lack’ of political knowledge. Moreover, Beckett had displayed political naiveté prior to his membership to the British Union of Fascist. Indeed, in 1937 Beckett along with other popular celebrities such as black American actor Paul Robeson (who was involved in the American Civil Rights Movement and a Communist), entertained and fundraised for the Basque refugee children who had fled Spanish fascism and were camped in Eastleigh, Hampshire.143 Kushner and Knox have identified that Beckett ‘despite his fascist connections’ was a ‘regular attender at the camp,

142 HO 144/2180, Joe Beckett’s appeal to the Regulation 18b Advisory Committee, National Archives, Kew.
143 Kushner & Knox, Refugees in an Age of Genocide, p. 112.
encouraging the children to enjoy sporting activities’.\textsuperscript{144} Beckett’s political naiveté was only partly to blame, even some of the organisers also had no clue who the children were. Moreover, his involvement with the displaced Basque children could also suggest Beckett’s own minority origin and his empathy for other minorities in Britain. On the other hand, Beckett’s anti-Semitism also reflects a desire to belong, to be part of the ‘majority’ culture. Travellers were accused of disloyalty and Beckett, as a minority origin individual, could have shown empathy for another minority group in Britain, for example Jews. Instead, he chose to demonstrate solidarity and identify with the ‘majority’. Speculatively, Beckett could have perceived Mosley, the famous aristocrat, as being an ‘insider’ of British society. However, part of him related to the British Union of Fascists because he was an ‘outsider’ mainly because their beliefs and practices were beyond the pale. The relationship between Beckett and the BUF provided both with opportunities. These hypothetical assertions are only to suggest and offer insight into Beckett’s multifaceted identity. To that end, the Regulation 18b Advisory Committee notes and their reaction can be assessed in order to unveil why the Becketts were released earlier than other active Mosleyites. Whilst there is no definitive evidence, there are statements that were made by the Advisory Committee that indicated the reasoning behind their decision to release the Becketts. Indeed, handwritten on the official sheet by one of the members of the Committee, a statement that remarked that Beckett ‘was a notoriously stupid man’.\textsuperscript{145} Additionally, scribed on the other side of the sheet in different handwriting it was inferred that both Joe and Ruth were ‘simple minded people’.\textsuperscript{146} It is these suggestions by the Appeals panel that will be discussed.

Regardless of whether Beckett was naïve or if he was exploited by the British Union of Fascists, it was his perceived lack of education that insured his release from detention. Beckett’s lack of education and illiteracy has been discussed at great length in the previous chapters, however, his lack of ability to read and write comes back into the debate for evaluating the

\textsuperscript{144} Kushner & Knox, \textit{Refugees in an Age of Genocide}, p. 112.
\textsuperscript{145} HO 144/2180, Joe Beckett’s appeal to the Regulation 18b Advisory Committee, National Archives, Kew
\textsuperscript{146} Ibid.
decision made by the Advisory Committee. The Appeals Panel hinted at Beckett’s illiteracy and questioned Ruth during her interview by querying:

Q – Has someone written this letter for your husband? It is not your husband’s handwriting, is it?
A – Yes.
Q – This writing at the bottom is different from the writing at the top.
A - That might be the case; he dictates his letters.  

There can be no doubt that the panel knew of Beckett’s illiteracy. They would have been aware that his solicitor wrote his appeal to the Committee and all of Beckett’s other statements that would have been presented to the panel. Additionally, his lack of education was public knowledge during his professional boxing career. Therefore, they were well aware that Beckett could not read or write. If the discussion focused on that one fact, could this have influenced the final decision made by the Committee? Even though presented with the facts and proof of Beckett’s involvement with the British Union of Fascists, did the educated men of the Appeals Panel revert to class and ethnic snobbery to make their decision for his release? It is more than possible that for the Advisory Committee, to consider a man with little education could have been so actively and publicly involved in an alternative and dangerous British political movement, was too much to swallow.

Alternatively, Beckett could have also played on his illiteracy in order to secure his release. After all, the evidence presented suggests a man that did understand the nature of the British Union of Fascists. With such conflicting evidence, the true political nature of Joe Beckett and his understanding of the BUF will never fully be resolved.

Joe and Ruth Beckett were assessed for their political fervency for the British Union of Fascists. When they were presented with the evidence, the hardship of detention, separation from their family and the realisation of the impact of their membership on their lives, they chose publicly to walk away from the BUF. Nevertheless, post-detention they privately held onto their radical right anti-Semitic attitude and their fascism. Even though their public

\(^{147}\) HO 144/21839, Ruth Beckett’s appeal to the Regulation 18b Advisory Committee, National Archives, Kew.
political profile was tempered, privately they expressed their support for the British Union of Fascists. After the Becketts were released in December 1940 they moved from Southampton to Basingstoke. They purchased a large bungalow with three and a half acres of land which they cultivated with the assistance of the Hampshire War Agricultural Executive Committee, although Beckett did not appear to give farming much personal attention. As part of the condition for his release from Ascot, Beckett reported monthly to the local police station and he diligently did until his restrictions were relaxed in August 1943. Beckett demonstrated no involvement in the BUF between late 1940 until the spring of 1942. Indeed, a letter to G Hatcher, Basingstoke’s Superintendent, from MI5’s Regional Security Officer emphasised that Beckett ‘had been known to walk out of public houses owing to discussions arising in connection with politics’ and it was stated that ‘when politics are about to be discussed in Beckett’s presence, he passed remarks such as “Don’t discuss politics here, or I shall have to leave”’. Yet, when he was contacted in May 1942 by the Chairman of the 18b Detainees (British) Aid Fund George Dunlop and asked if he would donate to the charity, he agreed. Beckett posted a £5 cheque to the fund, with a promise that he would donate £3 every month and he remarked ‘I am very pleased to do all I can for the people who are suffering unjustly’. His contribution to a charity that was created to support 18b internees and provide legal, medical and financial help to their families might not seem to be fascist support, especially as Beckett had empathy for those effected by Regulation 18b. Additionally, the charity was also registered under Wartime Charities in 1940 and was seen by the state as ‘performing a useful function’. Therefore, Beckett’s regular aid to the charity could potentially be perceived as an act of kindness rather than resuming his involvement with the British Union of Fascists. On one level this could be true, however, on another the fund also had connections with keeping fascist sympathisers connected, particularly, as Dunlop was involved in various attempts to resurrect British fascism and allegedly

148 HO 144/2180, Joe Beckett’s appeal to the Regulation 18b Advisory Committee, National Archives, Kew.
149 Ibid.
150 Ibid.
utilising the charity (and its funds) to create a new political party called the Independent Nationalists.\footnote{152} Whether Beckett was aware of this is open to debate. Equally, he did not completely sever his ties with other elements of the BUF. For instance, in April 1943 Beckett also wrote (or Ruth did on his behalf) to the fascist publishing business Valeriani and asked to be supplied with copies of ‘The Jewish Question’ an anti-Semitic treatise and the notorious ‘Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion’ both by Henry Ford, as well as the pro-fascist, anti-Semitic Duke of Bedford’s pamphlet ‘Poverty and Overtaxation’.\footnote{153} Furthermore, in the same month Dunlop visited the Becketts in Basingstoke and the Home Office recorded:

> it seems clear, therefore, that in spite of Beckett’s refusal to discuss politics in public, he still retains some interest in fascism.\footnote{154}

Despite all of the links and facts that Beckett continued his former British Union of Fascists identity, as well as the new ideals of Dunlop, the security forces relaxed his conditions and insisted that:

> in spite of the Asst. Chief Constable’s (Basingstoke Division) recommendation that the restrictions should be maintained, we might relax the condition whereby Beckett is required to report monthly to the police.\footnote{155}

Notwithstanding the evidence of Beckett’s private affiliation and connection with the British Union of Fascists and its ex-members, it would appear that the Home Office were only concerned with the public display of Beckett’s fascism. Whether this was because public fascist exhibitions were part of his character and were considered the primary reason for internment in 1940 and now that specific display had ceased, cannot categorically be asserted. The state security services insisted that the 18b Detainees (British) Aid Fund was ‘harmless’, however, it acknowledged that the organisation was a useful source of keeping sympathisers in touch with one another.\footnote{156} Once Beckett’s restrictions were lifted in 1943 there are no further official records to

\footnote{152}Macklin, \textit{Very Deeply Dyed in Black}, p. 33.\footnote{153}HO 144/2190, Joe Beckett’s appeal to the Regulation 18b Advisory Committee, National Archives, Kew.\footnote{154}Ibid.\footnote{155}Ibid.\footnote{156}Graham Macklin, \textit{Very Deeply Dyed in Black}, p. 32.
demonstrate his participation with the BUF and its affiliates. Nevertheless, what is clear was that Beckett’s beliefs continued post-internment – his detention in Walton Prison and Ascot had not curbed his anti-Semitism and fascism.

Conclusion

Interpreting Joe Beckett’s fascist identity is not straightforward. The evidence suggests the scale of his involvement in the British Union of Fascists movement, prior to his and Ruth’s internment, and furthermore in the years following his release from Ascot. Clearly this chapter has shown that his fascist involvement was extensive and that he actively sought to engage with the BUF and its members. Equally, the ambiguity of his relationship with right-wing politics has been demonstrated. Whether for patriotic or nationalistic causes, or for the reassurance of a political party that was led by a percievably strong leader, or for the British Union of Fascists’ utopian ideology that was steered by anti-Semitic and anti-war ethics, all of these motives directed Beckett toward Mosley. Perhaps what is most significant to Beckett’s case is the fact that the British Union of Fascists contained all of the utopian messages with which he could readily empathise and support. His own argument that he was not politically minded falls short when interpreting events that unfolded, and indeed, his level of intelligence and understanding was substantiated through his actions. Furthermore, the continued the purchase of anti-Semitic material from fascist sources after his release clearly denotes that the hatred of Jewry remained a constant. This is paramount to understanding Beckett’s attraction of the British Union of Fascists and its pro-Nazi ideals. Undeniably, extreme anti-Semitism was very much part of his character and the ‘Jewish question’ continued to play on his mind. For example, Superintendent Hatcher of the Basingstoke Division recorded that when Beckett:

entered the public house he heard a conversation taking place relating to Jews. Beckett is alleged to immediately left the premises and as he did so remarked, “They (referring to the
Jews) make me raving mad and I do not want to get into trouble”.

And as Gerald M. Platt has emphasised ‘it was not only the language or the use of the past, present and future in BUF propaganda, but it was the orient of action’. Platt’s argument is that ideology was not the cause for action, but the mode through which action was made and ideology is the mechanism by which diverse groups are bound together. As discussed, Beckett’s anti-Semitism, admiration and desire for a strong male leader and a desire for a social climbing, along with his anti-war sentiments, made the BUF irresistible for him. To that end, the BUF members mimicked Mosley and professed their ideology, particularly in public places and Beckett was no exception. Indeed, the movement wore their fascist attitude with arrogant pride, this enactment was their action, as reflected in the British Union of Fascists propagandistic newspaper title. Above all, Beckett understood the fascists’ viewpoint and acted through it – beyond and during the war. Conclusively, there can be no doubt that Beckett had a clear political and anti-Semitism viewpoint, and these drove him to subscribe to the BUF and fascist ideals before, during and after the war.

157 HO 144/2180, Joe Beckett’s appeal to the Regulation 18b Advisory Committee, National Archives, Kew.
Conclusion

In today’s Britain, especially during the Brexit transition, what elements of identity which constitute ‘Britishness’ are constantly debated. Indeed, the discussion of what forms a British identity is never far from the themes that have been discussed and contested in this thesis. Ideas of ‘race’, ethnic heritage and political deliberations are prevalent in an age that nears the post-Brexit mindset. Indeed, a new British nationalistic vibe with an old rhetoric has the power to undo all the liberal and tolerant qualities of ‘Britishness’ and pluralist concepts of belonging. This new ‘racism’ is still concerned with inclusion and exclusion, with an aim to specify who may legitimately belong to the national community and simultaneously banishes anyone whose ‘origin’ assigns them as ‘other’. Therefore, as the discussion of ‘who we are’ is still highly relevant in today’s society, the study of Joe Beckett and all the elements in how he, and others, constructed his identities has contemporary resonance and reveals the longstanding argument of what constitutes ‘Britishness’.

Indeed, ‘race’ and ethnic ideology were (and are still) central to the discussion of ‘what is’ a British identification. British politicians have come to stress tougher policies towards immigrants and to define a stronger sense of ‘Britishness’ to which the newcomers must conform. However, it is hard to pin-point what exactly this identity should be whether from state or society. To that end, this thesis, through Beckett, has demonstrated the fragility of ‘Britishness’ in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century. Moreover, it has shown that the hierarchical system that evolved was customised by the ‘white’ elite. For example, if an individual was male and white there were opportunities to ‘overcome’ racism and ethnocentrism and carve a new British identity – though often at a loss of earlier distinctiveness.

This particular case study has confirmed that questions of ‘Britishness’ were bound up with debates of masculine displays, particularly

the spectacle of violence within the boxing ring. However, on the canvas, a man’s ethnic and racial identity could only be altered if he was perceived as ‘white’. Indeed, a colour bar was placed on professional championship bouts which led diminished opportunities for men who were regarded as ‘black’ due to the colour of their skin. To that end, Beckett was only able to climb the ‘white’, and consequently social, ladder because of his surface ‘whiteness’.

Yet, Beckett’s ‘race’ and ethnicity were constantly questioned in his professional career. There are examples throughout, particularly in regard to the media’s portrayal of his image through cartoons and satirical imagery, of Beckett’s struggle to be positively recognised as a ‘white, white’ British man. However, this was also modified by his winning of professional titles. The reality was that his ‘Britishness’ was more acceptable when he competed and won heavyweight titles, which in turn brought him wealth and the chance for social advancement. The combination of the display of a strong masculine physique and the purse won from the bouts enhanced Beckett’s ‘white’ identity. Indeed, when Beckett was financially secure and rose to the dizzy heights of middle to upper middle-class, he benefitted from a higher ‘white’ status, in turn profoundly altering his ethnic and racial standing. He was able to demonstrate that he had ‘white’ good bourgeois taste through the clothes he wore and the houses he bought, proving that he was ‘decent’ and ‘respectable’. Furthermore, he displayed an interest in politics and enjoyed the social life at the local and establishment Conservative Club in Southampton. But Beckett’s new ‘white’ status also enabled him to radicalise his racial outlook and led ultimately to his membership of the British Union of Fascists. Beckett’s acceptance into an extreme right-wing political organisation which placed a ‘white’ racial heritage alongside an Anglo-Saxon ‘British’ identity at the core of its foundation, demonstrated how Beckett now perceived himself. Indeed, he no longer considered himself an ‘outsider’ or racially different to the mainstream, and he believed that his ‘whiteness’ exemplified an unproblematic ‘Britishness’. Ironically, however, Beckett’s anti-Semitic and fascist public life ultimately ostracised him from the majority and he was placed back as the ‘other’ in British society, albeit of his own political making.
It remains that the reality of what defines a British identity is, by nature, highly subjective, fluid and shifting, constantly being created and recreated. Moreover, the ideology of culture and politics that came out of it was the mechanism by which the diverse British population were either bound together or excluded. Beckett understood that his heritage and illiteracy placed him as an ‘outsider’ and like his public professional reputation with the theatrical spectacle of intense male violence, his fascism was another extreme identity to prove his ‘Britishness’. An extreme version of nationalism was the only way that Beckett knew how to be British and to belong. Moreover, his right-wing racial and political views that were publicly vocalised, as well as his membership of the British Union of Fascists and his anti-Semitism, may have been Beckett chasing the spotlight he had lost since his pugilistic days. If so, however, Beckett would have been disappointed: he received very little media attention in both BUF newspapers and the local and national press. And for a ‘local hero’ it was ironic that it was the citizens of Southampton who reported Beckett and his wife to the town’s police, leading to his internment during the war. It was then his extreme political expression that defined his place in society and consequently forced him to move his family away from Southampton. It undermined his local identity that he had forged during his sporting career and the Traveller was forced to uproot away from his ‘home’ town but not by choice. Ironically, Beckett’s downfall in British society did not have anything to do with his racial and ethnic heritage; it was his anti-Semitism and fascist identity that led him largely, if not totally, ‘beyond the pale’.

Ultimately, it was Beckett’s internment that drastically impacted on how he constructed his identity. Indeed, it was Regulation 18b that questioned his ‘Britishness’ and queried his loyalty to the nation. In this sense, the attack and challenge on his British persona, his patriotic values and his loyalty to the crown, combined with the restriction on his freedom and his inability to protect his family or himself, subsequently undermined his masculinity and caused him to have a nervous breakdown. The nine months

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spent in detention reshaped Beckett’s Britishness. Thereafter, he attempted to readapt his ‘Britishness’ once more and conformed at least in the public sphere but now with only limited public recognition or affirmation.

To summarise: through Beckett a deeper and more nuanced understanding of ‘Britishness’ has been facilitated. Beckett’s unique career and wider life story has provided the opportunity to highlight the complex workings of race and ethnicity in Britain during the late nineteenth and the first half of the twentieth centuries, especially with regard to minority groups and responses to them. From this it becomes less surprising that Beckett was involved with the British Union of Fascists. Indeed, with his insecurities of returning to the fringes of British society and the belief that he had required the perfect masculine identity through his professional sporting career, together with how hard he struggled to gain his elite ‘Britishness’ status, to Joe Beckett there was no better way to validate he was not an ‘outsider’. To Beckett, the BUF confirmed the British identity that he had struggled so hard to achieve. Therefore, by professing a distaste for ‘others’ and ‘outsiders’ he proved to himself that he truly belonged. The final irony is that in doing so, it was not society or the hierarchical race categories that undermined his ‘Britishness’ and labelled him as an ‘outsider’, it was himself.
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