

# THE POLITICAL SOCIOLOGY OF POWER IN SPORT: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE 1956 AND 1981 SPRINGBOK RUGBY TOURS TO NEW ZEALAND

Pieter Labuschagne<sup>1</sup>

## *Abstract*

*The political sociology of power in sport has been undervalued as a field of study for many years. The predominant reason for this phenomenon is that the “innocence” of sport as a power politics vehicle shields the underpinning currents and trends of political manipulation of sport. In the formulation and application of policies, governments (or individual politicians) adopted either a value-driven or a strongly regulated approach to sport. In this regard the Springbok rugby tours to New Zealand in 1956 and 1981 provide a valuable insight into how governments’ policies could manifest in various opposing degrees of power politics. Max Weber’s theoretical apparatus to categorise sport action is regarded as very useful in categorising the various degrees of applied power politics. The investigation in the article was done on the basis of his exposition of sport. It is evident from the findings in the article that during and between the 1956 and 1981 Springbok tours significant changes occurred in both South Africa’s and New Zealand’s public policies, conceptualisation of sport and the application of power politics.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Up to the nineteenth century sport was predominantly a local and informal pastime. It was only in the 1960s, with the advent of universal communication and broad media attention, that sport became a global phenomenon. This was predominantly the result of the arrival of geostationary satellite transmission, such as the broadcast of the 1964 Olympic Games to a worldwide audience, which propelled sport into the global arena (Houlihan 1997:2).

The development of sport into a global phenomenon was accompanied by the growth of governmental awareness and the subsequent involvement and manipulation of sport for a variety of reasons. Governments’ sports policies are theoretically a link between (their) intentions and adopted actions, the aim being to reach an intended outcome in the future (Heywood 2003:401). Each of these variables has varying and different value levels which dictate the nature, structure and plan of action of the adopted policies. Governments’ involvement in and manipulation of sports policy therefore differ in terms of their value content, because of the intended differences in governments’ end goals and targets.

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1 Professor, Department of Political Sciences, UNISA. E-mail: labuspah@unisa.ac.za

The historical relationship between South Africa and New Zealand in sport, specifically rugby, therefore reflected contrasting end goals as a result of the role and status of different normative values in their formulated policies.

The rugby relations between South Africa (Springboks) and New Zealand (All Blacks) in the predemocratisation era fall into two distinctive and identifiable periods, namely 1921-1967 and 1967-1985. These two periods could also be comparatively divided into a preglobal phase, during which the 1956 Springbok tour to New Zealand took place, and a global phase, during which the 1981 Springboks toured New Zealand.

This long and dynamic relationship between the two powerhouses of rugby provides the opportunity for a comparative study to categorise, understand and explain the differences in their perception and evaluation of sport, and the role that values played in their respective sports policies. The comparison could also be enhanced by an application of the exposition of the German sociologist, Max Weber, of the different actors' social action. Weber's theoretical exposition provides a valuable framework for the methodological analysis of South Africa and New Zealand's social interrelationship and policies in rugby during the two tours.

## **2. PURPOSE OF THE ARTICLE**

The primary purpose of the article is to make a comparative analysis (Hague & Harrop 1995:66) of the 1956 and 1981 Springbok rugby tours to New Zealand. The objective is to use a case study to isolate the interrelationship between South Africa and New Zealand in order to demonstrate their contrasting public policies, social actions and ultimately their different sports policies.

Both tours (1956 and 1981) were hallmarked by predominant strong underlying social actions which directed their encapsulating policies. However, the challenge will not only be to identify their contrasting approaches to sport, but also to emphasise the significant paradigm value shift that took place in their respective policies from 1956 to 1981.

## **3. METHODOLOGY OF THE ARTICLE**

Sociology as a social sciences discipline *inter alia* entails the ability to explain and predict social events and patterns. One of the subfields of sociology, the sociology of sport, has the more nuanced challenge to construct theories to analyse, explain and predict sport-related behaviour, processes and structures (Cantelon & Ingham 2002:67).

Over time a number of theories have developed in (sports) sociology which are useful in explaining the nature of sport and could contribute to an analysis

of relationships in sport between different countries. In this regard Max Weber's influence and impact on sports sociology was without a doubt substantial to methodologically underpin an investigation. His insight into human action in sport is very useful, especially regarding the framework of human action which provides a valuable methodological means of ordering, outlining and explaining specific sports actions and relationships.

Weber's exposition was therefore the preferred choice to structure an investigation into the rugby relations between New Zealand and South Africa. The application of his broad methodology will enhance the understanding of the interrelationship of sport (rugby) with politics and shed light on the specific choices that were made and the outcomes that were achieved during this period. The behaviour, processes and structures of the two governments and rugby federations were politically very dynamic, packed with strong internal and external dynamics, providing a fertile field for investigation.

#### 4. WEBER ON THE SOCIOLOGY OF SPORT

Weber reiterates that to fully understand human action (in sport), an "ideal" type methodology should be developed to investigate the different approaches to sport (Cantelon & Ingham 2002:67). Weber's own basic outline is strongly based on rationalisation theory and he maintained that the process of rationalisation has a profound impact on life and on the way social action (such as sport) could be characterised (Cantelon & Ingham 2002:67).

Weber classifies social action into four ideal types, namely instrumentally rational, value rational, traditional and emotional. For the purposes of this article only the first two of the expositions will be outlined, because they are directly applicable to this specific investigation.

*Instrumentally rational action* involves regulatory action (policy) towards the attainment of a goal (or policy) that is deliberately selected by the actor from several available goals. This decision involves the rational consideration of alternative means to reach the end goal, after weighing up the advantages and disadvantages of each goal. One of the alternatives is then selected and deliberately pursued (Cantelon & Ingham 2002:67; Weber 1948:117). If *this* decision (or choice) is made on a central governmental level to accumulate political advantages, the result is that this instrumentally rational approach (as a sports policy) intrudes more and more into the private space of citizens. Therefore, if a government follows the instrumentally rational approach to sport the objective is not primarily to gain advantages for the participants, but also to benefit those on the periphery of the action. The agenda of the central government is to accumulate the "spin-off advantages", such as accumulated international prestige or the reinforcement

of a specific political agenda. In the process the athletes or rugby players are being partially alienated, because of the marked regulation and intrusion that take place at a central level.

In contrast, *value action* or *value-rational idealism* refers to action undertaken by decision makers (either government or sports federations) with a strong regard for formulated, ultimate or absolute values. As Cantelon and Ingham (2002:68) explain, value rationality can be seen in anyone who acts according to his or her convictions. Weber (1948: 25) uses the expression, "I did what I did because of my beliefs, it was my duty and my honour", to epitomise this approach.

The difference between instrumentally rational and value action is clearly located in the role that values play in the two approaches. Values play a more subservient role in instrumentally rational action, whereas values fulfil a more dominant role in value-rational idealism.

These two actions, the instrumentally rational and the value rational, will be utilised as an approach to analyse the underlying policies of the 1956 and the 1981 Springbok tours to New Zealand. In varying forms and different degrees the two contrasting actions featured in the formulation of their governments' and federations' respective sports policies and the way in which the tours to New Zealand were conducted, within the prevailing political context of that period. The methodology of the article will therefore be to outline both tours (1956 and 1981) in relation to the dominant role or subservient role that values played in the face of domestic political realities.

The power-political relationship which structures, confines and demarcates social action flows deductively from the broader political context of the respective countries. It is therefore understandable that South Africa's and New Zealand's application of power relationships from a central level downwards to their sports policies would differ, because of the development from different contrasting historical and political vantage points and the different appreciation of basic values.

To keep politics from creeping into sport is an insurmountable task. Power politics regularly camouflages itself under the innocent cloak of sports policies and seeps into the regulatory network of sport. This phenomenon is encapsulated in Weber's instrumentally rational approach to sport, where specific political goals are selected and pursued, while values (in sport) are greatly underplayed in the process.

Furthermore, in relation to the Gramscian notion of hegemony (the ideological and cultural domination of one class over the other), this political domination is specifically achieved by engineering consensus by controlling the cultural forms and pastimes of society such as sport (Jarvie 2006: 29). In this manner the former South African apartheid regime controlled all cultural forms, including sport, by developing a strong regulatory and instrumental approach. In the process basic human values for the larger society were grossly neglected.

According to Russell (Hargreaves 1986:3), power is the core concept of the social sciences and with sport intrinsically part of (political) sociology it is therefore natural that it forms an integral part of this hegemony. Hargreaves (1986:3) explains that when the term “power” is used, it actually refers to a relationship between classes and different agents. The outcome of this relationship is determined by the agents’ access to relevant resources and the use of appropriate strategies in specific conditions when in competition with other agents. Sport is one cultural form in which these agency/power dynamics can be studied, because as Sugden and Tomlinson (2002:9) explain, power relationships are inherently social relationships.

With this theoretical outline in mind, the two periods (1956 and 1981) will now be outlined, in relation to Weber’s methodological categorisation of social action.

## **5. SOWING THE SEEDS: SOUTH AFRICA’S REGULATORIAL APPROACH TO SPORT**

During the apartheid era South Africa followed a strong regulatory approach (instrumentally rational) to sport (rugby) that eventually initiated and fuelled its sports isolation. The institutionalised segregation in the political and socio-economic domains was directly reflected in sport, where strict separation was enforced between racial groups, with very little regard for basic human rights and values. South Africa’s discriminatory regulations and racial discrimination in sport, with little regard for basic values, therefore led to its expulsion from almost all sports codes in the 1960s, most noteworthy in 1976 from the International Amateur Athletics Federation at its congress in Montreal (Le Roux 1984:39) and the International Olympic Committee in 1970. The last Olympic Games that South Africa was allowed to participate was the 1960 Rome Olympic Games (Wallechinsky 1984:xix).

However, in spite of this global condemnation, South Africa’s historic ties in sport with New Zealand allowed for continued, but limited international contact from 1964 to 1981. The two countries sustained a rugby relationship in direct contrast to South Africa’s almost blanket isolation and alienation in sport. The Springboks were able to exploit their rugby brotherhood and the “kith and kin” sentiment to the maximum with the All Blacks, thereby keeping the rugby channels between the two countries open. New Zealand remained one of a few countries that steadfastly maintained contact and who played against the Springboks in spite of the global call for a blanket boycott and the universal condemnation of ties with South Africa. In reality, however, international pressure was mounting and consecutive rugby tours between the two countries were accompanied by increased international pressure and controversy. The 1976 All Black tour to South Africa was internationally sharply condemned and in protest over 22 African

countries withdrew from the Montreal Olympic Games because of New Zealand's participation in the Games.

During the early 1980s the international tide of opposition against South African apartheid policies reached a pinnacle relegating the country to a beleaguered state, isolated on almost every front in the international sphere. South Africa, traditionally proud of its sporting prowess, was almost totally excluded from international competition, expelled from membership of most major international bodies, such as the International Olympic Committee, the International Cricket Board, the International Amateur Athletics Federation and all other major organisations. (However, South Africa managed to remain a member of the International Rugby Board, but scheduling tours to South Africa became an increasing headache.)

## **6. SPORT IS WARFARE BY OTHER MEANS – THE 1956 SPRINGBOK TOUR TO NEW ZEALAND**

The defeat in 1956 of the All Blacks rugby team by the visiting Springboks during the Wellington test created uproar throughout the two-island state (Dobson 1996:95). This defeat in the second test against their perennial foe, the Springboks, gave rise to dreaded visions of a second consecutive home series defeat and also a repeat of the 1949 humiliation when the All Blacks were whitewashed during their four-test tour to South Africa. Tiny White, captain of the All Blacks, recalled how the charismatic New Zealand rugby official, Tom Pearce, exclaimed after the defeat that the economy would collapse if they would lose the series against the Springboks (Howitt 1975:296).

The defeat created a wave of sheer terror that swept frenetically through New Zealand. Every available resource was poured into a counteroffensive to turn the tables in the two remaining tests against the Springboks. However, this excitement cloaked the deeper normative issues and questions in New Zealand, such as continued rugby relations with South Africa with its racial policies, which had already impacted negatively on their own societal arrangements and societal values.

However, in reality the impetus during the period from 1921 to 1967 to maintain rugby contact with the Springboks was so strong that South Africa's "racial prejudices and discrimination" were allowed to be "exported" to New Zealand. The New Zealand rugby officials directly, and the politicians indirectly, "aligned" themselves with the South African politicians' "request" to exclude Maori players from their national teams against the Springboks on the flimsy pretext that "the Maori should not be exposed to the insult of apartheid" (Maclean 2008:4). However, the stark reality was that the Maoris were not welcome in South Africa. As a conciliatory gesture the New Zealand Rugby Football Union (NZRFU)

therefore excluded top Maori players from the 1928 All Black team that toured South Africa. This pattern was also followed during the 1949 and 1960 tours, when the top Maori players had to look on despondently as the ship sailed from New Zealand without them.

## **7. 1956 SPRINGBOK TOUR TO NEW ZEALAND**

### **7.1 South Africa's instrumentally rational approach to sport**

South Africa's sports policy in the period leading up to and during the 1956 Springbok tour fits squarely into Weber's categorisation of the instrumentally rational action approach to sport.

From as early as the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, South African politicians freely regulated sport to achieve political ends. From early on politicians used sport as an instrumentally rational mechanism to strengthen and ensure a segregationist society in South Africa. In two of the major sporting codes, rugby and cricket, politicians and even sports administrators ensured that the driving sociological and political imperative behind sports policies would be segregation, thereby nullifying the inherent quality of sport as a unifier in a diversified society.

As early as the nineteenth century the Prime Minister of the Cape, Cecil John Rhodes, used cricket in his efforts to create a segregationist structure in Southern Africa (Murray & Vahed 2009:43). Rugby football followed closely behind and as Booley (1998:14) explained, its administrators in the early twentieth century were equally determined to launch rugby on its segregated path, thereby depriving rugby of its potential at the social level to unite the diverse racial sectors in the country. In this manner sport strengthened the existing colonial legacy and patriarchal rule as an instrument for regulating South African society.

The National Party with its vision of apartheid policies won the 1948 general election and adopted an even stronger regulatory approach to sport, which accelerated and institutionalised the segregation process in South Africa. The new regime enacted various segregationist laws and bylaws to ensure that sport in the country mirrored the national policy of apartheid. In 1964 Jan de Klerk, the Minister of the Interior, announced a strong regulatory sports policy which reinforced the prevailing position of separateness and inequality between the various races in South Africa (Allison 1986:115) with the result that sport became highly centralised and strongly regulated. As Keech (2002:167) explains, the predominately (white) Afrikaner authorities progressively used sport on the domestic level as a tool to maintain their political ascendancy over the English community and the non-white population.

Griffiths (2006: 126) describes this manifestation of Afrikaner Nationalism and the total control of rugby through the Afrikaner "Broederbond" (Brotherhood)

(AB) organisation as all-encompassing. The AB was a secret Afrikaner organisation established to promote Afrikaner culture by ensuring that members of their organisation were placed in positions of influence. For example, of the eight players that led South Africa on the rugby field between 1956 and 1965, only two were not members of the AB and they captained the team for a mere three test matches between them (Griffiths 2006:127). (It should however be noted that the President of the South African Rugby Board, Dr Danie Craven, was not a member of the AB and he was steadfastly strongly opposed to their interference in sport.)

The control of rugby was in the hands of Afrikaner Nationalists, a problem that was exacerbated for decades by a government that exploited sport to strengthen its apartheid policies and fragmented society into separate racial entities. Sport was used as an instrument, not to unite and to build a nation, but to divide and to establish a divided South Africa. In reaction the non-racial sports movements, internally and externally, rallied around the normative principles of establishing unity and equity through sport in South Africa (Keech in Sugden and Tomlinson 2002:285).

The night before the team left on the 1956 tour, the coach and manager, Danie Craven, was approached by a man who informed him that his Assistant Manager, Mr B de Villiers, had been planted by the AB to keep an eye on him or even replace him if things were not going according to plan (Clayton & Greyvenstein 1995:134).

The AB's underlying motive for this regulatory control of rugby was to establish Afrikaner supremacy on all fronts, both internationally and at home. This had already been partly achieved in rugby when the 1949 All Black touring team was whitewashed, followed by the highly successful 1951/1952 tour to the United Kingdom. This meant that only one team stood between the Springboks and total international supremacy and the objective was therefore to achieve a second tour victory over the All Blacks in their own back yard.

However, the Springboks' claim to the world rugby crown was by no means secure. During the 1955 British Lions rugby tour to South Africa the Springboks were forced to share the series 2-2 with their traditional foe. When the Springboks lost the second test against the Lions, people were heard to say "that there were too many English players in the side" (Griffiths 2006:234). When the Springboks went on to lose another test and shared the series, this was met with stunned silence and disbelief that the *Boers* could have been defeated by the English (Grundlingh 1995:115). Players got death threats, and Danie Craven and the captain, Stephen Fry, were singled out for this kind of attention (Craven 1955:90).

## 7.2 New Zealand's approach to sport: value-rational idealism

In sharp contrast to South Africa's instrumental-rational approach to sport, New Zealand adopted a different approach, which was less regulatory and less state controlled. From the outset New Zealand sports federations were quasi-autonomous

with a significant part of the authority over sport delegated from the central government to the respective sporting codes (Houlihan 1997:67).

In New Zealand sport historically fulfilled a different, more integrationist role in society, which contrasted sharply with South Africa's segregationist approach. Rugby played a key role during the early foundational period in the social transformation of New Zealand and "assisted" politically and socially in the dismantling of the inherited social contradictions of colonial, patriarchal and bourgeois rule. The approach in New Zealand sport was accommodating and sport was not used as a regulatory and rational mechanism to exercise control over and enforce racial supremacy onto society. Weber (1968: 25) would classify this approach as a value-rational action, which demonstrates a high regard for absolute values, such as enhancing equality through sport. For example, the first Maori player in a New Zealand rugby team was recorded as early as 1872, more than 90 years before South Africa included a non-white player in one of their national teams.

In New Zealand rugby undoubtedly played a critical role to strengthen the nation-building process, in order to rid the former colony of the potentially dangerous side effects of colonialism. The manner in which rugby was organised in New Zealand enhanced social transformation and destroyed the social contradictions of colonial, patriarchal and bourgeois rule. This social transformation gave New Zealand rugby a national identity and pride in their status as a nation. In stark contrast, South Africa exploited sport to socially engineer the process of social transformation and to reinforce the social contradictions of colonial, patriarchal and bourgeois rule on the broader society.

However, in spite of New Zealand's value-based integrative approach to sport the NZRFU allowed themselves to be "dictated" to in terms of the racial composition of their teams against South Africa during the pre-global period. The NZRFU continued to bow to South African racial policies by excluding Maori players from their touring sides to South Africa. This happened during the 1928 and 1949 tours and also during the triumphant 1937 Springbok tour when a game against a Maori team was omitted from the itinerary. (Outstanding players, such as George Nepia – one of all time great All Blacks – and Jimmy Mill were in this manner excluded from the 1928 All Black touring party to South Africa.)<sup>2</sup>

Increased criticism was levelled at the NZRFU that by conceding to the "request" to exclude Maori players from their teams, they were actually importing apartheid into New Zealand. This criticism was countered by the NZRFU with the flimsy argument that it was necessary "to protect them (the Maori players) from the insult of apartheid" (Maclean 2001:4).

2 P van der Schyff, an established author on the history of sport, actually suggested that the Moaris refused to play against the Springboks (Van der Schyff 1988:98-102).

This argument, in spite of its superficiality, was not initially challenged because the New Zealanders were united in their determination to defeat their old adversaries on the rugby field, a foe threatening New Zealand's status as the super power of rugby. The rugby fraternity was therefore largely prepared to "legitimise" the presence of the 1956 Springbok team in spite of the fact that the team was racially discriminative and was based on the underlying ideological premise of reinforcing colonial patriarchal and bourgeois rule. New Zealand society at large was eager, almost to the point of obsession, to flex their international muscles and rugby was the one commodity in which they could really assert themselves and gain international prestige.

The New Zealand society at large was relying on the supremacy of the All Blacks in rugby to obtain international prestige, but the problem was that they were seriously challenged by their traditional foe, the Springboks. If the 1956 Springbok team would manage to win the series, on top of their successes in the two earlier tours in 1921 (when they shared the series) and 1937 (when they won the series) and a 4-0 whitewash in South Africa this would have been a disaster for New Zealand rugby. No wonder Colin Meads (Howitt 1975:194) described the 1956 tour as nothing short of total war. The violence was on the rugby field and the "war" with South Africa was waged with a passionate determination to beat the old enemy, which pushed the racial issues into the background (Prince 1956:154).

Therefore, in spite of the fact that the Springboks were an "all white" team and represented an unjust society this elicited few protests in New Zealand against their presence or the absence of black players. A further reason for the lack of opposition was that New Zealand in the 1950s was demographically and socially substantially different in composition and outlook from the position 30 years later (during the 1981 tour). In 1956 the idea of a British Empire was still very strong, with its added cohesive dynamics, such as the values of "kith and kin" and the brotherhood of rugby. Therefore, in spite of the fact that the idealism of a value-rational approach was still the predominant underlying value in New Zealand's approach to sport, it included the notion of not prescribing to others how to conduct their affairs – especially not to "our kith and kin" in South Africa, who fought side by side with them (the New Zealanders) in the Second World War. There was also the overarching concept of a British Empire and the accompanying assurances that it holistically provided for a "White Man's Club."

## **8. THE 1981 TOUR TO NEW ZEALAND – THE WINDS OF CHANGE**

South Africa's instrumentally rational approach to sport was forced into the international spotlight during the 1965 Springbok tour which profoundly affected further relations with New Zealand. On 15 September 1965 Dr HF Verwoerd,

the then Prime Minister of South Africa, announced that future All Black rugby teams would not be allowed to tour if they included Maori players. This regulatory approach to sport served to strengthen South Africa's racial policies, but accelerated the level of opposition to its racial policies and therefore served as a watershed incident in its rugby relations with New Zealand.

Verwoerd's public announcement forced the New Zealand authorities for the first time to take firm action. In reaction the NZRFU declared that they were no longer prepared to compromise their value-rational approach to sport to satisfy the apartheid regime and as a result the 1967 All Black tour to South Africa was cancelled. On the international front the favourable scenario that had protected South Africa for so long also changed. South Africa was expelled from the British Commonwealth and internationally the pressure was building up against its racial policies.

However, the pressure was temporarily relieved on the rugby front, when the South African government eventually caved in on the issue and allowed Maori players to tour South Africa as "honorary whites". The All Blacks touring party for the first time included not only "coloured players" but also a number of players who were openly outspoken in their opposition of South African racial policies and the way rugby was being exploited as an instrument of political superiority. When the All Blacks lost the series the outspoken scrumhalf Chris Laidlaw articulated the concerns of many when he said that it would be a pity if South Africans saw the victory of the Springboks as a "triumph for white domination" (Steyn 1972:216).

### **8.1 The 1981 Springbok tour to New Zealand: the instrument-rational approach**

During the early 1980s important political changes were taking place in South Africa with the government's rigid instrument-rational approach to sport being gradually watered down in the face of both external and internal pressure. As a result of the pressure the ideals of value-rational idealism slowly gained a foothold in South Africa's existing policies, with values such as equality in sport gaining momentum.

Significant political changes were noticeable in South Africa, such as that rugby clubs were opened to all players and that the first mixed rugby trials were held. At the junior level of rugby changes were also evident, for example the first non-white school team was allowed to play during the annual prestigious Craven Week for schools (Griffiths 1998:115). At the broader political level talks were taking place between the various role players, which eventually led to a fully inclusive democracy, less than a decade later.

However, in spite of the positive changes in 1981, it was too early to classify the policies of the South African government and rugby federation as value-rational idealism, because many of the changes (allowing Maori players to tour South

Africa and the inclusion of a coloured player, Errol Tobias, in the 1981 team) were superficial with restrictive substance.

The 1981 Springbok team to New Zealand was led by Wynand Claassen, who was fiercely opposed to the control of the “Broederbond”. The majority of the players in the touring party accepted (albeit reluctantly on the part of some) the values of racial equality and realised the wrongs of apartheid.

Unfortunately the opponents to the tour saw the changes that had been made as “too little, too late”, because the New Zealand society had been transformed from its passive stance of 1956 towards racial issues. In 1981 large sectors of the population was no longer prepared to sacrifice their consciences for the sake of rugby supremacy. The escalating political energy was dynamically channelled and culminated in the traumatic events of the 1981 Springbok tour to New Zealand.

The 1981 Springbok management team, led by Prof. Johan Claassen, adopted the ill-advised tactic of trying to disassociate themselves from the instrumental-rational approach (Louw 1987:93). They insisted that they were in New Zealand “not to concern themselves with politics” but to play rugby and were therefore only prepared to answer questions on rugby issues (Claassen 1985:115). However, the hostile media were not prepared to be stonewalled on the issue of values and human rights and were relentless in their criticism of the tour.

## **8.2 New Zealand perspective: value-rational idealism**

In 1981 New Zealand was clearly a different place from 1956, when the country was united in an overwhelming urge to avenge themselves against the Springboks on the rugby field. New Zealand had lost the cohesion since then and was no longer united on values such as its perception of the role of sport and the justification for the 1981 Springbok tour.

The fact was that geopolitical changes since 1956 had altered New Zealand’s social landscape. In the 1950s the country’s culture was resolutely rural, dominated by the farming community, which was the financial backbone of the economy. Although the majority of the population lived in the cities, New Zealand was predominantly suburban and a “quiet” society. The 1956 tour furthermore took place during the pre-global era and many of the New Zealanders were living in the mindset of relative international aloofness and political passivity, without a clear understanding of the political situation in South Africa, especially since the 1948 institutionalisation of apartheid.

However, demographic changes during the 1970s and 1980s transformed the New Zealand demographic landscape drastically, to such an extent that the cities became more dominant than the rural farming communities. Auckland grew from 300 000 citizens in the fifties to more than a million in the eighties, with an ethnically more diverse population, because rural Maoris and Pacific Islanders were

entering the cities in large numbers (MacClean 2008: 120). The general public was also better informed about political events in South Africa, because television coverage brought the 1976 Soweto uprising into their living rooms. In stark contrast to the position during the 1956 tour, New Zealand society in the 1970s had entered a global phase and had a stronger appreciation of their place in the interconnected global arena.

Therefore, in contrast to the welcoming attitude of the average New Zealander in the 1950s, in the 1980s there was a vociferous opposition, prepared to express value-rational idealism towards sport. Those objecting to the tour were motivated by broader values and idealism and they made sure that they had done their homework this time (Dobson 1996: 156). One of the leaders, Tim Shadbolt, voiced the opposition of the new generation of Auckland students to the older generation's support of the tour in an organisation named Halt All Racist Tours (HART). Using strong symbols, such as street theatre and a massive presence at rugby matches to encircle the beleaguered "enemy", HART was instrumental in setting the stage for severing ongoing rugby ties with South Africa.

Even among the All Black players the opposition to a continued relationship with South Africa and its racial policies was mounting. A number of players regarded universal issues, such as human rights, as a higher priority than playing rugby against the Springboks. Ken Gray, undoubtedly one of the best props in the world in his day, withdrew from the 1970 All Blacks tour to South Africa on moral grounds. This was a severe blow to the All Blacks and Colin Meads, who subsequently became the New Zealand rugby player of the century, thought that if Gray had toured South Africa they could have probably won the series (Veysey 1974:174).

During their 1981 tour to New Zealand the All Blacks captain, Graham Mourie, declared that he was not prepared to play against the Springboks (Claassen 1985:132). In spite of these attitude changes in New Zealand society their Prime Minister, Robert Muldoon, was seen to be out of step with the prevailing mood of the younger New Zealanders. Muldoon was afraid to oppose the 1981 Springbok tour and adopted a strong instrumentally rational approach towards the tour. The reason for this was the prevailing belief that the opposition Labour Party's decision to postpone the Springboks' 1973 tour to New Zealand had been responsible for the party's fall from government (Dobson 1996:156). Muldoon decided, rather opportunistically, to borrow the South African line of "keep politics out of sport", a regulatory approach that fell out of favour internationally and reflected a politically naive understanding of the nature of politics.

Muldoon's National Party's 1975 election campaign was therefore built on this outdated dictum of "keeping politics out of sport" and he was determined to rationally ensure that the police force was employed to ensure that the tour would go ahead. As a result he was criticised for being contemptuous of tour opponents, especially African

leaders' opinions, because he refused to meet the leader of the Supreme Council for Sport in Africa, Abraham Ordia. Muldoon afterwards declared that Ordia was not a government representative, but simply a sports administrator (Dobson 1996:156).

Support for the 1981 tour predominantly came from the older generation and the majority of the rugby players who were vehemently defending their position and right to play rugby and to maintain sporting contact with South Africa. After the cancellation of the 1973 tour the great Colin Meads expressed his regret about the possibility of there being no rugby contact with South Africa: "I feel sorry for the young players of today. They *need* to play against the Springboks; tradition and the game of rugby demand that" (Veysey 1975:175).

Although the opponents of the tour were in the minority, they were no longer prepared to allow the prestige and tradition associated with rugby to stand in the way of what they believed was right. It was especially the younger generation that rose up in protest against the tour and voiced their belief that New Zealand was out of step with the rest of the world with its outdated notion of "not mixing politics and sport".

Although the tour was completed, it was severely disrupted by opponents to the tour. The Springboks were virtually under siege behind barbed wire and one of the games, against Waikato, was cancelled. The relative "success" of the anti-tour movement was grounded in the broad international condemnation of sporting contact with South Africa.

## **9. THE CASEY JUDGMENT AND VALUE-RATIONAL IDEALISM**

When the 1985 All Black tour to South Africa was cancelled it effectively meant that value-rationalism triumphed over the instrumentally rationalist approach to sport. Judge Casey's judgement effectively stopped the 1985 All Black tour to South Africa and ended rugby ties with their old arch foe.

Earlier two New Zealand barristers had filed an application in the New Zealand High Court to stop the tour and based their application on the fact that the NZRFU was obliged to follow their own constitution, which stated as one of its objects "to control, foster and develop the game of rugby". Their application stated that the proposed tour would harm rugby football in New Zealand. Amidst the legal wrangle the tour was cancelled because the injunction was brought late, which meant that there was not sufficient time to oppose it before the tour would kick off.

Furthermore, for the first time there were stronger dissenting voices in the NZRFU with a split in the rugby fraternity noticeable. Representatives of Auckland and North Harbour, together with Ray Harper of Southland and Peter Wild of Nelson Bay, argued that the tour would damage rugby at school level (Dobson 1996:173). However, the majority of the members of the NZRFU were still in favour of the tour and voted that it should go ahead. In the end this was an academic exercise,

because the injunction and the decision by the courts meant that if the tour had gone ahead the NZRFU would have been held in contempt of court.

These developments during the 1980s meant that value-rational idealism had triumphed, but the “victory” was short-lived, because rugby was fast developing from an amateur sport to a professional one. There was worldwide frustration with amateur rugby, which was still organised on a semiprofessional basis, with clandestine payments to rugby players in a cloak and dagger style. In 1986 the All Blacks therefore simply defied the ban by touring South Africa as “individuals” (the Cavaliers). Although the New Zealand players denied this, it was widely rumoured they were handsomely paid by their South African hosts, which paved the way for professionalism and defeated the concept of a value-driven approach to sport.

## 10. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The turmoil and hardships of 1981 and 1985 could have been prevented if the same political and social determination had been exercised earlier to force South African sport to rid itself of the social contradictions of colonial patriarchy and bourgeois rule. The initial accommodating and conciliatory approach of the NZRFU had undoubtedly served to reinforce and maintain South Africa’s pattern of discriminatory policies in sport (Howitt 1975:158).

South Africa’s encompassing isolation in sport made a substantial contribution to pressurise the apartheid regime to dismantle its apartheid structure and rational approach to sport. After South Africa’s democratisation and the unification of the various rugby federations into one body, the instrumentally rational approach to sport was replaced by a more strongly value-orientated approach. This value-rational idealism approach to sport propelled the Springbok team to a victory during the final of the 1995 Rugby World Cup against the more fancied All Black team. This victory in the Rugby World Cup created a wave of nationalism and a feeling of togetherness which swept through the once deeply divided society. The late Steve Tshwete, who was the then Minister of Sport, exclaimed afterwards that never in the history of the country the people were so solidly united (Labuschagne 2004:123).

However, sadly, since the glory days of 1995 the new government reverted to a stronger instrumentally rational approach to sport to accelerate the pace of sports transformation. Again it resulted in the fact that the level of political interference reached unacceptable levels.

It is evident from this discussion that politics navigate sporting action and that values are mostly subservient to political agendas. Sport is a highly prized commodity, which ensures the dominance of the instrumentally rational approach to sport and the fact that sport as a commodity will always be exploited by politicians for prestige and as an instrument of manipulation. In the end the dictum

of Lord Killanin, former President of the International Olympic Committee, is still as valuable as when it was originally made. Killanin declared that since it is impossible to keep politics from sport the only reasonable alternative is to keep it within manageable levels (Killanin & Rhoda 1979:115).

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