

Introduction: Long run to freedom?

Ashwin Desai

...the level playing field is enclosed within a society which is anything but level. Access to the level playing field has always been unequal... But there is a sting in the tail. On sport's level playing field, it is possible to challenge and overturn the dominant hierarchies of nation, race and class...The level playing field can be either a prison or a platform for liberation. (Marqusee 1995: 5)

THE DAWN OF POST-APARTHEID South Africa witnessed a proliferation of writing on the value of sport in breaking down racial barriers and building a united nation. This was given incredible impetus in the immediate aftermath of the 1995 Rugby World Cup victory. Most dramatically, Nelson Mandela appeared at Ellis Park in a Springbok jersey, signalling the acceptance of this decades-long symbol of oppression as a national emblem for the rugby team. At the same time, this gesture was about more than the acceptance of a national emblem. Rugby, the symbol of Afrikaner nationalism, at once became the sport that would help to catalyse the building of a 'rainbow nation' predicated on a common identity, a common sense of 'South Africanness'. This project can be best summed up in a

comment originally made by Massimo d’Azeglio in 1870 in the context of the political unification of Italy: ‘We have made Italy, now we have to make Italians’ (D’Azeglio, cited in Hobsbawm 1996: 257). Inscribed in this nation-building project was also a commitment from the African National Congress (ANC)-led government to address the brutal legacy of apartheid.

This promise to redress the conditions of existence of those who had been oppressed under apartheid came to be captured in a simple but evocative ANC slogan: ‘A Better Life For All’. The party’s Reconstruction and Development Programme (RDP) of 1994 promised a heady mix of measures to address the expectations of the majority of South Africans, for whom poverty and minimal life chances were still a daily reality (ANC 1994). The RDP specifically addressed sport and recreation, referring to it as ‘[o]ne of the cruellest legacies of apartheid’ and signalling an emphasis on ‘the provision of facilities at schools and in communities where there are large concentrations of unemployed youth’. As was the way with the RDP, the document tempered this commitment with the recognition that ‘sport is played at different levels of competence and...there are different specific needs at different levels’ (ANC 1994: 72–73).

While in the aftermath of the 1995 World Cup it appeared that everyone could be part of ‘a talismanic club of equality’ (*Cape Times* 26 June 1995), the challenge of redress and change would see sport become, over the next decade and a half, an arena of intense engagement and contestation.

In discussions and debates around policy formulation for a ‘new’ South Africa, two approaches that could broadly be labelled ‘reformative’ and ‘transformative’ emerged. The transformative project sought to fundamentally transform the way society was structured; its economic emphasis was best captured in the popular slogan ‘growth through redistribution’. In sport, this emphasis would mean a bottom-up, mass-based approach, a position exemplified by Minister of Sport and Recreation Makhenkesi Stofile in 2004:

Our focus will be to build the right attitude and skills from below. In our view the starting place to achieve this is to get the basics

right. Community clubs must be revived and our children in township and village schools must be assisted to do sport. There is no short cut to this...Schools sport is the nursery for participants in senior competitions...We are strongly arguing here for a focussed attention on the schools and community clubs in building a broad base for talent scouting, developing and nurturing. This is the mass that will transform society and de-racialise it. We must go back to Wednesday afternoons as school sports days. But this cannot happen by chance.¹

The reformative approach, on the other hand, prioritised reconciliation and cooperative governance, in the interests of economic growth and acceptance into a neoliberal world order. In this scenario, the conditions best suited to facilitate an environment for doing business in South Africa would be created, and the logic underlying this paradigm was that the benefits of economic growth would ‘naturally’ trickle down to the poorest members of society; this argument was encapsulated in the adage ‘redistribution through growth’. In terms of this model there would be state intervention to de-racialise the uppermost reaches of the class hierarchy through pursuit of Black Economic Empowerment (BEE). In sport, this would be seen in the emphasis on high-performance centres and on the racial composition of national teams. Billions of rands would also be pumped into mega sports events such as the Football World Cup 2010.

It was the reformative project that won hegemony as the transition to democracy unfolded; it was encapsulated in economic policies in which the ‘twin objectives of restoring business confidence and attracting foreign investment seemed to swamp all other considerations’ (Murray 1994: 24).

The macroeconomic project had an impact on the configuration of classes in the country. Between 1994 and 2004 the number of South Africans who would be classified as ‘super rich’, in other words having assets in excess of US\$30 million (approximately R300 million), increased from 150 to 600 (*Sunday Times* 9 May 2004). Included in this list were some well-

known figures from the former liberation movement. The black elite had arrived, and its speed of wealth accumulation was astounding.

Alongside this there was an immediate post-apartheid rise in income inequality, which was slightly mitigated after 2001 by increased welfare payments, but which still meant that the GINI coefficient, a measure of a country's inequality, soared from below 0.6 in 1994 to 0.72 by 2006 (*Business Day* 5 March 2008).² According to Charles Meth, 'although the social wage may have improved conditions for some of the poor, the number of those in poverty increased by between one and two million between 1997 and 2002' (Meth 2004: 7). The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Report for 2003 outlined the state of South Africa's economy in unusually blunt language:

...highly skewed distribution of wealth; an extremely large earnings inequality; weak access to basic services by the poor, unemployed and underemployed; a declining employment outcome of economic growth; environmental degradation; HIV/AIDS, and an inadequate social security system. (UNDP 2003: 90)

The government's 'growth' model came in for persistent criticism from both inside and outside the Congress Alliance (consisting of the ANC, the Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), and the South African Communist Party (SACP)) as an elite model that benefited only the few. Blade Nzimande, the SACP general secretary and currently the Minister of Higher Education, for example, railed against 'filthy-rich millionaires' and argued that BEE favoured a select few at the expense of the working class (*Business Day* 25 May 2000). Service delivery protests that flouted the disciplinary wishes of the Alliance were breaking out across the country. The language of 'trickle down' redress was becoming difficult to sustain, given the everyday experiences of the poor.

Attempts at implementing improvements in sport, for example, ran up against 'budget constraints', a point made with rare honesty by Deputy Minister of Sport and Recreation Gert Oosthuizen in 2006:

To realise the benefits that can possibly accrue from our sector, we need three things; resources, resources and more resources. What we need is: infrastructure organisation, programmes, facilities, equipment and kit; human resources sufficient thereof, of good quality and with an appropriate disposition; and, finance that underpins both infrastructure and human resources...As a Department we have the smallest budget of all national government departments. We are committing some R10 per person per year to the participation of our people in sport and recreation activities presently. R10 can never make a substantial contribution to participation rates in sport and recreation... (Oosthuizen, cited in Mbeki 2006)

The Minister of Sport and Recreation, Makhenkesi Stofile, in further breaking down the figures, estimated that the government was budgeting 40 cents per child per year.³ Neville Alexander wrote in 2002:

The stark reality is that the political settlement of 1993–94 was based...on the assumption of a more or less rapid trickle-down effect deriving from the ‘miraculous’ increase in the rate of growth of the GDP...The real situation is that hardly any change has taken place in the relations of economic power and control. Moreover, in the foreseeable future and in terms of the prevailing system, no such fundamental change is to be expected. With hardly any exceptions, the sources of economic power remain in the hands that controlled them under apartheid. (Alexander 2002: 144–146)

In sport, the market was fingered for failing to redress the apartheid legacy. Butana Khompela, an ANC MP and head of the parliamentary Portfolio Committee on Sport and Recreation, fumed:

[B]ig businesses in the townships do not help black schools. You never get big bursaries for those children. Things will remain that way until business creates a kitty for black schools. Business is biased against black schools because the thinking seems to be that they get better returns when they invest in white schools. (*Sunday Times* 15 July 2007)

As opposition mounted, the ANC government spoke increasingly about ways of integrating the reformative and transformative approaches. Most famously, President Thabo Mbeki spoke of the need for both these approaches, in what has come to be known as the ‘two economies’ thesis. In 2003 he characterised South African society as divided between first and third world components, with the former defined as:

...the modern industrial, mining, agricultural, financial, and services sector of our economy that, everyday, becomes ever more integrated in the global economy. Many of the major interventions made by our government over the years have sought to address this ‘first world economy’, to ensure that it develops in the right direction, at the right pace...the successes we have scored with regard to the ‘first world economy’ also give us the possibility to attend to the problems posed by the ‘third world economy’, which exists side by side with the modern ‘first world economy’...Of central and strategic importance is the fact that they are structurally disconnected from our country’s ‘first world economy’. Accordingly, the interventions we make with regard to this latter economy do not necessarily impact on these areas, the ‘third world economy’, in a beneficial manner. (Mbeki 2003)

Mbeki argued that the solution lay in a tweaking of the neoliberal approach so that government intervention could support ‘the development of the “third world economy” to the point that it loses its “third world” character and becomes part of the “first world economy”’ (Mbeki 2003).

However, despite the ubiquitous use of the term ‘second economy’, there was little clarity about exactly what comprised this second economy, and the particular interventions that were to be made in the second economy were just as hazy. Adam Habib makes the point that:

...the entire analogy of two economies is itself misleading for it assumes the existence of a Chinese wall between the two; the one having nothing to do with the other...But what if, to stick with the

analogy, the policy reforms and interventions of the first economy is [sic] what creates the poverty and immiseration of the second?... The ANC had as its explicit mandate the [transcending] of the racial economic divide. Instead, however, the economic and social policies it pursued in the first decade of its rule began the process of deracialising the first economy, while simultaneously increasing the size and aggravating the problems of the second economy. (Habib 2005: 46)

Similarly, in sport the question could be posed: while a tremendous amount of resources has been thrown into mega stadiums, and the professionalisation of sport has created a stratum of highly paid players of all colours, what kind of development has trickled down to sport in Mbeki's 'second economy'?

How have the state and sporting organisations sought to redress the damage caused by 'one of the cruellest legacies of apartheid'? It is not difficult to discern that there are two sporting fields in South Africa, one of which is represented in the state-of-the-art high-performance centres and the incredible stadiums built in preparation for the 2010 World Cup. It is also to be seen in the old white schools, with their four or five rugby fields, floodlights, Olympic-size swimming pools and highly qualified coaches. The other sporting field consists of the sandpits that pass for football pitches, the lack of even rudimentary equipment, and the erosion of organised school sport. In shack-lands across the country footballers barely carve out a tiny piece of land that becomes 'home ground' for five to ten teams, before it is gobbled up by more shacks.

It must immediately be said that the chapters in this book reflect the fact that there are many sports facilities that lie 'in-between' these extremes. Rather than rely on a simplified dualism of 'two sports', many of the chapters illustrate the complexity, variation and interconnections in the reformative/transformative approaches in the context of changing class, race and gender configurations. One of the central questions that this volume asks is whether

the changes in South African sport are reinforcing a form of class apartheid in sports, and whether the present trajectory will deepen inequalities rather than progressively mitigate them.

Chapter Two, on swimming, by Ashwin Desai and Ahmed Veriava, begins by focusing on the neglect of black swimming during the apartheid era, and the struggle by black sportspeople to develop a culture of competitive swimming, given that by 1977 there was not a single Olympic-size swimming pool available to African swimmers. The chapter then sets out in fascinating detail the story of 'the fractious process that led to the establishment of a single controlling body for the sport'. The focus then shifts to examine actual 'performance' in the pool. Post-apartheid South Africa has witnessed the winning of a number of swimming gold medals at the Olympics, but all have been awarded to white swimmers. While SWIMSAs has rolled out a comprehensive programme to enhance a 'culture of swimming', there has been considerable pressure from the ANC and government to produce Olympic-standard black swimmers. The chapter explores the growing tension between the drive to create a grassroots culture of swimming and pressure to produce black Olympic qualifiers and medallists.

Chapter Three, by Ashwin Desai and Zayn Nabbi, focuses on the Jaguars, the only black rugby club in the premier division in KwaZulu-Natal. The chapter traces the history of the club, its courageous attempts to 'keep going' during apartheid and its experiences after the unification of the national rugby boards. The story of Jaguars provides important insights into the continuing salience of race and class, the legacy of apartheid geography and the 'unintended' consequences of transformation, which can rebound on the very constituency that policies are designed to benefit. Important in the story of Jaguars is the erosion of school rugby in the areas closest to the club's headquarters. The chapter describes how Jaguars has tried to overcome this by drawing in younger and younger players into youth teams, with varying degrees of success.

There are two chapters on football, the pre-eminent game in South Africa. Both chapters offer a necessary enrichment of understanding of the

game's significance in the country, given the celebratory environment created in the run-up to the 2010 World Cup.

Chapter Four, by Dale McKinley, deals with the inner workings of the South African Football Association (SAFA). It highlights the positive developments of achieving a unified soccer body together with some good performances on the field. However, McKinley argues that, in part because of the government's conservative macroeconomic programme, soccer at local level has been 'effectively privatised', while SAFA has adopted 'the institutionalisation of a status quo approach' to the administration and management of the game, where no one wants to really rock the boat too much lest it capsize – thus ending up with a paralysis of player development, management/training of coaches and staff, and the overall administration of the game itself. McKinley's searching critical analysis was given credence on the eve of the hosting of the World Cup 2010 when some of the leading coaches in the Premier Soccer League (PSL) lamented the state of the pitches on which their teams played. The coach of Ajax Cape Town, Mushin Ertugal, said that on one ground 'even cows wouldn't graze for fear of breaking a leg'. Manqoba Mngqithi of Golden Arrows backed Ertugal: 'We seem to be forgetting that after all the fancy infrastructure, football is about the pitch, the players, the technical staff and the supporters.' The response of PSL chief operations officer Ronnie Schloss was blunt: 'In the South African context certain things can be regarded as a luxury. Can we afford to reseed it every year? Who is going to finance it?' (*Sunday Times* 6 September 2009). In the context of billions of rands being spent on new stadiums, Schloss's comments only serve to reinforce arguments about the growing divide in South African soccer, and the potential for World Cup 2010 to exacerbate rather than mitigate the divide.

Chapter Five, by Prishani Naidoo and Zanele Muholi, considers the women's national soccer team Banyana Banyana. While highlighting the neglect of women's football – in the words of one informant, 'women's football is an afterthought' – the chapter also raises issues of sexual orientation and the struggle to confront the 'attempts at disciplining women's bodies and

rendering them functional to the heterosexist norm'. Flowing out of this, the analysis raises not simply issues surrounding the struggle against exclusion, but the form and nature of inclusion. The work of Naidoo and Muholi on sexual orientation is particularly prescient, given the murder in 2008 of former Banyana Banyana player Eudy Simelane, allegedly because she was lesbian. Mark Gevisser notes that while 'the prosecutor failed to establish a connection between Simelane's sexual orientation and her murder, her friends are convinced she was a victim of an epidemic of violence against lesbians, who are subjected to what is sometimes called "corrective rape" by men seeking to punish or cure them; or who feel that butch women are competing with them by straying into their territory' (*Sunday Times* 30 August 2009). Hopefully, read against the massive outpouring of support by South Africans for Caster Semenya after her success at the World Athletics Championships in August 2009 was challenged on gender grounds, the chapter will stimulate more research into issues relating to gender identity and (inter)sexuality, both inside sport and in the wider society.⁴

Chapter Six, by Justin van der Merwe, begins with an analysis of the state of athletics at a national level. Focusing on South Africa's re-admission to the Olympics, Van der Merwe dissects the highs and lows of the broad transformation agenda in South African sport. The chapter then uses this national backdrop to present a fascinating case study of the Worcester Athletics Club, based in the Boland in the Western Cape province. The chapter provides insights into the way that old apartheid racial categories persist as well as get challenged at the local level, as club athletics tries to deal with a long racial legacy while facing a myriad hurdles in the present conjuncture.

Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed, in Chapter Seven, focus on the journey of cricket at a national level after 1990. Cricket won a number of plaudits for its efforts to both de-racialise the game at the uppermost levels and also broaden its reach into 'previously disadvantaged areas'. The chapter seeks to assess the transformatory project of the United Cricket Board of South Africa (UCBSA), now known as Cricket South Africa (CSA), by excavating the limitations and potential of their development programme. The last part

of the chapter looks at the changing face of international cricket, especially the growing global reach of the Indian Premier League (IPL) and its implications for the 'local' game.

Chapter Eight, by Goolam Vahed, Vishnu Padayachee and Ashwin Desai, leaves the national stage and 'digs into' the way the transformation project has played itself out at provincial level. The focus is on the KwaZulu-Natal Cricket Union (κZNCU). While exploring a variety of issues arising from the cricket transformation agenda in the province, the chapter's analysis is centred on the historic construction of boundaries between Indians, whites and Africans as it pertains to cricket in the province, and the impact that these constructs have in the contemporary struggle for control of provincial cricket. In this context one of the key questions posed is whether the transformation agenda is creating tensions in the old black bloc of Africans, Indians and coloureds. An interesting aspect of this identity question is the way in which categories such as 'Indian' are fracturing further, with ethnicity and religion coming to constitute new lines of division.⁵

Emerging out of a major study on racial redress in post-apartheid South Africa, the chapters in this collection offer an in-depth look at how the dialectic between the reformative and transformative projects play out in the context of sport.

What is clear is that the divide between the two halves of sport in South Africa, like that between Mbeki's two economies, is increasing. There is an urgent need to make the kinds of demands and stimulate forms of mobilisation, both in the broader political arena and in sport, 'to realise intermediate victories, that, even when pursued and won, keep the long-term goal of ever broader transformation in sight and further empower the popular classes, organisationally and ideologically, to pursue it' (Saul 2006: 107). However, what the case studies in this volume show is that any transformative agenda must take cognisance of the changing terrain on which sport is played, as national sentiments both contest and reinforce global impulses. This approach could potentially create (once again) the conditions for sport to become a 'platform for liberation'.

The limitations of the present project, in terms of the number of sports covered in the book, are recognised. Hopefully it will serve to stimulate similar studies into areas such as hockey, surfing and disability sport. In a country that has trumpeted sport as a symbol of redress and nation-building, the lack of critical analysis of sporting activities is startling. To steal a word that is so much part of South Africa's transformation lexicon, this neglect needs to be urgently *redressed*.

Notes

- 1 www.info.gov.za/speeches/2004/04061511451004.htm
- 2 The GINI coefficient measures inequalities within a country, with a coefficient of 0 (zero) indicating extreme equality and a coefficient of 1 extreme inequality.
- 3 www.info.gov.za/speeches/2004/04061511451004.htm
- 4 See Swart W & Lelliott J, They've made Caster a freak, *Sunday Times*, 13 September 2009; Momberg E, I lied, but I'd do it all over again, *Sunday Independent*, 20 September 2009
- 5 All the contributors to the book recognise that race designations have no scientific validity. The categories white, coloured, Indian and African are used with an understanding that these are apartheid designations which, while not having any legislative basis that would permit apartheid-style discrimination in the post-1994 era, have been carried over into post-apartheid South Africa in many social and policy contexts. Similarly, while there are no more racially defined 'group areas', apartheid geographies continue to define much of South Africa's urban landscape. We use the term 'black' as a collective reference to African, Indian and coloured people in the discussions that follow.

References

- ANC (African National Congress) (1994) *Reconstruction and Development Programme*. Johannesburg: Umanyano Publications
- Alexander N (2002) *An ordinary country. Issues in the transition from apartheid to democracy in South Africa*. Pietermaritzburg: University of Natal Press

- Habib A (2005) The politics of economic policy-making. In P Jones & K Stokke (eds) *Democratising Development: The Politics of Socio-Economic Rights in South Africa*. Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers
- Hobsbawm E (1996) Ethnicity and nationalism in Europe today. In G Balakrishnan (ed.) *Mapping The Nation*. London: Verso
- Marqusee M (1995) Sport and stereotype: from role model to Muhammad Ali. *Race & Class* 36(4): 1–30
- Mbeki T (2003) Address of the President of South Africa. National Council of Provinces, November 11. Accessed 25 August 2006, <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/mbeki/2003/tm1111.html>
- Mbeki T (2006) Games are not Child's Play: Letter from the President. *ANC Today* 6(22). Accessed 25 August 2006, <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/anctoday/2006/at22.htm>
- Meth C (2004) Ideology and social policy. *Transformation* 56: 1–30
- Murray M (1994) *The Revolution Deferred: The Painful Birth of Post-Apartheid South Africa*. London: Verso
- Saul J (2006) *Development After Globalization: Theory and Practice for the Embattled South in a New Imperial Age*. Scottsville: University of KwaZulu-Natal Press
- UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) (2003) *South Africa: Human Development Report 2003*. Oxford: Oxford University Press