

REVIEW

AMABOKOBOKO STAAN STYF, HOEVEEL (Australiese) DOLLARS IN JUL SAFE?

Review of: Albert Grundlingh, André Odendaal and Burrige Spies (1995) - *Beyond the Tryline: rugby and South African society* (Johannesburg: Ravan).

Gerhard Maré

The colour of the cover of the previous issue of *Transformation* was green and gold, with definite reference to the Rugby World Cup (RWC) final that was imminent at the time of publication. I was astonished to find not only that specific choice of symbolism, but that a majority of those around me seemed to support the Springboks, if not as rugby players then as 'nation-builders'. Unconvinced that the arrogance that marked white and recent (as Grundlingh et al remind us) Afrikaner domination of the rugby scene nationally had really departed, for all those so racialised in this racist society, I did not take pleasure in the dour victory in June. As with various kinds of racism and crude sexism that permeate this country amongst white and black, such a sea change in attitude was, to my mind, not possible.

I love the *game*, let it be said. I do not like it that South Africa won the final, playing better English rugby than the English did. That insensitivity was shown immediately after the victory when the 'Christians all', until Pienaar remembered the scorer of all the points, went down on their knees and prayed; it was shown much more crudely by that peak of arrogance, Louis Luyt, when he said that New Zealand and Australia won the previous Cups because the South Africans were not there. Grundlingh refers to the characterisation of Luyt as 'a man with "less sensitivity and fewer principles than a rugby ball"' (1995:14).

At the same time, I would not wish to detract from the 'nation-building' effect that the victory did have, no matter how briefly. Many South Africans, and several Springboks, may have returned to their comfortable ways, but many of those may respond differently when new choices come to face them. There is not reason to doubt the sincerity of captain Francois Pienaar. Bafana Khumalo, writing in the *Mail and Guardian* did have a personal point in lifting the multi-hued cover on the symbols that have now come to signify unity, but he is wrong in claiming that symbols cannot alter, cannot serve new social purposes. On that score he is clearly wrong, even though he may not like such change. The

new South African flag is now waved proudly, far removed from the defiance of the singing of 'Die Stem' and the waving of the '*oranje, blanje, blou*' as recently as three years ago (Grundlingh et al, 1995:10). Late in the nineteenth century rugby, organised on a cultural basis, served to 'keep the Muslims of the Cape together and also to bring unity amongst them' (1995:28). There is at present general acceptance that the unity has to spread beyond the various 'groups' to 'the nation', even though it may not be embraced with equal vigour, nor signify the same for all.

Grundlingh, Odendaal and Spies' collection of essays is a valuable corrective to the over-the-top ahistorical media mythologising that marked the months leading up to and during the RWC 1995. They examine some of the facts behind the playing of rugby in this country, a history that is necessary for 'truth and reconciliation' within sport in this country. For example, it serves to remind that there is a parallel history of, unfortunately often also 'racially' divided, African and coloured rugby that stretches as far back as the hegemonic strand of white rugby (see Odendaal's essay); that the spread of rugby cannot be divorced from British imperialism (which meant that it was not always Afrikaner-dominated, and that the process of and reasons for Afrikaner infiltration needs to be examined, including the role of the Broederbond) (the essay by Spies); rugby and world sporting isolation under apartheid, and reconciliation and integration (chapters one and four by Grundlingh); and a more sociological approach in examining rugby, nationalism and masculinity (by Grundlingh).

The five essays, three of them by UNISA professor Albert Grundlingh, and one each by fellow historians André Odendaal and Burridge Spies, unfortunately remain as separate contributions with little editorial intervention visible to make the collection more coherent. The effect is that wide cracks remain and a fuller picture remains to be painted. The relationship between sport and politics and ideology beyond the descriptive approach largely followed by these historians, and the value of drawing on comparative material, falls within the scope of the task they set themselves but remains unexplored. This reader would have liked to see a more extensive exploration of the early and continuing divisions within black rugby that long pre-dates apartheid, despite noteworthy attempts to create 'non-racial' clubs and unions (eg 1995:37). It seems that 'non-racialism' remains and has always been poorly conceptualised, and has never withstood the test of the 'myriad influences shaping 20th century South African society' (1995:50).

Spies' 'somewhat impressionistic survey' (his own words, 1995:85) is a fragmented contribution. What Spies does not explain satisfactorily is why the English imperial history of rugby should have landed up in the hands of the Afrikaner nationalists (Grundlingh, in the last essay, takes this question further). Guttman's (1994) book, with a section on sport and resistance, may offer another

insight on this 'capture' of rugby by Afrikaners. The strongest essay (because more sociological?) is that by Grundlingh, examining the complex links between sport (rugby), nation (the Afrikaners), and masculinity. Stellenbosch University, as cradle of both Afrikaner nationalist politicians, *predikante*, teachers and other purveyors of ethnic ideas, as well as of rugby players, provided socialisation into both areas. Grundlingh refers to the interplay between class, culture, 'race' and sport, and these ideas could provide useful ideas for further research; as do those on rugby and masculinity, where the supportive role of women was highlighted in interviews with wives and girlfriends during and after the World Cup. The model for a more complex examination of the relationship between sport, class and nation remains Eric Hobsbawm's article on 'mass-producing traditions' (1983).

The collection forms a useful starting point for further such research and writing. In the meantime, player bank balances are probably being built with more success than the nation, introducing another major development in the history of sport and nationalism in South Africa.

REFERENCES

- Guttman, ALEN (1994) *Games and Empires: modern sports and cultural imperialism*, New York: Columbia University Press.
- Hobsbawm, ERIC (1983) 'Mass-producing traditions: Europe, 1870-1914', in Eric Hobsbawm and Terence Ranger (eds) *The Invention of Tradition*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.