

Mike Marqusee, *Anyone But England, Cricket and the National Malaise*, Verso, London, 1994

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Regular readers of *Transformation* may wonder why the editorial collective agreed to the publication of a review of a book on English cricket. Some explanation may therefore be in order. We have over the years carried virtually nothing about the appropriation of sport in the larger process of South Africa's social and political transition, a subject which would be entirely consistent with the journal's editorial focus and policy. Gerry Mare's review of Albert Grundlingh et al's 'Beyond the Tryline: Rugby and South African Society' (*Transformation* 27, 1995), is an exception. But this 'silence' on the subject of sport and politics still does not explain why we are reviewing a book on English cricket, by a 'deracinated Marxist of American Jewish (p11)' extraction. There are at least two answers to this.

The first relates to Marqusee's overall project, that of trying to understand the relationship between cricket and society in England, especially in a period in which the game has been undergoing far-reaching transformation. The issues he raises and the conclusions he reaches in this regard are very relevant to recent South African experience, into which can be added the further complexities of cricket transformation in a era of rapid political and societal change. The second reason is even more direct and obvious, for Marqusee devotes a chapter to issues of race and racism in English cricket and virtually a whole chapter to the relationship between the English cricket establishment and cricket development in South Africa, especially after the now infamous decision of Prime Minister BJ Vorster to refuse to accept the 1967 touring English cricket team, as it contained the former South African 'coloured' player, Basil D'Oliveira. This review focuses mainly on the issues raised in these chapters. The final paragraphs attempt to examine recent developments in South African cricket and society in the light of the issues Marqusee raises.

English cricket, Marqusee argues remains 'a world where the norms of an imagined nineteenth century still obtained. It was a world of deference and hierarchy, ruled by benevolent whitemen, proud of its traditions and resentful of any challenge to them' (p8). This image has been defended by the organised English cricket fraternity, by the chroniclers of the game (including Warner,

Altham and Swanton), by mainstream English politicians and the nobility, and by the media (broadsheet press, BBC radio and TV). However, a few revisionist historians (in the tradition of CLR James and John Arlott) 'spurred by the rapid changes and the sheer drama of cricket's latest encounter with the market and modernity [post-Kerry Packer] ... have refused to see cricket history or cricket itself as a refuge from reality ...' (p25). Marqusee's book, described by Caribbean Times cricket correspondent GD Govender as 'the most perceptive, challenging and irreverent book on cricket since [CLR James's classic] "Beyond a Boundary"' is clearly another in this small revisionist tradition.

One central theme which Marqusee develops and pursues throughout much of the latter part of the book is an interrogation from a revisionist tradition of the so-called Tebbit Test. Outspoken Tory MP, Norman Tebbit, had used cricket to illustrate another right-wing argument he was making to an American audience, about the dangers to Anglo-Saxon culture of the long wave of immigration from non-English speaking parts of the Third World. Too many Asian immigrants, Tebbit went on, failed what he called the 'cricket test'. 'When England played India or Pakistan [in England] whom did they cheer for? Its an interesting test, he said, Are you still harking back to where you came from or where you are?' (p137).

Perhaps the best response to Tebbit came from Tara Mukherjee, President of the Confederation of Indian Organisations, who made the point that black people were often judged by standards which whites did not apply to themselves. 'I would suggest', she argued, 'that he ask the English settlers in Australia which side they support when a test is played in Australia against the Australians'. One might also ask who Scottish, Welsh or Irish people living in England support, when sporting teams from their countries play against England in London or Birmingham. Or whether anyone raises an eyebrow when South African whites, who now live in Australia, continue to fly the [old] South African flag at the WACA, MCG or Sydney.

Marqusee's book brilliantly captures the deep racism, arrogance, hypocrisy, élitism and classism which still pervades English cricket. This is best brought out in Chapter 5, where he describes the trauma which English cricket underwent in attempting to come to terms with West Indian cricket supremacy, as well as the bitter controversies which surrounded the 1992 Pakistan tour of England. In the 'old days' when England regularly trounced the West Indies, English cricket commentators saw the latter as 'lovably unthreatening', often lauding them as 'colourful', 'unorthodox', 'joyous and uninhibited' (p145). By the 1980s all this had changed, following humiliating defeats inflicted on England by Clive Lloyd's bunch of cricket geniuses, including Michael Holding, Malcolm

Marshall, Viv Richards, Gordon Greenidge and Desmond Haynes. Now West Indian fast bowling was described as 'chilling', and 'vicious', the players, as big, 'loose-limbed' bullies. Marqusee makes the point that many West Indian cricketers (in their autobiographies) specifically acknowledged that being West Indian and black, in a world dominated by racism and colonialism 'had been in itself a powerful motivation for success in international cricket' (p149).

The Pakistan tour of England in 1992 began with memories of the 1987 tour to Pakistan and especially the Shakoor Rana-Mike Gatting face-to-face exchange of obscenities at Faisalabad still fresh in the minds of the English establishment. Although racial incidents and religious taunting characterised most of the series (English supporters chanted 'There's only one Salman Rushdie' on many occasions, and on another English supporters threw a severed pig's head into a group of Pakistani spectators), it was in the Third Test, that things really exploded. Rookie umpire Ken Palmer's decision to no-ball and then warn Aqib Javed for 'over-doing' fast, short-pitched bowling to (black) England tailender Devon Malcolm under rule 42.8 triggered a massive controversy, both in the UK and in Pakistan. The neutrality, fairness and famed greatness of English umpires, so much part and parcel of what English cricket was all about, were being challenged. At the end of this same test some commentators (including the cricket correspondent of the Labour-supporting *Daily Mirror*) began to wonder about the Pakistani's ability to swing the old, worn ball when new ones would not deviate much.

This latter issue returned to dominate the sports pages when virtually at the end of the tour South African-born former England batsman Allan Lamb accused the Pakistan fast bowlers of 'gouging' the ball with their nails. English cricket then exploded in a frenzy of accusations and vitriol. 'Cheats' was the cry, emanating from almost all sections of the English establishment. Forgotten was the growing success of Pakistan and their bowlers both on that tour, and on tours, countries and grounds, in so many different conditions all around the world. Among these successes was the 1992 World Cup. Few among the English establishment imagined that these successes had anything to do with skill, courage and determination. It was, for them, all about 'cheating'. When in 1994 England captain Mike Atherton was caught tampering with the ball by the TV cameras, the reaction in England was muted to say the least.

It was only much later that people began to talk glowingly about the art of 'reverse swing', now being attempted (not always successfully) by fast bowlers around the world. Even Jack Bannister (who led the rebel Derrick Robbins' to South Africa in 1974 following this country's expulsion from world cricket, and who now regularly returns to do commentaries here for the SABC on English,

Australian and New Zealand tours) himself no friend to Third World cricket (according to Marqusee), described Waqar and Wasim's achievement as the 'first genuine fast-bowling innovation since over-arm bowling was legalised in 1864'. What was new, he said, was the combination of high pace, late swing and the old ball (p.166).

In Chapter 6, Marqusee turns his attention to England and South Africa. His account is fascinating on a number of fronts. Firstly, for informing us of many forgotten or little known incidents. Like the fact that JTT Jabavu was the chairman of two cricket clubs; that Krom Hendricks, a 'coloured' player who impressed the 1892 English tourists, was left out of the South African side on the instructions of Cecil Rhodes who financed the tour; that Duleepsinghi was left out of the England side that played the touring 1929 South Africans after pressure from South African politicians; and finally that when Neil Harvey scored 151 not out for Australia against South Africa in Kingsmead in 1950 'every stroke was cheered by the black spectators sitting in their reserved places, one of whom was the young lawyer Nelson Mandela' (p186)¹.

Secondly, Marqusee traces the cosy relationship between English and South African cricket, which was only ended (changed would perhaps be a better description) a few years after the D'Oliveira affair of 1967. He demonstrates how desperately the English cricket establishment tried to save that tour and the planned 1970 tour of South Africa to England, and how only mounting threats of protests within England, led by former South African Peter Hain, and threats (as well as action) by West Indian, Indian and Pakistani cricket and political authorities against England cricket, forced the latter to drastically curtail its links with South Africa. By 1982 England found itself at last in the minority, when Sri Lanka was admitted to the ICC. It is worth quoting the response of South African cricketer, Peter Kirsten, to this development. He told readers of *The Cricketer* that the cause of South African cricket had been set back 'by the infiltration of the ICC by Sri Lanka (a very minor cricketing body). Now the four non-white member countries can vote against the three white member countries'. He complained that South African cricketers were being frustrated in their wish 'merely to take part in the contest of country versus country to show where one's identity lies' (p195). For Kirsten the idea of ever questioning what constituted a South African 'identity' never figured at all. And what Kirsten also failed to recognise was that the balance of power in cricket had changed, and that these 'non-white countries' had obtained a leverage in cricket which they did not enjoy in international forums like the United Nations, the World Bank and elsewhere. Cricket had become for these non-imperial nations 'a vehicle for anti-racist solidarity' (p211).

However, Marqusee also shows how, when official tours to and from South Africa were ended, some high-ranking members of the English cricket establishment continued unofficially to connive with the South Africans. This was most evident in their active support for the rebel tours, especially those in 1982 and again in 1989-90. This support was in large part based on the 'right' of an Englishman to earn his living in the way he chose, wherever in the world he wanted. When the TCCB grudgingly agreed to place curbs on those English players who came to South Africa with Gattling's 1989 rebels, they were heavily attacked both in the UK and South Africa for giving in to blackmail. Right-wing, Freedom Association Chairman, Norman McWhirter, referring to decisions taken by West Indies, India and Pakistan to ban those English cricketers going to South Africa from touring their countries in future, railed that 'foreign governments must be taught that whatever restrictions they place on their citizens, we still live in a free country'. And South African cricket captain Clive Rice lectured the TCCB on its responsibilities. 'England have backed down on those principles of freedom of choice which they hold dear'. Rice had conveniently 'forgotten' about that those very principles of choice and freedom, were denied to black South Africans under apartheid. Here, Marqusee reminds us, 'the English nation was harnessed to the free market, and both were placed at the service of the apartheid cause' (p202).

But the issues were about empire as much as about race. This is brilliantly argued by Marqusee in the following paragraph, which though lengthy, is worth quoting:

For many in English cricket, there was something right and just about the world of white South Africa, a world where people knew their places, where white skin brought comforts and privileges which only considerable wealth could purchase in England's dog-eat-dog world. Here was a hierarchical, leisured society like the long-vanished England embodied in cricket's traditions. No wonder that for them the defence of white South Africa merged so easily with a defence of 'England'. No wonder they were unable to understand that by playing in South Africa they were rejecting the multiracial reality not only of South Africa but of contemporary Britain itself ... The fact that in reality South Africa was one of the world's most unstable and disorderly societies did not stop some cricket writers from turning it into one of the many 'lost paradises' which resonate in the literature of the game (p207/8).

Marqusee points out how quickly after 1990 sections of the liberation

movement moved to promote the interests of (still predominantly white) South African cricket, even before real clarity was reached about their commitment to the cricket development programme for black South Africans. Too quickly for some like veteran anti-apartheid cricket administrator Hassan Howa who refuse to visit Newlands until his dying day in 1992, but not quickly enough for the (now older) lawyer who may have watched Neil Harvey in 1950. Nelson Mandela is quoted as follows in the early- 1990s: 'We have extremists who say that there can be no normal sport in a racial society ... but it seems to me that sport is sport and quite different from politics' (p212). An amazing statement if ever there was one, given the ANC's leadership of the sports boycott of apartheid South Africa.

Marqusee ends his account of the South African cricket saga with the following highly perceptive comment, which straddles the challenges which face South African cricket and the new society, economy and democracy in the post-apartheid era. 'The tensions between the dictates of the market and the promise of democracy which will course through South African society in the years to come will also run through South African cricket.' (p212).

This neatly brings us to some brief comments on cricket, society and politics in this country since South Africa's re-admission to international cricket in 1992. These comments are about loyalty, identity, and race, issues so central to Marqusee's overall project and to his South African chapter. In raising these issues my main objective is to suggest that a variety of factors (historical, cultural, social and political) may well combine to undermine the ANC-led government's perfectly reasonable hope and strategy that sport, including cricket, can be an important vehicle for racial reconciliation and nation-building in the new South Africa.

The first point to note is that in many democratic and non-racial societies issues of racism and prejudice in sport have been, and can still be, found. One needs only to think of racism in English football and in French rugby, among others. US baseball is another example. Fifty years after Jackie Robinson became the first African-American to play in the major leagues, and despite the success of many African-Americans since, racial prejudice still persists both in the sport itself and in US society. What these black players in the US did not do was fundamentally to disturb what Roger Angell calls 'the lumpish, Jabba-the-Hutt immobility of racial prejudice in the USA' (*London Review of Books*, April 24 1997). So even if more black South Africans in the near future make it into South African teams at whatever level, this would not necessarily signal the beginning of the end of racial prejudice in these sports, or help the national building process.

Secondly, South African cricket developments (post-1990) have to be understood within the context of the wider process of political and social change

which is occurring here. Regrettably such a contextualisation is not possible in this short review. I would say only this. That despite the enormous changes that have occurred in this country in the last seven years, there are many areas of ordinary life which remain delicately poised between the practise of the past and the promise of the future, where tensions and suspicions still exist, and where therefore a great deal of care and sensitivity needs to be exercised by those who participate in them, in part because their actions do serve as role models for the present and future generation of South Africans. Sport is one such area. But is this sensitivity to issues of race really being displayed?

Stereotypes about sports and racial 'identities' still persist among many South Africans. Like the *Daily News* reader who made the following comment in a letter attacking someone who had suggested that cricket has not made significant strides towards non-racialism: 'The realism of the situation is that generally, blacks in this country do not particularly want to play cricket. The fact that soccer is a giant sport in this country is because blacks wanted it ...' (April 15 1997). Such examples of racial stereotyping, based on a complete ignorance of the long histories of 'other-than-white' sports in this country, are still widespread. Neither are they confined to the more yobbish elements of our society. They will continue to be a barrier to fuller racial integration both in sport and society.

This brings me to a third point. No clear programme for sports transformation, development and monitoring was agreed to in the early 1990s as a pre-condition for the ANC's 'blessing' of white-dominated sports. And it has been suggested repeatedly that the ANC's hasty decision has enabled some of these sports codes to re-establish international links without a concurrent commitment to sports transformation and development. The recent furore over rugby administration and its development programme demonstrates how premature the ANC decision may have been.

In cricket, noticeably more progress has been made, both in terms of changes in the game's administration and in cricket development programmes, but many questions still remain over cricket. Why have there not been more black players (Indian, Coloured and African) in cricket teams, at national, provincial and even club levels five years after unification, and despite the fact that South Africans previously classified as Indian and Coloured have played cricket in this country for over 100 years? Are the changes at the top of cricket administration really significant, or are people like Ali Bacher and others (who pioneered rebel tours in the isolation era) still in reality calling the shots?

In KwaZulu-Natal and elsewhere, a group of (black) cricketers and administrators have constituted themselves into a pressure group (Cogoc) to challenge the cricket authority's transformation and development programme,

and have even spoken (unfortunately in my view) of establishing racial quotas for teams at all levels of the game in order to speed up change.

Let me end with a few general observations about cricket developments and race in South Africa post-1994. Many South African blacks, including prominent ANC politicians like Finance Minister Trevor Manuel have come out in support of touring sports teams, because of their inability to identify with South African teams. This is of course most clear in rugby, but is also increasingly emerging in cricket as well. Thousands of South Africans of Indian origin, for example, but perhaps excluding the young, would fail the 'Tebbit test' if it was applied here. For they enthusiastically support India or Pakistan against South Africa. These people love cricket passionately and many were eager to throw their weight behind the South African cricket team in the early-1990s, and especially during the 1992 World Cup. Now many have had a change of heart.

When one looks back at recent racial incidents, such as Steve Palfreman's racial abuse of West Indian Franklin Stephenson, and notices how lightly he got off, one must question the seriousness with which the new cricket authorities are committed to stamping out racial abuse on the field of play. Incidents such as Allan Donald's verbal abuse of Indian batsman Raul Dravid and Shaun Pollock's 'overzealous' send-off of Mohammad Azharuddin in the recent test series between these countries (may be qualitatively different from the Palfreman incident) but they are nevertheless symptomatic of a deeper ingrained racial socialisation, which is the product of an apartheid upbringing. These incidents sparked in KwaZulu-Natal a huge outcry, as is evident from the letter pages of local newspapers in the following months. Older readers may well remember that sometime in the 1970s, a prominent South African test player (and current senior cricket administrator) commented that the great Indian batsman, Sunil Gavaskar, was not even fit to clean Graeme Pollock's cricket boots. This is the kind of racial mentality which has been passed on to some of the generation presently representing South Africa.

It is also instructive to note that the South Africans were extremely 'well-behaved' in the 1997 test series against Australia. Was that only because they were humbled through the beating they were receiving on the field of play? There appears to be a view still prevalent among the new cricket authorities that playing against the 'Old Dominion' countries is what cricket is really all about. Playing on the Indian sub-continent is invariably seen as second best, despite the cricketing status of these countries. Like England often do, South Africa used every excuse in the book, to justify its relatively poor showing on the 1996 tour to India. But playing Australia is great - its about playing hard and fair, and when its over, its about the 'boys' having a beer together.

I have argued that there is a lot that sport, including cricket, still has to do before it can be said to reflect the realities of the new South Africa, and to command the unqualified support of sports-loving South Africans. In the end, however, my main aim is to point out that those who believe that sports in this country will inevitably (or quickly) help to break down racial barriers and build the new South African nation may well remain disappointed for many decades to come.

There is in all this, I would argue, some resonance with what Marqusee discovered about English cricket. If through its cricket, the English establishment stills imagines and plays out the rules and values of a long-lost colonial past, is it not the case that through sports like cricket, tennis, bowls and especially rugby, many white South Africans continue to live out the rules and values of their recently-lost apartheid past?

NOTES

1. I have tried unsuccessfully to corroborate this claim about Mandela's presence at Kingsmead.