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# ‘OF A HUMAN SATELLITE’: CASSIUS CLAY/ MUHAMMAD ALI IN COLD WAR FINNISH TELEVISION CULTURE, 1960–1965

Hannu Salmi  and Benita Heiskanen 

*This article discusses the reception of Cassius Clay/Muhammad Ali in Finnish media from 1960 to 1965, during the emergence of satellite broadcasting networks. The focus is especially on his two matches against Sonny Liston in 1964 and 1965, which had particular cultural and political resonance in Finland. Alongside other European sports fans, Finns were able to follow the bouts via satellite broadcasts, demonstrating not only the transnational possibilities of television but also the supposed technological supremacy of the West. The article is based on materials of the Finnish Broadcasting Company’s Radio and Television Archive and press coverage of Clay/Ali. The article argues that the Clay/Ali-Liston fights in Finland are best understood within the context of the Cold War, with the country itself being rapidly modernized after World War II. Within this geopolitical setting, the Clay/Ali-Liston boxing matches served as cultural vehicles in the broader Cold War debates, as the satellite broadcasts and other media activities helped to build Ali’s transnational fame and, in so doing, his globalization.*

At the Summer Olympics in Rome in 1960, Cassius Marcellus Clay made his international breakthrough by winning the gold medal in the light heavyweight division at the age of eighteen. The new Olympic champion caught the attention of global audiences with the coverage of the press and radio, but even more so due to the novel media technology of television. The dramatic visual impact of boxing provided ideal entertainment for television audiences, and it also offered new possibilities for spectators to become acquainted with sports stars.<sup>1</sup> This article

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concentrates on the years following Clay's success in Rome, for while the next five years were crucial for the rise of his transnational fame, they were also essential for the consolidation of television culture in Europe, where its development had been interrupted by World War II. The efforts to develop television broadcasting were strong in the United States, the UK, Germany, and the USSR, but in most European countries television sets only gradually made it into living rooms during the 1950s and early 1960s.<sup>2</sup>

Finland was one of the last countries to enter the television era, launching regular broadcasts only in 1957, three years after its western neighbor Sweden.<sup>3</sup> But by the time of Clay's Olympic victory, people enjoyed excellent opportunities to observe his maneuvering in the ring from their home sofas. It is often noted that in early television culture, sports events epitomized television's ability to broadcast events in real time. In Finland, the athletic games between Finland and Sweden in 1958 were the first sports events to be directly aired on television.<sup>4</sup> Sports were important also for marketing television sets: the Olympic Games in Rome fueled the sales of television licenses in 1960, as did the next Summer Olympics in Tokyo in 1964.<sup>5</sup>

This development was shadowed by Cold War tensions. On the one hand, the ideologically divided Europe was not open to the dissemination of television signals. On the other hand, it was difficult to restrict television broadcasts by means of national and regional boundaries. In 1961, the construction of the Berlin Wall represented an effort to prevent people's movements over the border, but the question of information diffusion remained. The role of the media gained particular significance in the 1960s, especially due to growing satellite networks that could broadcast over the Iron Curtain.

During recent years, there has been a growing body of literature on the relationship between media and the Cold War, including research on the press as well as on electronic media, such as radio and television.<sup>6</sup> As James Schwoch points out in the opening of his *Global TV: New Media and the Cold War, 1946–69*, the lunar mission of Apollo 11 in 1969 was 'the televisual inauguration of an American-led global satellite network.'<sup>7</sup> Our aim in this article is to analyze the cultural ramifications of satellite networks, with a focus on their early development in the 1960s, from the perspective of Finland, which offers an excellent analytical lens because of its proximity to the Soviet Union and, accordingly, the Iron Curtain. We also emphasize the role of sport as a locus of political negotiation, a viewpoint that has previously been examined in the Cold War context (for example, though baseball). In his *Transpacific Field of Dreams: How Baseball Linked the United States and Japan in Peace and War*, Sayuri Guthrie-Shimizu has pointed out the function of sport in building bridges between nations.<sup>8</sup> This is also the case in the rising stardom of Cassius Clay—or Muhammad Ali, as he was known after 1964—in the context of Cold War television. We argue that Clay/Ali was responsible for simultaneously creating a mode of viewer participation in the new television era and testing the boundaries of the turbulent period of the early 1960s.

In the Olympic tournament in Rome, Cassius Clay encountered the Soviet boxer Gennadiy Shatkov. On September 2, 1960, the Finnish newspaper *Turun Sanomat* wrote about Clay, who was already famous for his flashy boxing style: 'The left hooks of the slim Negro were spectacular, and the American danced

away like a ballet star every time Shatkov began his offense.<sup>9</sup> Clay was described as ‘a copy of Floyd Patterson,’ the reigning heavyweight champion, but also as an exceptionally talented boxer whose agile maneuvering in the ring was portrayed as a dance.<sup>10</sup> At the same time, he was depicted as a sophisticated and merciless fighter. Curiously, Patterson was himself keeping track of how his supposed ‘copy’ was progressing. Seen at the Olympic Village, he told the curious journalists how he had followed Clay’s performance via television.

Already before the Olympic final, the media had emphasized that Cassius Clay was the strongest contender for the gold medal. In addition to fighters from the Soviet bloc, Nordic athletes were also mentioned as contenders, although they would not ultimately stand a chance against Clay: ‘Shatkov from the Soviet Union, Pietrzykowski from Poland, Matti Aho from Finland and Lars Norling from Sweden can hardly prevent his ascendance to the highest podium.’<sup>11</sup> The final match against Zbigniew Pietrzykowski took place on August 18, 1960 and ended with Clay’s overpowering victory. The media estimated that Clay would soon end his amateur career with an extremely promising professional future ahead of him.<sup>12</sup>

This article discusses the reception of Cassius Clay/Muhammad Ali in Finnish media from 1960 to 1965, during the emergence of satellite broadcasting networks. The focus is especially on his two matches against Sonny Liston in 1964 and 1965, which had particular cultural and political resonance in Finland. Alongside other European sports fans, Finns were able to follow the bouts via satellite broadcasts, demonstrating not only the transnational possibilities of television but also the supposed technological supremacy of the West. The case of Finland is especially pertinent because of its geopolitical position as a Soviet neighbor between the East and the West. When Clay/Ali performed for Finnish audiences, the media producers must have been aware of the fact that this fight would be viewed and interpreted in the vicinity of the Iron Curtain.

Based on the Finnish Broadcasting Company’s Radio and Television Archive materials and press coverage of Clay/Ali, this article draws on ten Finnish dailies from both southern and northern cities in Finland, including the *Turun Sanomat* in the city of Turku and the *Lapin Kansa* in Rovaniemi. The materials include widely circulated papers like the *Helsingin Sanomat* and smaller ones, such as the *Länsi-Savo* and the *Etelä-Suomen Sanomat*. It also draws on popular magazines and other contemporary materials.<sup>13</sup> The article argues that the Clay/Ali-Liston fights in Finland are best understood within the context of the Cold War, with the country itself being rapidly modernized after World War II. Within this geopolitical setting, the Clay/Ali-Liston boxing matches served as cultural vehicles in the broader Cold War debates, while especially the satellite broadcasts and other media activities contributed to building Ali’s transnational fame and, in so doing, globalizing Ali.

## Clay’s star image in Finland

Cassius Clay/Muhammad Ali was preceded by such African American heavyweight champions as Jack Johnson (1878–1946) and Joe Louis (1914–1981), who, in an era of racial segregation in sport, broke the barriers preventing black boxers from climbing to the heavyweight throne.<sup>14</sup> Clay had fought in over a hundred amateur

bouts, but his obvious goal was to follow in the footsteps of Floyd Patterson and Sonny Liston in their path in the professional ranks toward the world championship. At the same time, it was inevitable that Clay would aim to become an athlete whose star power reached beyond the ring. From Jackie Robinson and Paul Robeson to Sidney Poitier and Sammy Davis, Jr., there were African American performers who had already made it, providing ample models for showbiz fame.<sup>15</sup>

During the Olympic Games in Rome, Clay radiated the aura of an icon. Noted everywhere was how exceptionally successful he had been and how he now behaved like a star. The Finnish left-wing newspaper *Kansan Uutiset* noted: 'The USA's latest hope, the black Cassius Clay, has already in advance received a billing straight out of a fairytale.'<sup>16</sup> Clay's private self was carefully kept behind a backdrop, but it is now known that at first he refused to join the US Olympic team because he did not want to fly.<sup>17</sup> This resulted in many stories of his fear of flying, with some even telling that during the flight he prayed in the aisle with a parachute on his back.<sup>18</sup> After arriving in Rome, however, his behavior changed; his public appearances struck a completely different tone. In *Ali: A Life*, Jonathan Eig writes: 'Clay arrived in Rome with a crown atop his head and a choir singing behind him everywhere he went – or so it seemed from the way he comported himself. He strode into the Olympic Village as if he had been named its king and everyone else had come to celebrate his coronation and gaze upon his beauty and grace.'<sup>19</sup> The Olympic hopeful introduced himself as Cassius Marcellus Clay VII to one of the many paparazzi tailing him, 'perhaps hoping,' Eig notes, 'that his lineage might be traced back to a Roman gladiator or king.'<sup>20</sup>

In early 1960s Finland, Cassius Clay was regarded not only as an Olympic athlete but also as a celebrity, a figure akin to the youth and pop culture stars of the era. This was a period when Finland was increasingly opening its doors to foreign influences and Anglo-American popular culture. Until 1956, domestic customs agents had imposed high levies on foreign-produced musical records.<sup>21</sup> After these taxes were lifted, however, a wave of pop and rock music flooded the country. This integration into the arena of international popular culture was a telltale sign of Finland's process of modernization, as young people started to move from the countryside to cities, seeking new forms of entertainment. For Finnish audiences, Clay's fame appeared simultaneously with that of many other figures of popular culture. Before his bouts with Sonny Liston, Clay made an album entitled *I Am the Greatest!*, which was recorded on August 8, 1963 before a live audience in New York City.<sup>22</sup> The album included eight entries titled as 'rounds' rather than 'tracks.' Promoting the forthcoming Liston fight in February 1964, the rounds included some musical accompaniment and audience noise but in the foreground featured Clay's spoken word and poetry. The record also aroused interest in Finland, and in the fall of 1963 it was mentioned twice in the leading pop magazine *Iskelmä*. In Issue 8, the Finnish audience could read that 'Cassius Clay, contender for the heavyweight championship of the world, has penned a bunch of pop songs on producer Loy Levy's dime.'<sup>23</sup> In Issue 10, additional details were given: 'Cassius Clay, the boxer turned pop star, has recorded a song "I Am the Greatest," composed and written by himself. The song is a kind of couplet that deals with his upcoming title bout with Sonny Liston.'<sup>24</sup> The Finnish journalist

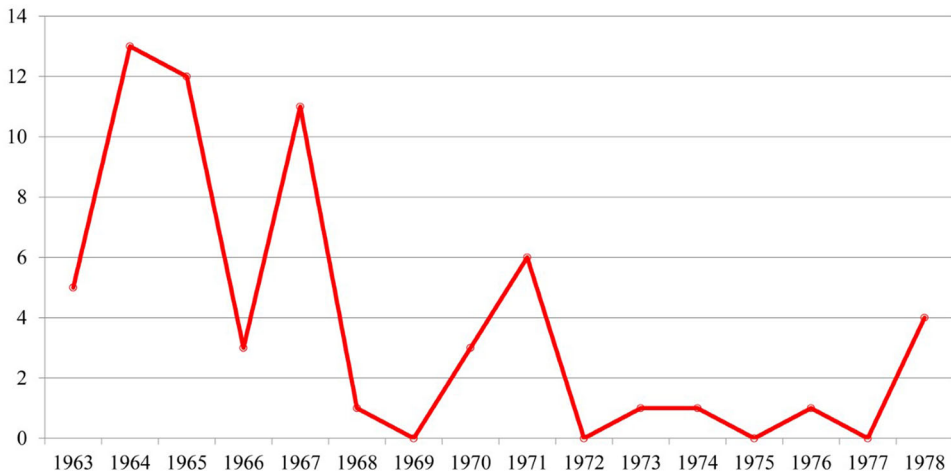


Figure 1. Clay/Ali on Finnish Radio and Television, 1963–1978.

used the word *kupletti*, which derives from the French word *couplet*. During the first half of the twentieth century, Finland had had its own tradition of couplets: humorous, wordy songs that occasionally also had spoken sections. As Clay's song was obviously something new for the author of the story, he made an attempt to find a parallel for it from Finnish pop music history. In today's parlance, Clay's poetry has musical accompaniment that smacks of either rap or hip hop.

As the album was meant to promote the forthcoming encounter between Clay and Liston, it included many verses and 'rounds' with taunts directed at Liston. Perhaps Clay did not know at this point how important space satellites would be for the global distribution of boxing matches and, ultimately, his own fame, but in his lyrics he fantasized of satellites in another sense. Clay imagined that he hit Liston so hard that he was hurled into the air:

Now Liston disappears from view.

The crowd is getting frantic,  
 But our radar stations have picked him up.  
 He's somewhere over the Atlantic.  
 Who would have thought  
 When they came to the fight  
 That they'd witness the launching  
 Of a human satellite?<sup>25</sup>

Clay/Ali used his satellite metaphor later on as well. When the journal *The Black Scholar* interviewed him in 1970, he invoked the old poem to poke fun at Joe Frazier.<sup>26</sup> This time, however, 'human satellite' had been changed to 'black satellite.' The context had been changed, too. Ali strongly criticized Floyd Patterson and Joe Frazier, both of whom had taken 'a white woman' (like Jack Johnson before them).<sup>27</sup> Clearly, the satellite metaphor had become important for Ali, and space technology served not only as a symbol of his unearthly strength but also the complete displacement of his rivals.

In 1963, Cassius Clay's bouts circulated via satellites. In Finland, his appearances on television dramatically increased, compared to the previous years. The

Liston bouts and their pre-publicity solidified Clay's identity as a sports star for Finnish audiences. The Radio and Television Archive of the Finnish Broadcasting Company indicates the dramatic fashion with which this took place (Figure 1).<sup>28</sup> It is precisely thanks to the satellite broadcasts that the Clay-Liston bouts received such a remarkable level of media attention globally, including in Finland.

It is important to point out that the metadata of the Radio and Television Archive in Finland is far from complete. In the 1960s, the people who appeared on television were not always mentioned there. While the metadata does give a reasonably reliable view of those who were shown in the inserts of the news broadcasts, Clay was probably seen on screen more often than the archives indicate. In 1963, Clay was mentioned in at least five television shows: a January 27 show discusses his match with Charley Powell, a February 14 show mentions his verbal acrobatics with Liston, and a June 19 show highlights his press conference before the bout with Henry Cooper. Moreover, a November 8 show mentions the signing of the contracts between Clay and Liston and, finally, a December 31 news broadcast included an insert from Clay's press conference. While the insert was shown muted, with voice-over in Finnish, the November 8 press conference included the original soundtrack and dialogue. Almost two minutes long, the clip concentrates on Clay's ranting and raving. The editor of the metadata must have been fascinated with Clay's audacious parlance, adding a quotation at the end: *I'm bad, I'm bad.*<sup>29</sup>

## Satellite broadcasts to Finland

In the early 1960s, Finnish television broadcasting was in its infancy. In Finland, television broadcasts had begun as a private enterprise through the activities of a radio engineers' television club in 1955. This led to the foundation of a commercial company TES-TV the following year. Encouraged by this, the Finnish Broadcasting Company YLE launched its public service television in 1957. It also sold channel time in time slots to another commercial company, MTV. As a public service company, YLE soon came to dominate the field. Continuing its cooperation with MTV until the 1980s, it indirectly benefited from television advertising. In 1964, when YLE bought out TES-TV and launched its second national TV channel, there were already 500,000 television licenses, while the total population was around 4.5 million.<sup>30</sup>

Due to having lost World War II, and partly because of the reparations that it had to pay in the late 1940s and early 1950s, Finland had close economic ties with the Soviet Union. Yet, Finland belonged to the Western European community and had a market economy. On the level of civil society as well, Finland was connected to the West in many ways. When Finnish television technology was launched in the late 1950s, the engineers consciously made technological decisions that meant that the Finnish television infrastructure was incompatible with the Soviet one. For this reason, Soviet television sets could not be used or marketed. This boosted both domestic television set production and Western imports.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, Finland was connected to the emerging Eurovision network, which

served as a conduit to TV stations in the United States. At first, these international links were built on terrestrial connections, but satellite networks soon followed. An important step in transatlantic information flows was the launching of the Telstar satellite at Cape Canaveral in July 1962. Its mission was to experiment with transatlantic broadcasting in both directions. This satellite also made it possible to make intercontinental phone calls.<sup>32</sup>

Telstar was a symbol of the Cold War in the same manner as Sputnik had been in 1957. They both epitomized the technological abilities of the Western and Eastern blocs, as well as their rivalries, which would continue throughout the 1960s. Yet, Telstar was also more than a symbol, as it concretely aimed at narrowing political relationships between the United States and Western Europe. This became evident on July 17, 1962, when British and French TV companies received by satellite a direct broadcast of a press conference given by President John F. Kennedy. Other countries were able to see the program via Eurovision's land-based network. The satellite made information flows quicker and it also enabled European countries like Finland to receive audiovisual material much sooner than before. It also provided live broadcasts directly from the US to Finland and other European countries.

In terms of sports events like the Clay/Ali-Liston bouts, even more essential was the launching of Relay 1 by NASA in 1962. Relay 1 was one of several satellites placed in orbit in the decade after Sputnik in an effort to advance communications from space. Relay 1 received telephone and television signals from ground stations and then forwarded these to other locations on the Earth's surface. The satellite transmitted signals between North America and Europe and between North and South America, and it also monitored the effects of radiation on its electronics. In conjunction with the Syncom 3 communications satellite, Relay 1 transmitted television coverage of the 1964 Olympics in Tokyo, Japan.<sup>33</sup> This system had not yet been in place during the 1960 Olympics in Rome; if it had been, Cassius Clay's ring ballet would have become even more celebrated already at that time. The system was ready to be fully deployed in 1964 and 1965, however, when Clay/Ali was pursuing the world championship.

In the 1960s, there was plenty of media coverage on satellite projects. Satellites were not seen as separate technological entities but essentially as a network through which communication became effective and broadcasting could be extended across geographical boundaries and political borders. The Soviet Union developed its own network at the same time. This was exemplified during the 50th anniversary of the October Revolution in 1967, when the satellite Molniya-1 was able to reach twenty new television stations, bringing in twenty million new viewers from the most distant corners of the country to witness the festival program live from Moscow.<sup>34</sup> Satellites represented the most advanced technology in the building of global connections.

Satellite transmissions were also a source of tension between the Eastern and Western blocs, since television signals could not be bound within strict borders. Estonians who lived on the eastern side of the Iron Curtain watched Finnish television, irrespective of strong regulations against it. At the same time, satellites could be used for propaganda purposes, with the purposive directing of broadcasts to the



other side of the Iron Curtain. In this interplay, seemingly apolitical sporting events were used for political purposes. The Finnish press coverage of the Clay/Ali-Liston bouts shows how extensively and in detail those fights were reported. There are no Europe-wide or global studies on the reception of Clay/Ali, but the Finnish example is indicative. The *Turun Sanomat* even published a special issue the day after the first Clay-Liston encounter, which described the events round by round, reporting the ups and downs of the bout in Miami Beach on February 25, 1964. This match seems to have drawn the most distant corners of Europe to tune in to the same channel. In Finland, boxing was a particularly popular form of sport, especially among young working-class men but also among the broader public. Finland had been successful in international arenas, too, receiving five medals at its own Olympic Games in Helsinki in 1952. Jorma Limmonen had won a bronze medal in the lightweight division in Rome in 1960, and Pertti Purhonen won another one in Tokyo in 1964.<sup>35</sup> One of the most celebrated Finnish boxers was Olli Mäki, who won the European lightweight title in 1959 in a tournament organized by the European Amateur Boxing Association (EABA). Mäki might have made a breakthrough in Rome in 1960 but was removed from the team after refusing to resign, as required, from the Finnish Workers' Athletic Federation. Instead he turned professional, fighting for the world featherweight championship against Davey Moore in August 1962.<sup>36</sup> This bout took place in front of an exceptionally large crowd gathered at the Olympic Stadium in Helsinki, and while he lost after a second-round knockout, this historic event made Finns even more keen to follow the international boxing scene.

Before the first Clay-Liston bout in February 1964, expectations were high. Clay himself had been fueling them with his verbal braggadocio, boxing poetry, and continuous mocking of Liston. The media industry—from record companies to radio stations—was complicit in this play. Marketing efforts started early on, promoting not only the event at the actual stadium in Miami Beach but also hundreds of theaters around the country, where the audience could follow a direct broadcast of the fight. This setting was described also in Finnish newspapers. The *Kansan Uutiset* reported on February 22, 1964 that from Miami the match would be sent live to 256 movie theaters around the US, and tickets would cost from four to ten dollars. Ringside tickets were much more expensive, costing around US \$250, which the *Kansan Uutiset* noted were deliberately priced that high to make black market scalping as difficult as possible.<sup>37</sup>

The satellite network was taken advantage of, too, which further increased the international attention of the event. The broadcasting network was not comprehensive in its coverage, however. In the case of Finland, the national broadcasting network did not yet reach the northernmost part of the country. There was a plan to build a television station in Tervola, near the Swedish border, to relay the signal to Lapland. The Rovaniemi-based newspaper *Lapin Kansa* commented on this a few days before the first Clay-Liston fight on February 21. This time the unevenness of the broadcasting network was a blessing, since people in Lapland were able to do what they were already used to doing (i.e., watching Swedish programming). It was widely noted in Finland that Sweden would show the match live, at 5 am in the morning (Finnish time). The reporter of the *Lapin Kansa* further states:

In Sweden, the event has created quite a storm. Earlier, Swedish radio was strongly opposed to prizefighting, and the purchasing of the rights to the Liston-Clay bout came as quite a surprise. The radio's leadership made the decision without first asking the board or other decision-making bodies, resulting in a flood of angry opinion pieces penned by opponents of boxing. The issue has even been raised in the Swedish Parliament.<sup>38</sup>

This quote exemplifies the transnational dimension of the Clay/Ali-Liston bouts and reveals how much discussion they aroused all over Europe. That a journalist in Lapland could enjoy the possibility of receiving the satellite broadcast from Miami Beach was something that would certainly not have been possible five years earlier.

### Globalizing Clay/Ali

The first encounter between Clay and Liston was dramatic. In spite of Clay's posturing and braggadocio, the pugilistic public was strongly of the opinion that Liston would be the winner. On the eve of the fight, as Ali A. Mazrui put it, 'the betting world had made Cassius Clay a seven-to-one underdog.' Mazrui pointed out that in comparison with other fights before and after, there was relatively little betting involved. Finnish newspapers also noted this in February 1964, suggesting that perhaps people 'expected' Liston to win. Clay's flamboyant character did not appeal to Finnish reporters. Columnist Olga Connolly of the *Aamulehti* newspaper, published in Tampere, complained how 'Cassius talks too much.'<sup>39</sup> Olga Connolly was a Czechoslovakian-American discus thrower who had won gold at the Melbourne Olympics in 1956. She made it a point to emphasize that Joe Louis himself was convinced that Liston would emerge victorious in the bout.

On February 21, four days before the match, Finns thought that they would not see the bout at all, but this was to change at the last minute. On February 23, the Finnish papers reported on a bulletin that had been transmitted via the international press agencies AFP and Reuters to the Finnish news agency STT. Subscribers to the *Lapin Kansa* woke up to read:

The heavyweight championship bout between Sonny Liston and Cassius Clay, which will be held in Miami next Tuesday (Wednesday morning Finnish time), will be broadcast to Europe via the Relay satellite, as per an official announcement in Miami on Friday. The bout will begin at 5 am Finnish time on Wednesday, and an hour later European viewers will be able to see it on their own television sets. Eurovision will record the bout and broadcast it through its own network so that at least England, Austria, France, Italy, West Germany, Belgium, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Yugoslavia will relay it to their own viewers. The United States does not charge any fee from these countries.<sup>40</sup>

As evidenced by this bulletin, the first Clay-Liston bout only became a Europe-wide event at the last minute. The broadcast was also seen in Yugoslavia, which had been a member of the European Broadcasting Union EBU since 1950

and had participated, as the only socialist country, in the Eurovision Song Contest since 1961.

Only two days before the *Lapin Kansa* reported on the widely available satellite broadcasts, the same newspaper had been covering the controversy in Sweden about the costs of the rights. Seemingly out of nowhere, the bout was going to be shown for free via Eurovision. This further fueled broad public interest in the event. On February 25, the Finnish Broadcasting Company interviewed pedestrians in Helsinki for the *Myöhäis uutiset* (*Late Night News*). The following dialogue is from the first interview, which was conducted with an elderly man:

- Good afternoon!
- Good afternoon!
- Do you know who Cassius Clay is?
- I cannot remember right now.
- Does the name Sonny Liston mean anything to you?
- I cannot remember that either.
- This has to do with the Heavyweight Championship of the World. Do you know when it will take place?
- Yes, I read about it in today's *Helsingin Sanomat*.
- They launched a satellite.
- Do you have a prediction as to who will win?
- Well, may the best man win.<sup>41</sup>

Younger people were also interviewed, and many of them had Liston winning the fight. Notwithstanding Liston's favorability, it seems that Finnish television showed more footage of Clay than Liston. On February 17, for example, the viewers had seen Clay's training in Florida, complete with him eating a grapefruit between workout periods. The title of the *Savon Sanomat*, the daily published in Kuopio in eastern Finland, after the bout depicted Clay's victory as a surprise: 'The Louisville Lip can fight, too.'<sup>42</sup>

After the first Clay-Liston fight ended in seven rounds, with Liston suffering a shoulder injury, many rumors started spreading about the legitimacy of the outcome. The Finnish media was complicit in circulating these stories. On February 27, the *Kansan Uutiset*, for example, wrote that Clay had gotten the championship 'as a gift.'<sup>43</sup> Doubts were raised about the honesty of the game, of 'gangsters' being involved, and allegations that the fight had been fixed. Naturally, fight fans were disappointed that the long-awaited encounter lasted less than thirty minutes. Such rumors circulated over the Iron Curtain, too. The Soviet newspaper *Izvestia* was convinced that the match had been rigged. This report was delivered by the press agency UPI and published in Finland, for example, by the *Turun Sanomat* on February 27. *Izvestia* argued that the American sports syndicate had arranged everything beforehand. In the end, Florida State Attorney Richard E. Gerstein conducted an investigation on the alleged fix. It took almost a month, and he could not find any evidence to support the allegations.<sup>44</sup>

The question of Soviet interest in the Clay-Liston case had already been raised before the match. The newspaper *Kaleva*, published in the city of Oulu in northern Finland, wrote on February 20 that 'the Soviet boxing circles' had become

interested in the fabulous fees that Clay and Liston were getting and that they would be willing to challenge the winner of the Clay-Liston encounter.<sup>45</sup> This supposition, based on news by the UPI, which cited the vice president of Intercontinental Promotions, Bob Nilon, was soon contested by the Soviets. On February 27, the *Kansan Uutiset* stressed that the report was 'a lame duck.' The vice president of the International Boxing Association, Nikolay Nikiforov-Denisov, argued these rumors were completely untrue. The *Kansan Uutiset* wrote: 'Professional sports are against the nature of sports in the Soviet Union, says Nikiforov-Denisov. [...] We exercise with sports because of health, not for money.'<sup>46</sup> The stories on the Soviet interest gained publicity worldwide. At the same time they reflected essential aspects of the Cold War. The news insinuated that there was interest in money and professionalism in the USSR, and this had to be quickly refuted by the Soviet authorities. Still, it was evident that the Clay/Ali-Liston bouts brought professional boxing to the border zone between the East and West, not only to countries like Finland but also to Yugoslavia, almost like a provocation. This must have irked the Soviets. It also demonstrated how powerful satellite networks already were and the ambiguous function they might have in the future.

But there was more to come. The second Clay/Ali-Liston encounter took place on May 25, 1965 in Lewiston, Maine. Clay had previously joined the Nation of Islam and was now known as Muhammad Ali. Finnish newspapers had followed Ali's life and escapades closely, but they systematically continued to call him Cassius Clay. By stubbornly refusing to accept his right to a change of identity, they also refused to take Ali and his cause seriously. This time, too, the bout could be followed via satellite. But contrary to the former match, the broadcast was not first received by the European Broadcasting Union and then redistributed to member states. This time the match was sent directly via the satellite network to Finland and other European countries. Two days before, Finnish papers reported on the nature of the transmission. On May 23, 1965, the *Turun Sanomat* wrote:

According to a telegraph received by the Finnish Broadcasting Company, the broadcast relayed by the Early Bird satellite begins on Wednesday morning at 4:25 (i.e., five minutes before the beginning of the bout). The duration of the bout is estimated at an hour and fifteen minutes if the bout goes the full distance of 15 rounds of boxing. This is the first direct sports broadcast from the United States to Finland. The broadcast has been subscribed jointly to 14 European broadcasting companies. Alongside Finland, Sweden, and Denmark are among the other Nordic subscribers. Norway, by contrast, will not subscribe to the broadcast.<sup>47</sup>

This message was reported throughout the country. The Swedish-language daily *Hufvudstadsbladet* in Helsinki continued by telling that the match would be shown again later in the evening with voice-over narration by Anssi Kukkonen, the famed sports commentator of the Finnish Broadcasting Company.<sup>48</sup>

This bout proved to be even more controversial than the first one. Ali's knockout victory in the first round came about with a punch that was hardly seen by the audience at the Lewiston venue. There was immediate booing, with

insinuations that the fight had been fixed. On May 27, the *Lapin Kansa* told that the Republican senator Robert Mitchell had pointed out in the US Congress that the last three heavyweight championship bouts had lasted only around five minutes and produced 12 million dollars for their organizers. The state of professional boxing, therefore, should be carefully investigated.<sup>49</sup> The *Helsingin Sanomat* wrote on May 30 that ‘Clay had dropped Liston with a karate punch,’ referring to the match as ‘a farce.’<sup>50</sup> A similar tone was repeated by all Finnish newspapers. Several news programs by the Finnish Broadcasting Company also reported on the match, as did the *Myöhäis uutiset* (*Late Night News*), where the whole match was shown on May 26.<sup>51</sup> The fight had been so short that it could be easily reprised.

It seems that Finns were disappointed by the brevity of the match, even if pleased they had been able to follow it in the first place. The idea that real-time television transmission was even possible was something that was exciting to people. The first round at the Lewiston ring was followed by Finns and many other Europeans at the exact moment when it was happening. At the same time it carried political undertones, since it was possible for the Finnish audience to tune into the same channel as the rest of the Western hemisphere. This same sense of belonging was also experienced later via satellite networks, when the lunar module of Apollo 11 landed on the surface of the Moon in July of 1969.

### Conclusion: the Clay galaxy meets Finnish modernity

In 1962, two years before the Liston bouts, the Canadian media theorist Marshall McLuhan published his classic book *The Gutenberg Galaxy: The Making of a Typographic Man*.<sup>52</sup> It was a wide-ranging analysis of the effects of media culture, spanning from the emergence of the printing press up to the age of electronic media. The book became famous for its emphasis on the *global village* and on how media in the end shrank geographical space. The breakthrough of satellite networks and international television broadcasts in the 1960s soon became interpreted in terms of this McLuhanian idea of togetherness. For the Finnish audience, the new faculties of electronic media appeared not as a ‘Gutenberg galaxy’ but a ‘Clay galaxy,’ as something radically new. It was boxing that first occupied the satellite network, and it was Clay/Ali whose stardom was first amplified by the new technology. Via their television sets, Finns joined the virtual crowd around the ring. For Finns, Clay/Ali was the epitome of telepresence.

Interestingly, in 1964 McLuhan published his other classic, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, dedicating a number of chapters to the technological ‘extensions of man.’ He discussed television at length, characterizing it as a ‘cool medium.’<sup>53</sup> According to McLuhan, television could not ‘tackle hot issues,’ because it did not arouse the senses as much as film, for example.<sup>54</sup> In the Finnish context, however, the first direct satellite broadcast made television a hot medium. Television sets did not have high resolution, but they electrified the audience through the idea of connectivity.

In the early 1960s, Finnish society was experiencing profound changes. After the war, the country had been mainly rural, with most of the population living in the countryside. At the turn of the 1960s, however, urbanization rapidly started to increase. New forms of sports, such as ice hockey, gained popularity in urban

centers; boxing as well was entertainment for a modernizing society. In 1962, Olli Mäki's fight against Davey Moore at the Olympic Stadium proved this, and the Clay/Ali-Liston bouts continued the trend two years later.

The reception of Cassius Clay/Muhammad Ali in Finnish media in the early 1960s makes visible not only local long-term interests in sports like boxing, but also how in the context of the Cold War it was essential for US broadcasters to build ties to Europe through modern media technology.

For the Finnish media, it was important to emphasize transatlantic connections, reminding that Finland was part of the Western world. The latter was necessary both for the international community and for the cultural navigation of the Finns' identity between the East and West.

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## Notes

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