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## Roundtable on *Invictus*

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### I

#### ILLUSIONARY *INVICTUS*: REVISITING THE 1995 RUGBY WORLD CUP

Albert Grundlingh

Saturday 24 June 1995 was a red letter day in South Africa. Before a capacity crowd at Ellis Park stadium in Johannesburg and with millions more watching the finals of the Rugby World Cup on television, the Springbok team narrowly managed to beat the much vaunted New Zealand All Black team in extra time through a drop goal by the fly half, Joel Stransky. South Africa was the new rugby champion of the world. On hand to present the Cup to the victorious captain, Francois Pienaar, was South Africa's most celebrated prisoner-turned-president, Nelson Mandela, decked out, in an unmistakable show of identification and support, in Pienaar's spare number 6 jersey. It was the perfect climax to a tournament that saw South Africa taking pride of place in the rugby world after the international sports isolation of the apartheid years. Unprecedented scenes of mass euphoria followed the Springbok victory; it unleashed a celebration of exhilarating excess, of hugs and hurrahs, of merriment and madness. From the staid, tree-lined, white suburbs to the dusty black township streets, it appeared that black and white South Africans had discovered a sense of common unity as the victory was toasted across the land. Given the country's painful history of division and conflict, and, in the sporting arena, the longstanding perception of rugby as the game of the Afrikaner oppressors, such celebrations were extraordinary and thrilling.

It was this occasion that launched the film *Invictus*, which exploits the dramatic elements of the event and popularizes its "feel-good" dimension on a global scale.

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Adding to the film's appeal were actors of the caliber of Morgan Freeman (as Nelson Mandela) and Matt Damon (as Francois Pienaar). *Invictus* is based on John Carlin's book, *Playing the Enemy: Nelson Mandela and the Game that Made a Nation* (2008). While fluently written, the book borders on a hagiography of Mandela. It asserts but does not interrogate the symbolic life of the 1995 World Cup victory as a foundational moment of nation building. But as one of the few critical commentators on the 1995 event recently observed, the occasion needs instead, to be recognized as "a transient moment of national euphoria gift-wrapped in rainbow nation romanticism."<sup>1</sup> The euphoria, in other words, needs to be disaggregated. What were the underlying factors that accounted for the outcome and how was the event choreographed?

For a fuller understanding of the contextual forces that helped to shape the public sphere during the time of the World Cup, one has to begin with an examination of the attempts to re-model the Springbok rugby ethos along appropriate post-apartheid lines. Springbok rugby, as I noted above, has long been associated with the Afrikaner and apartheid, despite the fact that both 'coloureds' and black people had a long history of playing rugby in the Western and Eastern Cape. The reconciliation between the anti-apartheid rugby organizations and the mainly white establishment organizations that followed in the wake of the political transition was a slow and painful process. The South African rugby hierarchy was alive to these problems and to the real possibility that the tournament could be disrupted by dissent and conflict. Louis Luyt, President of the South African Rugby Football Union (SARFU), was not a man to tolerate failure easily; for all his bluster and at times bombastic behavior, he fully understood the need to work in a different political environment after the outcome of the 1994 elections. For the World Cup to be a success, one of the prerequisites was that rugby had to project a more positive image of embracing the new order in South Africa, which, after all, made it possible for the tournament to be held in the country. "Rugby," the *Sunday Times* reported, "is known to be keen to improve its poor image and portray itself as a catalyst for change."<sup>2</sup> To this end a new management structure had to be deployed: stodgy Afrikaner functionaries of the old order had to be replaced with more progressive officials.

Out of a thousand applicants, Edward Griffiths, a noted sports journalist, was appointed to the position of CEO. It was a significantly different type of appointment. Usually such positions were reserved for Afrikaans speakers from the inner circle of rugby administrators with years of service to the game. Griffiths was English-speaking and, at 32, relatively young. What counted in his favor, though, was that he had written a number of critical yet constructive articles on South African rugby which brought him to the attention of rugby officials. Louis Luyt, so often in the center of public relations disasters, was impressed; in Griffiths, at least for the time being, he saw the ideal person to refashion the image of South African rugby

<sup>1</sup> C. Merrett, "From non-racial sport to the FIFA World Cup: A tale of politics, big business and hope betrayed" in C. Thurman (ed.), *Sport versus Art*, p. 80.

<sup>2</sup> *Sunday Times*, 12 Feb. 1995.

during the forthcoming World Cup tournament. In addition to Griffiths, another significant appointment to the management team was that of Morné du Plessis as manager. A Springbok rugby captain from 1975 to 1980, Du Plessis was one of the few Springboks of the apartheid era who was sensitive to the iniquities of the system and the rationale behind the sporting boycott. Appointing someone of Du Plessis's caliber was a further important step in the effort to enhance the image of Springbok rugby in a new political environment. Equally important was the marketing potential of someone like Francois Pienaar, the 1995 Springbok captain. Pienaar, a friendly, accessible and articulate individual, was well aware of the wider ramifications of his role.

With the key personnel in place—all, with the exception of Pienaar, are conspicuously absent in *Invictus*—the rugby show was about to embark on what Griffiths later described as “an exemplary public relations campaign.”<sup>3</sup> He considered the Springboks to be in the “entertainment industry,” but their responsibility extended “far beyond the rugby field.”<sup>4</sup> In the world of public relations, where perceptions tend to determine reality, the Springboks had to project an image of being humble, excited, and unashamedly proud of their new democracy, and this had to be restaged at infinite press conferences and public appearances. But while the refashioning of the image of South African rugby was meant to showcase a “new” rugby culture, it was difficult to give substance to these claims of newness if the Springbok rugby team as such, consisting only of white men, looked suspiciously the same as before. There was an overriding need to find a black body who could on playing ability be put into a Springbok jersey. In stepped Chester Williams, a coloured winger from Western Province. Williams was on the fringes of being a good enough player to qualify on merit, but more important on the public relations front he was a priceless asset as the face that could launch the newly integrated South African rugby ship. Not surprisingly, much is made of Williams in *Invictus*; he is portrayed as the emblem of achievement, hope, reconciliation, and recognition for the fledgling nation. What is not mentioned, though, is that Pieter Hendriks, a white winger who had been expelled from the tournament for overly robust play, was offered R15,000 not to appeal against his expulsion since his return would have jeopardized Williams' chances of being selected as a first-choice winger.<sup>5</sup> By fair means or foul, Williams had to be kept in the tournament. But for *Invictus* to reflect such chicanery would have run against the grain of its fairytale narrative.

The opening ceremony of the tournament was of prime importance as the principal vehicle for the self-representation of a newly born society. Given the country's deeply divided past, the whole ceremony had, as far as possible, to be drained of history. On a bright sunny Cape day a colorful pageant unfolded as happy, smiling and dancing South Africans—representing all ethnic groups—cavorted around the field, representing the “rainbow nation,” while the official World Cup

<sup>3</sup> Griffiths, *One Team*, 114.

<sup>4</sup> *Sunday Times*, 19 Nov. 1995.

<sup>5</sup> *Die Afrikaner*, 27 July–1 August 1995; *SA Sport Illustrated*, 22 July 1996.

song, “A World in Union,” was belted out. When President Nelson Mandela appeared on the field to make a short speech, he was warmly and enthusiastically welcomed with chants of “Nelson, Nelson.”<sup>6</sup> The “rainbow nation” vehicle seemed to have clicked into gear. More soberly, the celebration can be seen as a well-choreographed public spectacle which gave the dark and dangerous South African past a wide berth, and as a result was able to create the illusion of a new country born and received without sin.

The repackaging of South African rugby ideology goes some way to explain the euphoria, but not far enough in elucidating why the South African public endorsed the refashioned product so enthusiastically. It does not follow that just because image-producers have carefully repackaged a product, it will necessarily have an impact on the cultural market place. This is an issue that *Invictus*, in its infatuation with Mandela, only addresses tangentially. The prevailing public mood at the time of the tournament was an important element in the overall configuration. The World Cup tournament coincided with a groundswell of buoyant public opinion; in 1995, “if ever a country was in need of a party, a good time . . . it was South Africa,” observed Griffiths.<sup>7</sup> It was indeed a rare historical moment. Public spaces for interaction on a different level from what was possible under apartheid had opened up; black and white could, in a relatively harmless way, express a common sentiment without either side sacrificing or risking too much.<sup>8</sup> Most Afrikaners, excluding those on the right, adapted much more quickly to the new dispensation than many observers had anticipated. In part this was because they still had the perception (based on the notion of weights and counterweights much touted by FW de Klerk and designed to convince Afrikaners that their interests were safeguarded) that political negotiations had worked to the benefit of Afrikaners, and that this attitude of give-and-take had wider parallels in the connections between sport and society. There was more than an element of truth in the blunt observation by one journalist that “Afrikaners had swapped apartheid for rugby, and there was every sign they thought it a fair deal.”<sup>9</sup> The ANC, in turn, had just moved into office and still had to demonstrate that they had effectively made the transition from a liberation movement to a responsible government committed to order and reconciliation. Furthermore, as far as economic and social policies were concerned, the ANC was put on “capitalist probation and subjected to unrelenting pressure to prove its reliability to business interests that will help shape its fate.”<sup>10</sup>

During the tournament, much was made of black support for the game, and this is duly portrayed in *Invictus*. Yet the dynamics of this support remain unexplained. There were those whites who believed that black enthusiasm was proof of the

<sup>6</sup> For example *Die Burger*, 26 May 1995; *Cape Times*, 26 May 1995. See also JM Coetzee, *Retrospect: The World Cup of Rugby*, *South African Review of Books*.

<sup>7</sup> Griffiths, *One Team*, 51.

<sup>8</sup> Compare Griffiths, *One Team*, 113.

<sup>9</sup> P. Waldmeir, *Anatomy of a Miracle: The End of Apartheid and the Birth of the New South Africa*, 269.

<sup>10</sup> M Macdonald, ‘Power Politics in the New South Africa’, in *Journal of Southern African Studies*.

proselytizing power of rugby and, by implication, of whites.<sup>11</sup> It was a simplistic view, conveniently ignoring shifts in power relations. In fact, it was only because there was a black government in power that South Africa was able to host the tournament at all; the trickle-down effect of this political victory was that black South Africans could now afford to demonstrate greater largesse. The change was neatly explained by one commentator who pointed out that it was as if black people were in the position of “senior school kids, indulging the junior standards”; it was with a similarly patronizing and “benign generosity [that] black people allowed white South Africa to have their fun while they applauded.”<sup>12</sup> It would also be short-sighted to view black exuberance in the streets after the victory as an indication of durable support for rugby; this was little more than brief carnivalesque enthusiasm.

All of this is not to deny that Mandela, as is abundantly clear in *Invictus*, had a great deal to do with the way in which the event was perceived. But should we therefore interpret Mandela’s role as that of a saint or sage without exploring the matter any further? The South African rugby team, it should be noted, stood more to gain by the association with Mandela than the other way around. Power resided with Mandela, who already had a long-established international reputation as an anti-apartheid icon, while the Springboks still had to prove their international credibility after their readmission to world sporting competition. Mandela’s strategic appearances and his identification with the team helped elevate them, a virtually all-white team, to a symbol of nationhood. So the Springboks, the management, and the die-hard rugby supporters played along without necessarily realizing that they were bit players in a far bigger political drama than that of the World Cup. They were feted but ultimately ensnared by Mandela.

Mandela’s performance turned out to be a marketing masterstroke. A British journalist made the point well:

Mandela had . . . pulled the political magician’s trick of all times; to have allowed his rivals the most precious of prizes they could ever wish for and – swish – with one sweep of the cloak represented the prize unchanged, yet suddenly belonging not to the minority but the majority.<sup>13</sup>

Following on from this, Mandela’s involvement with the team and the tournament generally can be seen as an excursion into the field of cultural politics. The closed cultural space occupied by rugby, hitherto a predominantly Afrikaner preserve, was sufficiently prised open to allow at least a partial reinscription of the game’s narrow cultural identity. Moreover, the ‘public ownership’ of rugby was symbolically democratized and extended. The Afrikaner’s possessive claim to the game was challenged by Mandela’s anointment of it; his symbolic message was that the game belonged to the new South Africa and the old order had passed.<sup>14</sup> Mandela – “he of the perpetual smile and studied stoop of humility”<sup>15</sup> may have appeared magnanimous

<sup>11</sup> For an example see *Argus*, June 1996.

<sup>12</sup> *Sunday Independent*, 25 June 1995. See also *Star*, 25 May 1995.

<sup>13</sup> *Cape Times*, 27 June 1996.

<sup>14</sup> *Cape Times*, 27 June 1996.

<sup>15</sup> *Living*, Dec. 1995.

and he certainly was a remarkable figure, but he was also an astute politician who ultimately played to the gallery for the benefit of the ANC. If “*Invictus*” only had nodded in this direction the film would have had greater credibility.

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## II

### OF COLOR AND BLINDNESS IN *INVICTUS*

Stéphane Robolin

The lead-up to the 1995 Rugby World Cup tournament in Clint Eastwood’s *Invictus* features an interview between the recently-elected South African president Nelson Mandela and acerbic sportscaster Jan de Villiers. A cantankerous critic of the current national rugby team’s heretofore poor performance, de Villiers cynically lobs a loaded comment to the president, who himself was no fan of the sports team that had long symbolized Afrikaner hegemony and the apartheid government: “It’s been said that you used to support any team that played against the Springboks.” Ever the tactical politician, Mandela instantly responds, “Yes, well, obviously, that is no longer true. I am 100% behind our boys. After all, if I cannot change when circumstances demand it, how can I expect others to?”

By the film’s account, Mandela was more than 100% percent behind the Springboks. *Invictus* diligently positions Mandela as a shrewd political master-strategist and magnanimous conciliator, who steadfastly steers his nation—still nursing its prides and prejudices of the past—through the tumultuous dawning of democratic rule. The country’s first black president faces, one reporter notes, a daunting set of “issues ranging from economic stagnation and unemployment to

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rising crime, while at the same time balancing black aspirations with white fears.” His strategy for negotiating these challenges rests upon his very public support of the feeble Springbok team in the hopes that they will win the World Cup championship and place South Africa at the center of the world’s attention—giving the deeply fragmented country a much-needed unifying boost of pride. The film frames Mandela’s nation-building tactic of embracing the sport beloved by Afrikaners as a hard-nosed, single-minded obsession which becomes a key affair of state that occasionally edges out others. To accomplish his symbolic national victory, he drafts Springbok captain François Pienaar into the service of inspiring his teammates to greatness.

I am interested not in Mandela himself or his actual leadership as much as I am in the film’s rendering of Mandela, its regime of representation, and the service to which this rendering is put. It is thus best to keep in mind that, while very much an international collaboration, the interests of an American studio, producer, and director infuse this cinematic production. *Invictus* bears the marks of a movie tailored by and for a predominantly American standpoint, and illustrates Rob Nixon’s claim that, when the mass-marketed US culture industry represents other areas around the world, “American preconceptions, frames of reference, and narrative designs readily take precedence.”<sup>16</sup> In addition to casting American superstars in the lead roles—a routine practice in Hollywood films about Africa(ns)—*Invictus* quite often reflects American social preoccupations that overshadow South African ones. Its suspense-building mechanisms draw upon obvious and veiled evocations of post-9/11 fears (see the airplane fly-over), the monumentality of a country’s first black president followed by concerns of racist assassination attempts (see the bodyguards’ worries), as well as the explosion of “post-racial” discourse following the election of Barack Obama.

Furthermore, while John Carlin’s *Playing the Enemy*, the book upon which the film is based, exaggerates the political significance of this event in Mandela’s presidency and flattens South Africa’s black political scene, the film takes simplification to new heights. The film’s aesthetic Manicheanism yields binaries that leave its moralizing message and triumphant ending unencumbered by historical complexity or nuance. It also clearly operates within the exceptionalist Great Man tradition that permits a very safe hagiography of the already globally adored Mandela. These various Hollywood staples of representation often are efficiently combined in *Invictus*. For example, Mandela figures as the messianic moderator saving his country from two equal and opposite extremes: fearful, paranoid whites desperately clinging to their way of life—played by “brutish boers” and Pienaar’s racist father—on the one hand, and angry or vengeful blacks hell-bent on overturning all vestiges of white-minority rule—starring the South African National Sports Council and Mandela’s own daughter, Zindzi, who is reprimanded by her altruistic father for her “selfish thinking” that does not “serve the nation”—on the other, even heavier, hand.

<sup>16</sup> Rob Nixon, *Homelands, Harlem and Hollywood*, 78.



The arrangement of these tropes underwrites an ideological current that runs throughout the film. Mandela's interview with de Villiers, referenced earlier, is revealingly followed by a scene of the president's helicopter flying to the Springboks' Cape Town practice field to meet the team for the first time as they prepare for the World Cup tournament. The soundtrack to this scene is the vanilla pop tune "Colorblind," written for the film and sung by South African boy-band. The song—whose last lines exalt "Yes, we've conquered the war/With love at the core/I stumble, I fall, but I'll stay Colorblind"—functions as *Invictus*' ideological anthem. The shift from Mandela's demand for personal transformation in the de Villiers interview to the song lyrics explicitly signals, and helps cement, the normative assumptions and objectives of the film: celebrating the triumph of colorblindness as the bedrock of the post-apartheid dispensation. Film and song alike solicit a teleologically-rooted political commitment to the transcendence of racial difference as a society's most elevated form of consciousness and ethical relation. Colorblindness presents itself as an enlightened response, a progressive refusal to accede to the racial distinction and identity upon which prejudice, discrimination, and violence are based. In contrast to what it understands to be the triviality of race (as "mere" skin-color), colorblindness calls for weightier, more substantive criteria for social engagement, judgment, or identification. A fervent "post-racial" romance, *Invictus* casts Mandela as its greatest proponent and exemplar, and it projects him as the wise (because) conciliatory, grandfatherly patriarch, ever-willing to extend the olive branch of peace and forgiveness to his fearful white constituents in an effort to bring all South Africans together. This vision of a unified citizenry is in many ways the driving force of Mandela's (and the movie's) agenda of harnessing the coagulating, nationalist power of mass-mediated international sports competition. The abstract ground of unification, colorblindness, is thus funneled into the sports arena, the literal ground of unification, thereby facilitating the replacement of allegiance to color with the allegiance to national colors.

The profound contradiction at the heart of colorblind propaganda—aside from the fact that those "national colors" remain the Springboks' narrower, apartheid-tinted tones of green and gold—is that it is all too frequently, revealingly, and at times embarrassingly color-conscious. Demonstrations of an ennobled willingness to transcend racial difference first inevitably require raising and emphasizing the very racial distinction it claims to erase. This is particularly evident in cinematic representations that function on the visual register, where the scopic regime of race plays out. The paradox remains prominently on display in *Invictus*, especially in the build-up to and ultimate *jouissance* of the Springboks' World Cup win: the white Pienaar family's patronizing fascination with their black domestic worker Mary's ululation during the final match; the four white police men's collective hugging of a young black boy; Mandela's alternately-paired black and white security men's self-surprised embrace of one another; an anonymous Afrikaner's spontaneous bear hug of Jason, the most cautious of Mandela's black bodyguards; and most iconographic of all, the slow-motion clutch of the golden World Cup trophy by black and white

hands. Ambiguity, here, haunts the passage from racial consciousness to racial indifference, too often reinforcing the racial difference it professes to oppose.

These various visual cues invite us to consider the philosophical dimensions and political tendencies that lie at the heart of colorblind positions. As critical race theorists have pointed out for some time, the embrace of colorblindness is not the espousal of an anti-racist politics but a continuation of the racist status quo by other means. The ideology of colorblindness deploys a rhetorical appeal to the principles of equality and fairness that refuses to recognize or address calcified substantive inequalities wrought by centuries of racial subordination. Accepting an abstracted formal equality that only detects “forms of individual, intended, and irrational prejudice,”<sup>17</sup> colorblindness privileges individualism over systemic analysis; sets up spurious equivalences between systemic racism and the strategies used to redress it; masks the machinations of accrued white privilege and systematic advantage; and in so doing, works to preserve them “without... departing from democratic or egalitarian ideals.”<sup>18</sup> It labors to draw our attention to single scenes of interracial harmony (like those noted above) while permitting a blindness to continued white supremacy and structurally maintained racial disparities in material wealth and social power.

In this light, the last lines of William Ernest Henley’s poem “Invictus” that the film lionizes—“I am the master of my fate: / I am the captain of my soul”—can become as much a rallying cry for conservative colorblind individualists eschewing state-sponsored racial redress as it is a hymn of “self-empowerment” and “self-mastery” for the besieged individual caught in a contest of will and strength.<sup>19</sup> They further validate a right-leaning politics of personal responsibility, especially, when endorsed by an international hero and “self-made” man. Precisely this position is expressed, in barely veiled racial terms, in the comments section of a *Mail & Guardian* blog entry about the poem: “High time people in SA realizes [sic] that last line and stop asking the government, and the tax base, to be the masters of their fate.”<sup>20</sup>

As the comment indicates, the embrace of colorblind ideology in South Africa is not wholly concocted by American filmmakers for this production. It is rather a phenomenon that resonates within and between both countries—and a phenomenon that *Invictus* carefully negotiates. Certainly, the movie’s celebration of colorblindness recalls the South African principle of non-racialism, the constitutionally-enshrined doctrine of the ruling African National Congress that stands in direct opposition to the white supremacist racial consciousness of the apartheid regime. Non-racialism thus formed the basis for an inclusive and egalitarian black-majority society rooted in a united national identity.

American multiracialism/multiculturalism, a principle frequently contrasted with South African non-racialism in comparative scholarship as one of the critical

<sup>17</sup> Neil Gotanda, “A Critique of ‘Our Constitution is Colorblind,’” 266.

<sup>18</sup> Amy Ansell, “Casting a Blind Eye,” 344. See also chapter two of Eduardo Bonilla-Silva’s *Racism Without Racists*.

<sup>19</sup> Elleke Boehmer, *Nelson Mandela: A Very Short Introduction*, 87 and 157.

<sup>20</sup> See Llewellyn Kriel, “Invictus: What Does It Mean to You?”

differences between the oft-compared countries, claims racial difference as a valuable asset of American society.<sup>21</sup> Given that multiracialism operated as a euphemism for the apartheid regime's program of separate development, South African aversion to this term is quite understandable, and the differences of the countries' racial politics cannot be casually overlooked. And yet, positions that too dichotomously contrast South African and American politics of race risk overstating the difference and obfuscating elements that both countries in fact share. For instance, the United States has a long-standing discourse of colorblindness grounded in liberal philosophy, both of which are also enshrined in constitutional law. Partially because popular American appreciation of racial difference is so superficial, American multiculturalism-lite has coexisted rather amicably with colorblind ideology, and this has only intensified in the last few decades, in Supreme Court rulings and popular culture alike. In effect, colorblind, or racially "neutral," discourses are antithetical to neither South African nor American contexts.

Sociologist Amy Ansell has charted an even tighter relationship between South African and US forms of colorblindness. She identifies a significant "discursive congruence" between colorblind ideologies in both countries, despite their "contrasting demographic, cultural, structural, and political profiles."<sup>22</sup> Ansell argues that, while colorblind ideology in each country uniquely originated and evolved in distinguishable ways, it has more recently become adopted by predominantly white conservatives in both post-Civil Rights America and post-apartheid South Africa to more palatably package efforts to preserve white racial privilege. Far from coincidental, Ansell points out, this congruence is premised on transatlantic ideological traffic: "the adoption by South-African whites of a literal-minded brand of race neutrality borrowed from the American context."<sup>23</sup> South Africans and Americans have exchanged much over the last centuries, and this specific strand of ideological circulation seems to have yielded some considerable cross-cultural discursive symmetry.

The relevance of this transatlantic circuitry is perhaps nowhere more evident than in the example of *Invictus*, the internationally distributed American filmic representation of a uniquely South African event. The very processes of this transnational dynamic are also apparent. Given its colorblind commitments, *Invictus* is at least in part a product of this ongoing transnational ideological traffic, but the film's powerful international reach also ensures that *Invictus* perpetuates this transatlantic dynamic and reinforces colorblind mutuality. This particular form of traffic, furthermore, pushes us to revisit presuppositions in comparative scholarship that cast South African and US politics of race as virtual opposites of one another.

<sup>21</sup> For example, see Jacklyn Cock and Alison Bernstein's claim that "the politics of race in South Africa [...] contrast sharply with those in the United States," in their *Melting Pots & Rainbow Nations*, 20.

<sup>22</sup> Ansell, "Casting a Blind Eye," 350, 352. Ansell lists the following discursive characteristics shared by white South Africans and Americans in her research: "(1) selective acknowledgement of the racist past, (2) denial of the continuing impact of the legacies of the past, (3) assertions of unbiased innocence, (4) complaints of white communal victimization, and (5) reliance on idealistic definitions of racism [...]," 344.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 350.

Attending to these cultural circuits may help obviate against blindnesses to less visible but nonetheless operative ideological dynamics when the romantic, colorful scenes begin rolling.

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## III

### INVICTUS: FANDOM AND THE PLAYING FIELD OF THE NATION

Abigail Hinsman

Fandom may contribute toward productive training for citizenship, sport spectating toward the formation of national identity and community, and rugby toward the performance of nation, as portrayed in *Invictus* (dir. Clint Eastwood, 2009). However, it remains doubtful to what extent unification behind a national sports team, where the goal is clear cut (winning against a single opponent) and repetitive (winning consecutive games), indicates the beginnings of a national community premised on new ideas of inclusion and equality. The terms of a game are not completely translatable to the terms of citizenship and nationhood. For one, while the game takes place in a space and time dedicated to play, in which certain activities are permitted and others are not, and in which rules are applied evenly (in the ideal game) to all players, participation in a democratic society involves the reality that rules are not applied evenly to all members; they are unsettled and open

to interpretation in the realm of law. Furthermore, exigencies and unpredictable events impinge on everyday life in ways that cannot always be controlled, dealt with, or likened to the ludic aspects of sport.

The generic categorization of *Invictus* in popular online cinema archives points to its project of convergence. On the one hand, the film seeks to resignify the Springboks and, on the other, it narrativizes Nelson Mandela (Morgan Freeman) as wagering his presidency on the success or failure of the national rugby team. IMDb classifies the film as “Biography, Drama, History,” while Netflix tells its members that it falls within, “Dramas based on real life,” “Social Issue Dramas,” and “Sports Dramas.”<sup>24</sup> While docudramas, biographies, historical dramas, and other genres of remediation involve a time lapse between the historical referent and the profilmic (everything that takes place before the camera) moments of recreation or reenactment, *Invictus*’s narrative seeks another layer of revision at the levels of the sport and the nation. The film narrativizes and visualizes these processes of re-symbolizing the South African nation at a particular historical moment, employing an interplay among fandom, citizenship, and space. The affective deployment of fandom, which has particular resonances in cinema, attains a political dimension in the context of a young representative democracy. Although construing the citizen as fan permits a certain degree of play (with identity, affect, and engagement), collapsing the two—as the film does—fails to consider whether the practices of fandom can successfully transfer to those of citizenship. Additionally, *Invictus* does not examine whether the game has any real referent in the social, and those who choose not to participate as fans (or who lack access to the game) and their reasons for doing so.

Aside from its recuperation in recent scholarship, fandom has generally been pejoratively described in pathological terms in media studies and sociology. Joli Jenson argues that the literature on the fan, which assumes one of two types, the obsessed loner or the hysterical—for which read “feminized” crowd member, is “based in an implicit critique of modern life.”<sup>25</sup> The loner fan expresses an anxiety about the pathological and psychological culmination of isolation, and the crowd member a fear of contagion.<sup>26</sup> What they have in common is a shared irrationality. We can perceive a residue of this sentiment in *Invictus* when, just before the 1995 Rugby World Cup begins, an airliner flies low over the stadium. Mandela’s security detail detects a possible threat and considers an ad hoc evacuation strategy while the crowd remains oblivious. Then, as the plane glides over the stadium, displaying a “good luck” message to the team emblazoned on its underbelly, the crowd raucously cheers; meanwhile, the diplomats and officials wipe their brows in relief. In this moment a binary emerges between the detached rationality of politicians and the emotionality of the mass: affect distinguishes the “true” rugby fans from those who merely perform fandom as a cultural-political expedient.<sup>27</sup> Furthermore, the

<sup>24</sup> “Invictus,” IMDb, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1057500/>; “Invictus,” Netflix, <http://movies.netflix.com/WiMovie/Invictus/70118779?trkid=2361637>.

<sup>25</sup> Jenson, “Fandom as Pathology,” 9–11.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

individual identities of those who are savvy to the political weight of the sporting event, and to its importance for the new South African nation, are delineated in the clarity of two- and three-shots. However, the individual physiognomies of the crowd are visually obscured in extreme long shots. In hierarchizing fandom into those who are in the know and those who are not, *Invictus* construes the democracy as premised on a subtle political stratagem: if South Africans can unite behind a sports team, with any luck this will transfer to a collective sense of nationhood. The melodramatic register likewise intends to reproduce this sentiment and conviction in the cinematic spectator.

More recently, the relation of a fan to the object of her or his affection has been salvaged by scholars as an affective empowerment that can be energized and directed toward substantive political change. According to Lawrence Grossberg:

The fan [...] is a different matter altogether. For the fan speaks from an actively constructed and changing place within popular culture. Moreover, because the fan speaks for and to the question of authority, and from within an ideology of excess (which constructs a certain critical distance), the politics of the fan never entails merely the celebration of every investment or every mattering map. The fan's relation to culture in fact opens up a range of political possibilities and it is often on the field of affective relations that political struggles intersect with popular concerns. In fact, the affective is a crucial dimension of the organization of political struggle. No democratic political struggle can be effectively organized without the power of the popular.<sup>28</sup>

Part of my critical endeavor is to investigate whether this characterization of the active, questioning fan (who is often also a cultural producer who appropriates and reworks texts<sup>29</sup>) finds embodiment in *Invictus*. Aside from the incident with the airliner, this positive embodiment of the fan is largely consistent with the representation of fandom in the film, which becomes a vehicle for citizenship and a crucial part of imagining the individual citizen's relation to the new South African nation under Mandela's administration. Such a strategy surfaces in a discussion between Mandela and Springboks captain François Pienaar (Matt Damon) over tea. As Mandela introduces what will be an extended metaphor in which the team stands for the nation, he confers with Pienaar about tactics to make the "team" feel they can be better than they think they can. In this rhetorical gesture, team members (perhaps including fans, who often consider themselves to be valuable and active elements in the imaginary creation of the sports team) and citizens are condensed. Enconced in the President's office, Pienaar and Mandela discuss questions of leadership: how to empower those you lead. This conversation implies that a leader can unify a hybrid body that is composed of many heterogeneous organisms in order

<sup>27</sup> George Yúdice proposes that culture in the period of globalization has bled into economic and political realms. In this way, culture has been used as a political and economic tool in the service of increasing political participation or economic growth. Culture has been recognized as interested and redefined itself as "utility" in order to validate its existence. Yúdice, *The Expediency of Culture*, 11.

<sup>28</sup> Grossberg, "Is there a Fan in the House?" 64.

<sup>29</sup> This is the orientation of Henry Jenkins's reading of the fan through the lens of Michel de Certeau's theories in *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*.



to function smoothly and harmoniously, whether that composite body is a team or a nation. For both the Springbok team captain and President Mandela, the question is one of bodies, not just minds, hence the emphasis the film grants to the physicality of the sport: sounds of interbodily contact, spraying sweat, visible contusions, and close-ups of hands gripping flesh. Though the collisions in the games prove productive in forging an affective relationship not just to the team but to the nation (and for the film's spectators, too), the question of non-sporting bodies is obscured and swept up in the ecstasy of the game. By the final scenes of the film and the last few minutes of the World Cup, spectating bodies are celebrating together in a utopian harmony, regardless of race, gender, socioeconomic difference, and history: they form a universalized fandom and cohesive citizenry. This is allowed by the metaphor because the game occupies the interstitial space between the ludic and the regulated, between aspirational and real social conditions. The concept of play as therapeutic and a performative reach toward happiness appears in Miriam Hansen's reading of Walter Benjamin's work (which provides an alternative to Freud's linkage of repetition in play to the death drive).<sup>30</sup> In a sense, rugby fandom serves as imaginative and affective training ground for participation in a new and better form of the social. Although the practicality of this training remains dubious (and in fact distracts from a multiplicity of differences), it presents the possibility and hope of collective goals; this is not far from Richard Dyer's formulation of entertainment as presenting abundance in the face of scarcity. In *Invictus* it is not a spectacular musical number but a rugby game that substitutes performative utopian harmony for historical dystopian strife.<sup>31</sup>

Fandom multiplies in meanings and develops at an array of sites; indeed, the citizen is interpellated as a Springbok fan on numerous occasions, as when Mandela calls upon Pienaar to win the World Cup, along with his intervention at a town-hall-type meeting to prevent the abolition of the Springbok team. Even professionalization requires a fan's affective investment in either the nation or rugby. In the case of the former, Springbok athletes are asked to perform Mandela's vision of the nation by visiting townships and playing rugby with children in publicized interactions; in the latter, Mandela must transform his previous animosity for the Springboks into rallying support. For example, as Mandela works on political strategy with his advisor he watches a game and his dialogue is peppered with predictions and commentary. In the middle of his meetings, Mandela's personal assistant relays updates to him on the Springboks' games; at one point he asks that his schedule be cleared during a particular match. Additionally, he asks for a full report on the national team's opponents. When his advisor asks if his interest in rugby is still "strictly political" he replies in the affirmative. Yet, we know, Mandela is disavowing his fan interest (which can be very powerful and mobilized politically). In another scene, Mandela interrupts political strategy meetings with his cabinet officials in order to watch the publicity coverage of the Springboks traveling to townships and playing with

<sup>30</sup> Hansen, "Room-for-Play," 7.

<sup>31</sup> Dyer, *Only Entertainment*, 26.



children. He seems to think such publicity can be more successful than rhetoric and political speeches made from the overtly political position of the presidency; rather, Mandela believes it is more effective for the political to be communicated as *play*. *Invictus* politicizes the fan—and the affective engagement with play, with culture, serves as a political expedient. In an interesting twist on fandom, the fans in *Invictus* appear to be mobilized in spite of themselves—for example, when Pienaar’s family is surprised to find themselves given an extra ticket for their domestic servant. This departs from Grossberg’s idea of fandom’s potential for active (and presumably conscious) political change on the part of fans. At points, *Invictus* still relies on the troubling association of fans with a mass that is easily manipulated and duped; this contrasts with the savvy fans like Mandela and Pienaar who recognize the political expediency of fandom. Emotions and feelings tied to sport are recruited for political ends in order to imagine the nation as a cohering around collective goal(s); the problem is that it is easy to unite behind a game that, due to its ludic nature and prewritten and commonly understood rules, has the singular and clear aim of winning. The roles and (not unimportantly) sentiments of fan-citizens will likely change in the face of the unscripted possibilities and unpredictable trajectories that make up real social life.

According to *Invictus*, Mandela reshaped the notion of South African citizenship in the initial stages of his presidency. Being a good citizen in post-Apartheid South Africa comes to mean supporting the national team. As the film progresses, its scenes are increasingly intercut with images of South Africans watching rugby games, in and out of the stadium: in private and public spaces, in transit, most often in the company of other South Africans in multi-shots so as to emphasize a growing sense of community. Shots of the games are intercut with images of people across the racial divide watching attentively (there seems to be no question of inattention where the World Cup is concerned). Instead of the projected image engaging the spectator through distraction (in the Benjaminian sense<sup>32</sup>), a distraction that transpires within the confines of the screen, from shot to shot and between successive frames, the rugby game distracts from the fact that persons who would not usually socialize together are occupying the same social space for the same purpose: to watch the game.

Mandela admits that in the past he would cheer for any team that was not the Springboks. He justifies his change of heart as an example of his preparedness and ability to adapt to shifting circumstances. In effect, his project to resignify the Springboks is a project of mythmaking. For Roland Barthes, myth is a form of speech that involves two levels of signification. At the second level, the first sign becomes

<sup>32</sup> Benjamin’s model of the cinema engages the spectator through a mode of distraction and exposure to ongoing shocks: “The distracting element in film is also primarily tactile, being based on successive changes of scene and focus which have a percussive effect on the spectator. *Film has freed the physical shock effect – which Dadaism had kept wrapped, as it were, inside the moral shock effect – from this wrapping*” (emphasis in original; Benjamin 39). Benjamin aligns tactile reception with habit and distraction, rather than attention (40). Because film utilizes shock effects to continually change viewer focus and distract, cinema accustoms spectators to “reception in distraction.” Benjamin, “Work of Art,” 40–1.

the signifier for the sign of the myth.<sup>33</sup> Here, the Springbok team becomes the signifier for post-Apartheid South Africa. The narrative unfurls that the goal of this resignification is to make the Springboks stand for the nation and for this sign to become invisible and naturalized; the fan-citizen would read the team as the nation (rather than as its signifier) and fandom as citizenship (rather than in a semiotic and highly constructed relation). Of course, the problem with myth for Barthes is that it is “depoliticized speech.”<sup>34</sup> It seems then, that in this context, the naturalization of team/nation and fan/citizen undergone in the mythmaking process would defuse the political potential of national rugby fandom.

As the film nears its end, the number of two-shots that are biracial proliferates, especially of the male security detail (one black man and one white man in a two-shot). Thus, a formal unity ensues (and one that simplifies, for it mainly articulates difference across one color line): racial integration of difference within the frame matches and subtends the affective unity of the Springboks fans. At the same time, the food and housing shortages, economic problems, and crime mentioned by Mandela in the opening scenes are deemphasized, pushed to the margins of the narrative and the frame. An ideological pluralism, without a stress on political and economic difference and conflict, saturates the sentiment of the final scenes; difference is there, but conflict is minimized as a citizenry develops and coalesces as fans. Jonathan Hyslop points to the complicated and shifting interests of sports fandom, especially as it straddles political and consumer identities. In Hyslop’s view, the applause on the part of white crowd members for Mandela at the 1995 Rugby World Cup indicates a change in that “the crowd’s identity as sports consumers was far stronger than that as adherents of the old political order.”<sup>35</sup> *Invictus* does not probe the motivations behind the nameless viewers’ and spectators’ affiliation with the Springboks; it does not seem to matter whether the basis of investment is political, consumerist, or otherwise. The primacy the film places on affect to some degree glosses over the question of whether these fans are active, critical participants who will change, and not merely follow, the game.

National fandom assumes a spatial quality as well, one that plays out at the formal cinematographic levels as well as in the *mise en scène*: automobiles; prison; mobility; private, public, and interpersonal spaces (bodyguards as corporeal protection and the sensory apparatus extended and multiplied into the immediate surrounding space); doorways, inner vestibules such as locker rooms, offices, and the stadium—all of these imply a passage to the interior, the center. This movement is aligned with the increasing centralization or unification of national affect throughout the film. In the course of this traversal, what happens to the geopolitical margins? One might ask: if one does not enter the stadium, physically, televisually, or by wireless radio, in what capacity is one choosing *not* to participate? As a fan, a spectator, or a citizen? And, is (non)participation cast in relation to the sporting game or the representative

<sup>33</sup> Barthes, “Myth Today,” 115.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 143.

<sup>35</sup> Hyslop, “Why did Apartheid’s Supporters Capitulate?”

democracy? Although, as Hansen has argued convincingly, play contains the potential for producing change and difference even in repetition, it requires a decision to engage. What *Invictus* leaves one wondering is this: what happens to those citizens who choose *not* to take up the role of the fan? Not addressing the asymmetries between fan and citizen is one of the film's critical omissions. One could extend this problem further, to the viewer, and the latent asymmetries among *Invictus*'s global audiences. It is telling that this international production premiered in the US eight days before its simultaneous South African and Canadian debuts and wide US release, and the release schedule raises a question about variations in spectator interpellation.<sup>36</sup> Which viewers are being hailed as cinematic spectators, and which as citizens, and how in relation to different nationalities? In all likelihood the processes of interpellation incited by a transnational cultural product such as *Invictus* cannot be reduced either to an easy binary (spectator or citizen) or to a universal idea of a unified sense of national belonging, but this is best left as the subject of another piece.

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<sup>36</sup> "Invictus," IMDb, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1057500/releaseinfo>.

## IV

## REGARDING THE HISTORY OF OTHERS

Lily Saint

Set during Nelson Mandela's first days as South Africa's president, *Invictus* purports to illustrate the unifying role played by national sports in the establishment of the new democracy. Yet the film is less an accurate portrait of a moment in South African history than another installment in Clint Eastwood's recent series of films presenting utopias of human relation that masquerade as realist, historical cinema. *Flags of Our Father* (2006), *Letters from Iwo Jima* (2006), *Gran Torino* (2008), and *Invictus* (2009), cloak idealized fantasies of defanged race relations beneath surface narratives of historical accuracy that evade the more complex truths of the present.

As Abby Hinsman notes elsewhere in this issue, "IMDb classifies the picture as, "Biography, Drama, History," and it is the third of these categories that interests me here. Eastwood's *Invictus* is a history film in the tradition identified by Robert Rosenstone, since it uses individual figures—in this case "great men"—as conduits for the telling of larger historical events. The film's allegiance to historicity is due, in part, to its genesis in John Carlin's 2008 book *Playing the Enemy*. Carlin presents the events surrounding the Rugby World Cup of 1995 as pivotal to the transition years. His plot is non-fiction yet he embellishes factual events with unverifiable details about individuals' inner psychological states. This kind of pseudo-fiction is the groundwork of "truthiness" upon which the screenplay builds. Carlin himself notes in his introduction that "more than once people remarked that the book I was going to write felt like a fable, or a parable, or a fairy story . . . for it fulfilled the two basic conditions of a successful fairy story: it was a good yarn and it held a lesson for the ages" (5, 6). This parable-like promise proves alluring to Eastwood too, even at the expense of accurately depicting historical events. Though the inherent subjectivity of historical narratives has long been established—since both history and fictional narratives involve a selection process whereby certain details are included and others excluded—history, as a popular genre, continues to separate itself from fiction by asserting its analytical, factual, empirical character. This is certainly the tradition to which Eastwood and Carlin subscribe.

Carlin provides the rugby tournament with a historical resonance far in excess of what it has come to symbolize. He claims, for instance, that: "[Mandela's] whole life had been a preparation for this moment . . . Today was the great test, and the one that offered the prospect of the most enduring reward" (17). Since the match, however, South Africa has scarcely become the nonracial nation Mandela envisioned, and rugby continues to be dominated by white players and white spectators. Though published in 2008, the book blatantly ignores the rift that opened up between

Mandela and the rugby establishment in 1997, after he initiated an inquiry into its continued racism, graft and nepotism. This culminated in a lawsuit directly targeting Mandela himself, brought by Louis Luyt, the head of the South African Rugby Football Union (Sarfu) in 1998. Luyt argued that Mandela did not have the right to set up a commission of inquiry into Sarfu since it was a private organization, and thus not subject to government regulation. Intent on producing a comic narrative, or “fable,” Carlin’s book blatantly disregards this turn of events and portrays Luyt instead as a man “changed . . . softened by Mandela the way all Afrikaners seemed to be” (171–2), a man who “hugged [Mandela] so hard” after the winning match that he “lifted [Mandela] off his feet!” (239). Carlin and Eastwood’s desire to emphasize moments of interracial harmony may be understandable, yet their claims to historical truth-telling damage the potency of such aspirations. When realities are conflated with utopias, the steps necessary to achieve such idealized communities—or merely improved ones—no longer need to be taken, and consequently the inequalities of the present are reinforced rather than addressed.

Eastwood, as director of two films about the battle of Iwo Jima, is of course no stranger to historical film. The ease with which the past can be turned into narrative (its narratability)—in contrast to the defiance of the present’s elusive and complex character—often permits its fetishization. Eastwood’s films attest to the persistent anxieties of the present, and to the ongoing need for fantasies of the past to intervene in and assuage the perplexities of the now. Unfortunately they often hearken to misremembered and idealized historical utopias, expressing the longing for an alternative present, but more potently a refusal to engage with its irreducibility.

What history does *Invictus* tell? As already mentioned, the film relies on a common method of telling history; using individual biographical trajectories to tell broader, political and national histories. Rosenstone has pointed out that this can be a compelling device for audiences unfamiliar with the subject material, as films such as *Reds* or *Breaker Morant* exemplify. But as Ryan Gilbey argues, Morgan Freeman’s portrayal of Mandela amounts to no more than hagiography, “a close relative of character assassination,” rendering Mandela “as a human air-freshener,” while Matt Damon’s Francois Pienaar, the Springbok’s captain, “is thwarted by a role that requires him only to master the rudiments of a South African accent, furrow his brow and remark on Mandela’s magnificence.”

The flatness of these portraits exemplifies the film’s representation of the post-apartheid moment, though its use of documentary footage and other markers of chronological accuracy maintain that it narrates historical truth. The film opens with a white rugby team in uniform playing on a neatly kept pitch surrounded by an iron fence. This is contrasted with the rag-tag black team playing soccer across the road on scrubby ground cordoned off by a fence that could come down with a quick tug. The opening shot focuses in a close-up on several of the rugby players bent over for a play. Then the camera pans across the street, viewing the black players from a less intimate distance, as an ethnographizing outsider. A caption appears on the screen: “South Africa, February 11, 1990” announcing the movie’s participation in a regime of truth.

This is of course the day of Mandela's release, and the car carrying him from prison appears next, driving between the two sports fields. The coach of the white players cautions them to "remember this day" as the day "our country went to the dogs." This scene shows both the apartheid divisions but also suggests a physical proximity between the groups that are only tenuously separated in apartheid space, a division all but eradicated by the interracial jubilation of the movie's finale<sup>37</sup>.

After this brief introduction, Eastwood turns to the common technique of history films, combining actual and fabricated documentary footage to narrate the period following this moment of Mandela's release until his election as president. This begins with clips from the press conference at which de Klerk announced Mandela's emancipation, and culminates in shots from the election. Eastwood eases viewers into the fiction that Freeman is Mandela by inserting doctored footage that has Freeman emerging from the prison with Winnie Mandela to climb into the waiting car. Such replacements, dominating the next few minutes of film, are meant to establish the authenticity and continuity of Freeman's portrayal of Mandela, by "historicizing" Freeman with film technology that makes new film look grainy and old. The footage is used to speed through events of the period, showing shots of violence that lack any clear referent, to suggest the threat to transition still palpable after Mandela's release. A voiceover meant to sound like a newscaster announces, "South Africa appears to be on the verge of a civil war," alongside footage of unidentified black men holding assegais staring defiantly at the camera. After shots meant to show how Mandela short-circuited this potential civil war, the sequence ends with footage of people toyi-toying with the new South African flags, celebrating Mandela's 1994 election.

Original documents are also employed in the film's closing credits when photos of the actual Springbok players appear along with some of Mandela in the green jersey that he famously wore at the final match. The standard disclaimer scrolls quickly by: "This film is based on actual historical events. Dialogue and certain events and characters contained in the film were created for the purpose of dramatization."

That the inspiration for these historical events (and for the film's title) is represented as coming not from South Africa or even Africa, but from a nineteenth-century British poem, hints at Eastwood's unwillingness to consider how Mandela's non-violent approach to transition might have been influenced by regional philosophies such as *ubuntu* as well as by European culture. Carlin similarly finds it simpler to compare Mandela to Odysseus (or to kings) than to imagine that there might be South African historical and literary precedents to contextualize Mandela's heroism (17). Since Eastwood is participating in a long, troubled history of outsiders representing African places, peoples, and histories, he might have considered treading with greater care on such contested ground.

Instead he clings to this successful model, because he desires a comic narrative of the nation that conveys closure and resolution rather than give a sense of the persistent racial and economic inequalities plaguing the South African everyday.

<sup>37</sup> *Gran Torino* also deploys this spatial metaphor in the two houses side by side containing the American, Kowalski, and the Hmong family he befriends.



Samba Gadjigo has written convincingly on Hollywood's "treatment of the past," arguing that its profit-driven motivation leads to films which confirm audiences' preconceived notions of history rather than challenging them. "By maintaining and reinforcing the publics' 'taught' memory and hence its false historical consciousness," Gadjigo writes, "[Hollywood's history] films . . . hinder any interrogation of, and critical engagement with the past" (35).

He continues:

Hollywood's ideological twist is that to please its consumers, when it reopens the past, it must at the same time provide a sense of "closure," a finality that has the social function of reinforcing the public's quest for reassuring images that in no way interfere with the hedonistic search for entertainment and distraction from problems raised by the present . . .

Paradoxically, Hollywood's appeal to the past has the effect of muting its dialogue with the present and of concealing its bearing on the future (36).

In the end, it repeats "the public's myths and false memories" (36). In the end, the film is less about South African history or South African rugby than it is about Eastwood's own financial and ideological aspirations, including a blatant evasion of the problems of the present.

While such portraits set out to make films "teachable" historical moments, instead, by reducing history to a happy ending, they enact damage on the present by allowing audiences to disregard it. History becomes a finalized present—the present is resolved (by the film's conclusion blacks love a previously white sport)—denying it its complexity and leading audiences away from any recognition of the constructive and partial nature of histories. Rather than encouraging audiences to seek out varied narratives of South African histories and presents, the film encourages audiences to accept Eastwood's account as sufficient, accurate and comprehensive.

That Eastwood is not South African should certainly not hinder him from attempting to explore the histories of others—indeed such a move might well be applauded. Yet Eastwood fails to investigate the way his position has contributed to his own particular vision of South African history. Such inattention inevitably led to the creation of an American film about American obsessions. In addition to its participation in the celebrity-blighted tradition of Hollywood (by including Damon, Freeman, and indeed Eastwood himself), the film, placed alongside his other movies from this period, points to a preoccupation that extends beyond idealized race relations to include a vision of masculinity that suggests Eastwood's anxieties about contemporary American manliness. *Invictus*'s depictions of Mandela and Pienaar are archetypal representations of masculinity, and as Ella Taylor points out, if Eastwood could have played Mandela himself, he would have. This may be equally true of Damon's Pienaar, whose masculinity is averred in the physicality of his vocation.

In the extra footage attached to the DVD, Eastwood contends that rugby is "a very rough game and the guys who play it are a special breed of cat." Aimee MacDaniel, Sports Coordinator for the film, draws on another set of gender stereotypes, reminding us that "as rough as they are and as tough as they are, they shake hands



at the end of the game, and a lot of them go out for beers afterwards, together.” A producer on the film, Lori McCreary, muses that “there’s something about South African men that is both at once rugged and manly and very soulful and heartfelt, and I think that’s what we see embodied in Francois Pienaar.”<sup>38</sup>

Such stereotypes of heroic, solitary masculinity can be traced through Eastwood’s recent filmic preoccupations with soldiers, cars, boxing, and rugby, reflected also in the repeated line from *Invictus*’ title poem: “I am the master of my fate:/I am the captain of my soul.” *Invictus* is a story about solitary captains: captains of state, captains of sport, and also captains of (the film) industry. After the Springboks clinch their World Cup victory, Mandela rides home in the back of a car while around him the streets erupt with jubilant South Africans, celebrating together as a national, interracial community. Pleased, yet separate from it, Mandela’s final appearance shows him, the great captain of state, tired and alone, now that his campaign has been won.

Similarly, Pienaar is often shown apart from the crowd as a man distinctly solitary in his appraisal of experience, despite his wife’s attempts to share it with him. When the team visits Robben Island, Pienaar confronts Mandela’s imprisoned past by visiting his old cell. The poem, read in a voiceover by Freeman, breaks into the scene as visions of workers in the quarry outside appear to Damon’s Pienaar. He sees Freeman reading on his small bed in the prison cell, and laboring in the quarry under the hot sun. Each time Damon stops to contemplate these visions his wife conveniently leaves him to it, wandering off with the other players and their wives into the present and future of South Africa, hardly stopping to heed the past. Damon’s Pienaar looks appropriately disturbed by the visions Robben Island conjures up as Freeman repeats the lines “I am the master of my fate, I am the captain of my soul.” History is an object of contemplation only to men of leadership; the rest shuffle by him, oblivious to the ghosts of the past.

Filming for *Invictus* was delayed for long enough that Eastwood decided to film *Gran Torino* in the interim. Certain commentators on that film insist that it misrepresents the Hmong culture it pedantically introduces to American audiences, even while conveying a message of interracial solidarity in the American Rust Belt. If we consider this along with Eastwood’s oversimplification of apartheid history, we can conclude that Eastwood is more concerned with relaying a message of tolerance and peaceful co-existence than he is with actually examining what is happening on the ground in these places and relations. South Africans and the Hmong people serve as figures in a parable of his own desire rather than as groups of individuals with complex histories and complex presents that defy easy reconciliation and pacification. While Eastwood’s utopian dreams are hardly

<sup>38</sup> Women are mere accessories to and caretakers of Mandela’s greatness—in addition to Brenda (who cleans lint from his suit in the presidential car) his housekeeper Mary brings him hot milk to drink at night in several scenes. More complex women such as Winnie Mandela are entirely absent (Taylor), and similarly, the wife of protagonist Walter Kowalski in *Gran Torino* is killed off in that film’s opening scene.

reprehensible, he distorts the histories of others in order to write such fantasies, relying on the unfamiliarity of American audiences with the peoples' under discussion in order to validate his simplistic idealism.

It is to other places and other peoples that Eastwood has turned to communicate his particular vision because American counterparts would be less credible to American audiences, and the complexity of, for instance, contemporary US race relations would defy such simplistic portrayal and potentially reduce box office proceeds. Eastwood relies on the ignorance of the American public's knowledge of South African politics or Hmong cultural traditions in order to draw unreal conclusions about human interracial relations in the twenty-first century. The damage such oversimplification perpetrates lies primarily in the resolution concluding these movies—by the close of *Invictus* we are led to believe that in a frenzy of cross-racial Springbok euphoria race conflict in South Africa has evaporated. If this were true, there would be no work left to be done there.

The movie's final image shows a group of young black men playing rugby on a field somewhere in South Africa. This is not the field of the opening scene since the men are clad in proper rugby jerseys and the grass is green and mown, and most importantly, they are no longer playing soccer, but seem instead to have embraced rugby, thanks to the victory of 1995. It is unclear why Eastwood chose to film this final image in front of the backdrop of a power station belching out smoke into the air behind them. The message this suggests is less the "green and pleasant land" of another famous British poem, but rather the "dark satanic mills" of industrial development. While the scene's place in the narrative arc functions to confirm rugby's integration in black South African life, the ominous backdrop serves as a reminder that South Africa's problems—and the world's—have hardly been so neatly solved as the film (and Carlin's book) suggest. Instead, its newfound prominence in the global, industrialized marketplace may have added to the wealth of a black elite, but this has hardly served to eradicate the continued impoverishment and threat to existence of the South African majority.

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## V

**INVICTUS AS CORONATION: CREATING AND EXPORTING A KING**

Sharrona Pearl

If there are no villains, how do we know who the real heroes are? *Invictus* solves this problem by simply telling us, over and over and in a multitude of ways: there is only one true hero, and it is through him that the future is saved; there is only one true leader, and all others follow his lead. There is only one man who deserves gratitude, and all others thank him. There is one master of fate, and he is the captain not just of his soul, but of the soul of the country. All other captains are in his thrall. In the film *Invictus*, Nelson Mandela is the hero, and the only real villain is the demon of memory. According to the narrative of the film, the Mandela character must battle for the future of the country. But the largely American viewers for whom the film is primarily structured are not able—at least not with any real excitement or enthusiasm—to view the past as a major antagonist, for the simple reason that, in the case of South Africa, it has already been condemned and it has already lost. This is the major failing of this film: it has a hero with no villain, stock characters with no development, a story with no narrative, and a cumulating conquest that is no real event. As a result, the outcomes of the sports battles, which stand as a proxy for the outcome of the battle between Mandela and history, are never in doubt. Rather than an epic victory against overwhelming odds, the film's representation of the Springboks and Mandela simply achieve the inevitable.

Part of the project of the film is to enroll the trust of (American) audiences in Freeman's character through their identification with the story's fans undergoing the same process. Royals, unlike elected political officers, represent continuity over time; the trust that American audiences place in the film's regal portrayal of a President from 1995 bridges that sporting event with the 2010 World Cup. As Bok success is, essentially, a given from the outset, the narrative of sporting contest and conquest by the underdog is necessarily subsumed by the true story of the film: the coronation of the character of Nelson Mandela.

Mandela, as depicted in the film, is a minutely flawed but still all-knowing deity in whom we have absolute trust. The tension of the film—if there is any—arises when those less generous, those who lack foresight and political acumen, those who fail to see the reconciliatory potential of rugby, disagree with Madiba about the importance of the Springboks, hitherto, for the majority, a hated symbol of the apartheid regime. We know that the naysayers are wrong, but the tension, slight as it is, arises from the possibility that they may override Mandela and succeed in changing the team name and colors; this, in the logic of the film, would irreconcilably alienate Afrikaners (assumed by the film to be Springbok supporters, one and all). The tension is only slight because the Mandela character will of course prevail, such is his power and

sway over an adoring public. The naysayers are depicted as either vengeful or guilty of a lack of understanding of what is at stake in a sports contest. While the depth of their anger against the Boks and all they represented is hinted at, it is rarely taken as seriously as the film Mandela's message of reconciliation, which is always presented as both just and politically astute. Freeman's Mandela is thus not only a hero and a saint, but a shrewd political operator, and necessarily so—for to win against the past, nothing short of an omniscient and charismatic leader will do.

In their seminal work *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*, Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz offer three major categories of live television events that are highly-coordinated and carefully choreographed to highlight social organization and continuity, even at moments of dramatic change: contests, which are rule-governed battles between two equal sides; conquests, in which the stakes are high (nothing less than the organization of society) and which are overwhelmingly unequal battles in which rules are inevitably broken; and, finally, coronations, in which a leader is ceremonially anointed.<sup>39</sup> Dayan and Katz offer a number of compelling examples for each category, which they analyze in depth. They point to conquests as the typology that most drew them to their model, highlighting the visit of Egyptian President Anwar El Sadat to Israel to negotiate with Prime Minister Menachem Begin in 1978, or the equally courageous visit of Pope John Paul II to Warsaw in 1979. The American Presidential debates are an archetypal contest that sets evenly matched competitors against one another in a highly structured, rule-governed setting. Their examples of coronations (in which they expand the definition of royalty to include any significant societal leader, often in moments when his or her flaws are ignored or elided) include state funerals such as those of Mountbatten, Kennedy, or, indeed, Princess Diana.<sup>40</sup> Coronations, they explain, are also highly rule-governed, but the rules derive from tradition rather than collective agreement. They focus on societal rites of passage, and are particularly important in moments of crisis or change. In the case of funerals, the coronation marks the defiance of society against the possibility of falling apart following the death of a leader. The success of the coronation event hinges on the witnessing function of the audience, who perform the magic necessary for the ritual. There is tension; the magic may not work, and may be undermined by a variety of factors. When it does work, society and social order triumph by failing to disintegrate.<sup>41</sup>

While Katz and Dayan are primarily interested in the construction, production, and representation of highly newsworthy events after they have occurred, their analysis can be successfully extended to genres like the bio-pic or historical film, which may also borrow the organizational and storytelling structures they bring into play. Though *Invictus* is not presented as news per se, its repeated use of quasi-documentary clips (as in the election scenes, the analysis of All-Blacks games, and the final rugby match) and its gestures towards historical events enable the application of

<sup>39</sup> Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History*.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 33.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

the broad categories Dayan and Katz provide. On the face of it, *Invictus* seems organized around two simultaneous and related conquests: the Springboks' road to the conquest of the World Cup, culminating in their final match against the New Zealand All-Blacks, and Nelson Mandela's conquest of the hearts and minds of his countrymen: the road he travels to reconciliation between black and white South Africans. Both are brave attempts at victory against the odds; both break the established social rules; and both would have (at least so the film and the book on which it is based would have it) significant consequences for the structure of society. The Boks, in truth, stood little chance against the all-mighty All-Blacks and the film makes it clear that their chances are improbable at best; in the tutorial given to Mandela by his minister of sports, the President is told that, "according to the experts, we will make the quarter finals and no further." The Mandela character sagely and pithily indicates that all manner of unlikely events have recently come to pass in South Africa. Improbability is no barrier to achievement: "According to the experts, you and I should still be in jail." (53:52–53:56).

The Springboks, and Mandela, win, of course. The beast of history is vanquished—but not in the final scenes of the film. Rather, it is in the opening moments that the conquest occurs: when the contrast between the lush rugby pitch of the white schoolboys and the depleted soccer fields of the black schoolboys are highlighted against the backdrop of Freeman's release from prison. The rest of the story functions, really, as the Mandela character's coronation. The essential victory is in Freeman's release, creating the bridge between the two pitches by bringing the rugby football to the soccer field was inevitable. Once the conquest is made, the remaining two hours and thirteen minutes of the film are details.

The Boks, historically a rugby powerhouse, suffered significantly from the boycott against South Africa. For many years they were unable to compete at the international level, with the resultant decline in their own skill. In Mandela's South Africa, the Boks were again exposed to international play, and, in the matches shown in the early part of Eastwood's film, often came out the worse for it. The conquest event is set up neatly by clearly establishing the Boks as underdogs facing powerful (but, in a nod to historical veracity, not overwhelming) odds: even in the best-case scenario, the Boks would only make it to the quarter-finals. Mandela (or Freeman's) request that the team should win the World Cup (which, in an important scene, he subtly but effectively communicates to Captain Francois Pienaar), is presented as courageous, even audacious, challenging the predictions of the experts and possibly the abilities of the team itself. The stakes are presented as high: loss for the Boks could mean the country's loss of the delicate and precarious balance of growing forgiveness and acceptance that directly mirrors the Boks' march through their matches.

The ostensible payoff of the film comes with the final battle between the Boks and the All-Blacks, which represents the culmination of both the team's and the character of Mandela's long journey(s) to victory. This event is not just a contest (as defined by Katz and Dayan as a battle between equals governed by well-established rules), but, following their formulation, a conquest. Contests, as they point out, tend to have

fewer long-term implications and less emotional resonance than conquests, which are sites of drama, daring, and, in this case, deliverance. The tension surrounding the conquest and its outcome is where the interest and emotional heart of the film lies. However, through its hagiographic treatment of Mandela, the film sets up the Boks and Mandela's victory as inevitable, the only possible outcome in a battle between a divine ruler and mere humans. The sport scenes, lacking the usual excitement of a simple contest, fall flat. So strong is our trust in the film's Mandela, so convinced are we of his omniscience, so potent is his prophetic power, that his inability to bring about victory through force of will is simply inconceivable. If anything, an All-Black victory would itself have hints of conquest, so imbalanced, ultimately, is the game. While they may have had arguably one of the best rugby players of all time in Jonah Lomu, the Boks had something even more important: the Boks had a king on their side. As Grant Jarvie has argued, the inherent conservatism of sporting events and experiences create moments of collective identity; in the narrative of the film, Freeman's Mandela mobilized that identity to an experience of common (and inevitable) destiny.<sup>42</sup>

The athletic contest-that-is-really-conquest is layered upon a conquest-that-is-really-a-coronation: the Mandela character's courting of the whites in the name of reconciliation. Rather than chronicling the difficulties of the struggle and the transition (which even John Carlin's book on which the film is based attempts to do, and which would be a rich source of narrative and tension), the film relies on the tropes of Dayan and Katz's coronation category. Already a king for some, in the course of *Invictus*, Mandela is, with a Springbok cap, crowned the king for all. The white rugby supporters, the film tells us, needed—and got—a king, who is crowned during the World Cup opening ceremonies by his green Boks cap, a gift from a player whose heart he won over earlier. Like a king, Mandela's leadership in this moment transcended political divisions; his crowning cap, as Jacqueline Maingard has argued, identifies Mandela the leader of a unified South African nation.<sup>43</sup> Once again, the odds of victory, in terms of the film's visual and narrative logic, actually fall in the film Mandela's favor. While on the surface of it, Mandela is pitted against the powerful forces of hatred, and anger, and racism, and repression, and poverty, and the results therein, his own personal charm renders these challenges minor.

It takes only one meeting between Freeman's Mandela and the Afrikaner captain Francois Pienaar for Pienaar to fall totally under his spell. As the captain of the Boks, the symbol (we are repeatedly told) of apartheid and discrimination, Pienaar, and especially his family, act as a proxy for the past; if Pienaar, an archetypal Afrikaner, can come to experience reverence for Mandela, so too can (and will) the nation. The Pienaar family home is a bastion of apartheid attitudes of the past and fears for the future unashamedly expressed by Pienaar's father in full hearing of the black maid.

<sup>42</sup> Grant Jarvie, "Sport, Nationalism, and Cultural Identity," *The Changing Politics of Sport*.

<sup>43</sup> Jacqueline Maingard, "Imag(in)ing the South African Nation: Representations of Identity in the Rugby World Cup 1995."



The physical and rhetorical space of Pienaar's home is placed in sharp juxtaposition with other spaces of the past, including Mandela's jail cell on Robben Island, and the spaces of the rainbow nation future, namely Mandela's Presidential office. The rest of the courtship process underscores the security of the film Mandela's position rather than chronicling how it is established. For Freeman's Mandela, the victory of the Boks is not the victorious culmination of his conquest; it is his coronation.

There are many moments in the film in which the Mandela character has power conferred upon him—by his people, by the institutions of (fledgling) democracy, by his workers and subordinates, and, finally, by the newly amalgamated rainbow nation as a whole. There is a great deal of slippage between the quasi-documentary scenes depicting Mandela's (which is to say, Freeman's) release from prison and his inauguration; the intervening election is treated in one brief clip whose outcome is never in doubt. The Mandela character's statements upon release and his inaugural swearing-in are presented, in the rapid montage of these quasi-documentary clips, as almost contiguous. Both moments are brief scenes filled with cheering (black) crowds; both moments contain short excerpts of Mandela's forward-looking speeches calling for reconciliation and forgiveness; both showcase his leadership, dignity, and absolute comfort in his position. The continuity between these two moments depicting the conferral of power underscores the extent to which Mandela's election, or (what was in actual fact quite fraught and tense) the holding and timing of the election, is never in doubt. More than that: the film's Mandela is able to escape the usual rituals of campaigning and wooing a nation; as a divinely appointed ruler, he is exempt from the base requirements—the content, if you will—of the campaign trail.

Carolyn Marvin has argued that political campaigns involve an extended fertility ritual in which the candidate woos the voters with the goal of consummating the relationship through the marriage of election and inauguration.<sup>44</sup> (This narrative also provides some of the generic rules of romantic comedy.) In *Invictus*, the Mandela character's divine ordinance exempts him from this process; his leadership is already guaranteed and his supported is a given. The burden of dealing with dissention lies with the dissenters rather than the leader. The democratic nature of Mandela's election was of overwhelming historical significance, but in the context of the film, the narrative of election is sidelined in favour of the narrative of coronation as represented by the spectacle at the end of the championship match. Mandela's achievement of regal, or, (as embodied in Morgan Freeman,) of celebrity status on the rugby field is also marked by cheering crowds; these crowds are mostly white, and their cheers represent the final stages in the consensus around Mandela's authority. Unlike elected officials, kings and queens do not need to seduce the people on whose support they rely. The honour of the office in many ways rests on its distinctions from transient and fickle political machinations, a distance that Freeman's Mandela labors to achieve throughout the course of the film.

<sup>44</sup> Carolyn Marvin, "Fresh Blood, Public Meat: Rituals of Totem Regeneration in the 1992 Presidential Race." *Communication Research* 21.3.



The regal bearing of Morgan Freeman's Mandela reflects the very deliberate way in which his public persona was constructed to reflect a notion of inherited right to rule. The oft-repeated claim that Mandela was the scion of a 'tribal' royal family can be traced to Anthony Sampson's *Mandela: The Authorized Biography*.<sup>45</sup> Mandela did indeed descend from Thembu royalty, albeit from a lesser house. The film exploits this rhetoric by framing Mandela's leadership as regal rather than political, culminating in his coronation and rendering his inauguration narratively unremarkable.

The Rugby World Cup, according to J.M. Coetzee, was used "to promote the idea that a nation and a national consciousness are to all intents and purposes the same thing, and therefore that sounds and images, if numerous and powerful enough, can create a nation."<sup>46</sup> In Coetzee's analysis, the images and sounds of the World Cup—those that were used to constitute the nation, were clichéd caricatures, stereotypical tokenism, and naïve historical snippets far more contiguous with the colonial visions of South Africa than any true embodiment of the Rainbow concept. The group identity promulgated by the opening and closing ceremonies of the Cup had more in common, he argues, with Victorian imperial and ethnic ideas, in which rugby played a huge part, than post-apartheid possibilities. The image-makers behind the construction of the new South African "nation" were bowing to the expectations of outsiders to create and market a vacation destination.<sup>47</sup> Mandela's coronation in the film shows the deftness of Coetzee's description of the World Cup Ceremonies: it is a spectacle of what we might call, to borrow from and modify Jean and John Comaroff, a climactic moment in the project of image-construction or nation-imagination.<sup>48</sup> Unlike political office, whose occupants are ever changing and whose fulfillment is often fracturing, royalty represent national continuity and unity. In this sense, we might say that Mandela's coronation keeps the rainbow nation from falling apart. Eastwood's film is, then, a curiously anti-democratic celebration of democracy, right at the moment when the US was celebrating Barack Obama's electoral victory—which is clearly one of the subtexts at stake in its appeal to an American and international audience.

Like the event itself, Eastwood's cinematic rendering of the 1995 Rugby World Cup is a project in outsider nation-imagination. A largely American product, *Invictus*, though many years in the making, was released strategically in the run-up to the 2010 Soccer World Cup, held for the first time on African soil. Designed in part to make South Africa legible to American World Cup tourists (by far the biggest group of international visitors for the event in 2010), the film borrows heavily on American sports film tropes, rhetoric of colourblindness, and notions of the sacredness of the Presidency.

As Mandela conducts his battle with history (in the guise of those who will not support the Boks, and will only grudgingly support Mandela's support of the Boks),

<sup>45</sup> Anthony Sampson, *Mandela: The Authorized Biography* (New York: Vintage) 2000.

<sup>46</sup> J.M. Coetzee, "Retrospect: the World Cup of Rugby."

<sup>47</sup> Coetzee, 352.

<sup>48</sup> Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, "Naturing Hte Nation: Aliens, Apocalypse and the Postcolonial State."

he is aided on his quest by the growing success of the team, which, we are to believe, is due to his inspirational leadership. Rugby comes to displace even Mandela himself as a symbol, thereby allowing the film to avoid any real interrogation of Mandela as a person and Mandela as a politician, leaving us with Mandela as king. Rugby and its apparatus – including field, players, opposition, and violence – replace Mandela and the nation as the sight of debate, battle, and victory. What we are left with is rainbow-painted by outsiders for outsiders to see when they watch the sights and sounds of the 1995 (or 2010) World Cup. The only villain (and then, only sort of) is the team of the New Zealand All-Blacks (with their own complicated and utterly obscured history of reconciliation) who come to stand in for history.<sup>49</sup> The only real nation is the one whose construction lies in the future.<sup>50</sup> The Mandela character's coronation is a key moment in the project of image-construction or nation-imagination, designed in the film to export an American-friendly idea of a safe and redemptive sporting nation. Unlike political office, whose occupants are ever changing and whose fulfillment is often fracturing, royalty represent national continuity and unity. Though the Mandela presidency lies far in the past, the film presents a logic of royalty to reassure potential soccer World Cup visitors that the unity of the rugby moment transcends time and politics; royalty, the royalty of Morgan Freeman's Nelson Mandela, is forever. Or at least through the summer of 2010.

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<sup>49</sup> The rugby relationship of New Zealand and South Africa made this final match especially resonant; South Africa's first post-apartheid test match in 1992 was against the then-utterly dominant All Blacks. The ANC situated this first match as an explicit (if highly controversial) gesture towards gaining the trust of white South Africans. Black protesters were killed at Boipatong a few weeks prior to the event, leading for numerous calls to cancel the game. The ANC decided to go ahead with the match with the proviso that the white South African flag was not flown and the white anthem not sung. The anthem was indeed sung, leading to further divisions within the ANC and throughout the South African sporting community. J. Nauright, "A Besieged Tribe?"

<sup>50</sup> The ANC framed sport broadly, and rugby specifically, as an "emotional unifier," explicitly acknowledged by Mandela in the opening of the World Cup, during which he referred to the event as an important "nation-building effort." L. Steenveld and L. Strelitz, "The 1995 World Cup and the Political of Nation-Building in South Africa." The role of sport in creating national identity across political, economic, and social divides has been examined in depth by Grant Jarvie (1993), though as Eric Hobsbawm has pointed out, sport in general and rugby in particular can also be used to delineate and exacerbate class divisions. E. J. Hobsbawm and T. O. Ranger, *The Invention of Tradition*.

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## VI

### A REAL MAN'S MANDELA: THE SPECTATOR AND SPORTSMANSHIP IN *INVICTUS*

Samantha Pinto

"But as soon as we stepped on to the cricket or football field, more particularly the cricket field, all was changed. We were a motley crew . . . Yet rapidly we learned to obey the umpire's decision without question, however irrational it was. We learned to play with the team, which meant subordinating your personal inclinations, and even interests, to the good of the whole. We kept a stiff upper lip in that we did not complain about ill-fortune. We did not denounce failures, but 'Well tried' or 'Hard luck' came easily to our lips. We were generous to opponents and congratulated them on victories, even when we knew they did not deserve it. We lived in two worlds. Inside the classrooms the heterogeneous jumble of Trinidad was battered and jostled and shaken down into some sort of order. On the playing field we did what ought to be done."

—C.L.R. James, *Beyond a Boundary*, (25–6)

The Trinidadian intellectual C. L. R. James writes vividly about how the performance of sportsmanship aligns with and imagines a colonialist vision of community, one that centers not only on following the rules, but also on a set of affective behaviors that govern social relations. Clint Eastwood's film *Invictus* harnesses sportsmanship, what I identify as the dominant logic of the sports-movie genre, and reimagines it as political strategy in the biographical feature film. The opening scene of the film features two sports fields in South Africa in 1990: the first contains immaculately maintained grass populated by uniformed white boys, headed by a white male rugby coach; the second is a sun-singed, dusty, and litter-strewn venue for black South African youth running their own soccer game. Between these is a road that carries a newly freed Nelson Mandela and, with him, an array of political

feelings attending the promise of a New South Africa. Instead of sports-as-metaphor, we instead are plunged headlong into a biopic, with sports as *strategy*: as tactic of the liberal state. *Invictus*, based on John Carlin's 2008 book, *Playing the Enemy*, is thus a story of a new politics of transnational spectatorship in which sport figures as a strategy for reconfiguring South African citizenship and its global image. Sportsmanship, with its mix of competitive drive, altruistic belonging, and allegiance to preset rules, might be the staple of the national sports movie. Here, however, its stake in politics is spelled out for us in excruciating detail: the fate of national unity, we are repeatedly reminded (from Morgan Freeman's near-saintly portrayal of the workaholic, shrewd Nelson Mandela), depends on the affect produced by and through national rugby fandom. It is a tricky juggling act of persuading white rugby lovers to show loyalty to the new democracy, while convincing black South Africans to switch their allegiance to the 'home' team, and attracting a favorable international audience for the new "Rainbow Nation" through the media platform afforded international sporting events like this.

In addition to serving the nation-making function described by James, *Invictus* creates what Jasbir Puar might call a homonational space, one that harnesses and regulates difference into service to the nation, in the formation and representation of national identity. But it also involves a further transnational dimension: Americans' fascination with South Africa during apartheid has spawned several Hollywood films that have deployed the tropes of domestic melodrama to articulate the relationship between individuals who are able to come to a personal, emotional understanding of one another across racial identifications. But here, director Clint Eastwood decides to tell the story of post – apartheid South African politics through the epic melodrama – and the business – of sport.

*Invictus* concerns itself directly with harnessing the "hearts and minds" of men who play or watch a rough and violent game to non-violent ends. The disciplining narrative of the sports film is that success at competition offers, as James puts it in the epigraph from *Beyond a Boundary*, a chance for everyone to learn their roles and to sublimate individual success for the collective good of the team. This message is frequently the stage for political metaphors that relate the sports team to the nation—to put it crassly, a national body of men organized into defeating another nationalized collective. In this sense the sport film participates in the same economy as the war film—a genre that Eastwood has also recently explored in historical detail in *Letters from Iwo Jima* (2006) and *Flags of Our Fathers* (2006). But the "contact" of sport happens, as the opening scene of the separate but unequal fields attests, in the narrative realm of elective cooperation. So Eastwood's translation of the sports film into the biographical and political makes sense as an affective move, one harnessing the force of voluntary feeling that sport can often traffic in, rather than the obligations of law and order, or the corruptive force of state-sanctioned violence (though one wonders how much sport does fit into this latter category).

As the icon of outlaw masculinity from the *Dirty Harry* franchise and Westerns of his movie star days up through *Gran Torino*, Eastwood softens his vigilante hero in Mandela, a man split from his family for both personal and political reasons.

Mandela is shot in biopic fashion, frequently alone in a room, with high angle long shots (emphasizing his singularity) giving way to tight-framed close ups that register his strength as a charismatic lead and leader. This is Mandela/Morgan Freeman's film through and through, and the flipside of that reaction is how little Matt Damon fills that same role as François Pienaar, the Afrikaner captain of the Springbok team. Damon's character is barely realized, purposely so, by the film. He starts as an (apparently) apolitical blank slate on which national consciousness can be inscribed, or more exactly where it can be hailed into existence by Mandela. As the movie poster and trailer attest: "His people needed a leader. He gave them a champion." Granted agency and (inter)national visibility by Mandela's attention to the rugby team of which he is captain, *Invictus*'s Pienaar executes the rules and discipline of the sport leader only by proxy of the star power of Mandela/Freeman himself, who lends his gravitas to the not-so-serious business of sport. This is mirrored by the marketing poster, in which Freeman looms large in a quarter profile, with Damon's visage at Freeman's back, smaller but in three-quarter profile.

This difficult translation of sports into politics is, in fact, the driving conflict of the film. When Mandela interrupts the meeting of the National Sport Council (who have just voted to strip the Springbok team of its colors and name and remake the national team as the Proteas, the name of the coloured team), his advisors are mystified. Brenda Mazikubo, Mandela's Chief of Staff, vocalizes the quandary directly when, early on in the film, her character says of Mandela's political capital: "At least risk it for something more important than rugby." *Invictus* directly aligns the solitary experience of political prisonership, an internal battle for an external cause, with the impact of sport, a recreational phenomenon ancillary to the real business of governance and politics, which manages to do important affective and symbolic work for the national body politic. As James says of the "code" of sport in *Beyond a Boundary*: "I learnt it as a boy, I have obeyed it as a man and now I can no longer laugh at it" (26). *Invictus* takes the business and culture of sport as serious politics—serious biopic politics that moves the focus off the team and onto the political acumen of one of the twentieth century's most famous and appealing international figures.

When he is asked later whether his interest in rugby is "just a political calculation," Mandela responds that it is "a human calculation." Eastwood's Mandela, in other words, recognizes the genre of sports and its mobilizing utility as much as the film itself attempts to trade on the sports genre. The twist the film puts on C. L. R. James's orderly colonial regimen of learned sport behavior, in the context of postcolonial, postapartheid South Africa, is that it is embodied in the spectator, in fandom, not only in the player. Arjun Appadurai argues that international media is a way to consolidate diasporic audiences into a collective through viewing and rooting for one's "home" national team while abroad. *Invictus* imagines media as just such a "technoscape," and sport as a cultural space of constructed competition and belonging that can activate what we might call political feelings. We might even go as far as to think of them as public feelings, in the sense Ann Cvetkovich develops: feelings that are allowed little expression in the realm of normative masculinity. *Invictus* demonstrates what it shows Mandela doing: it takes the 'bad' public feelings

around race and politics in South Africa and transforms them through and into the discourse of sport itself. Rather than having the characters participate directly in political discussion the way a traditional biopic might, *Invictus* reimagines politics as sports, creating an observant citizenship, which acts by ‘rooting for’ the nation. Charismatic leadership gives way to a possessed citizenship, a collective of spectators who can reharvest their national-participatory practices to (or begin to cultivate them as) the emotional experience of sports fandom.

The shared public sphere in the film offers the promise of reconciliation, rather than, following Brenna Munro’s analysis, the nuclear family, which serves in the film as an impediment *to* rather than as a metaphor *for* nation building: Mandela’s family refuses to forgive in private, while the Pienaar family’s maid and mistress get to hug in public in the stadium at the big match. Nowhere is this public promise more apparent than in the other major subplot of the movie, that of tensions within the newly integrated national security detail. This business of reconciliation in *Invictus* is a thing to be worked out, in Sedgwickian terms, between men (but minus the triangulatory presence of women in any significant way). The security detail embodies the “team” metaphor of strategies of violence, fear, and protection that must be sublimated in the new vision of nation into a masculinity that smiles as it “defends,” and as it strategizes new ways to reach a global audience while maintaining discipline and control of its message. If violent feelings don’t serve the nation in *Invictus*, nor do fear and paranoia, the possibility of which the film introduces at various points. For example: in an early scene we see Mandela on his pre-dawn walk with his security guards. The quiet of the morning, which somehow seems menacing and dark, is broken by a suspicious van racing down the street towards them—but only to toss a bundle of Afrikaans newspapers, which, as it happens, express skepticism about the newly elected president’s political acumen. This scene is matched by the scene immediately preceding the World Cup finals at Ellis Park (one likely to arouse post-9-11 fears in American audiences), when what looks like a pending domestic terrorist attack from a white pilot turns out to be an expression of support for the home team. The men of the security detail bond over their rugby fandom, but also over the challenge of Mandela’s public presence in front of a possibly uncontrollable, unpredictable rugby audience hostile to his politics. That constant threat, like the high wire act of sports competition, keeps the men together—and forms the basis of their joint success in their position on the watchful sidelines of national politics.

This narrative of national spectatorship is driven home as the Springboks team wins the Rugby World Cup on a South African field, with montages of happy fandom cutting from the bar, the home, the state house, the stadium, the street, and the township; Carlin’s take begins “There wasn’t a dry eye in the country” (243), before leading us through several snapshots of public celebration and interracial solidarity on the night of the win. The display of public feeling around the win is a convention of sport film, but *Invictus* also traffics in various other cinematic styles and clichés. The start of the film, following the scene of the segregated rugby fields, is in documentary footage style, with reconstructed newsreel footage of Freeman as



Mandela, for instance. Reconstructed footage of Freeman-as-Mandela is shot frequently on the Pienaars' television screen as well. So as we watch (mostly) men watching sports in various locales in *Invictus*, the film also asks us to become spectators of the media construction of affect around sports and racial politics that it praises Mandela for recognizing and harnessing politically and cinematically. But at other moments, particularly surrounding the depiction of poverty, the film asks us to lose that critical lens. For instance, though we as viewers know that there are news cameras recording the Springboks during their visit to a township, the news cameras themselves do not appear in the scene, visually. *Invictus* chooses not to question affective paradigms of understanding racism and poverty, again wanting us to see the successful Mandelian tactic of sportsmanship as good diplomacy rather than to deconstruct what "good diplomacy," in this instance, is made out of—namely, exploiting the poor, black citizens of the New South Africa for public relations purposes. This reading perhaps sounds cynical, but it shows the way in which histories of Great Men must move to the margins the complexities of gender, class, and race in order to tell their versions of success.

*Invictus* asks us, in a way, not to see the emphasis on masculinity as exclusionary, but as a way to think about a public-sphere politics of feeling that does not revolve around violence (rather than leaving that to the filmic domain of the private, the family, the feminine), even if that utopian possibility is effected through the stricter heteronormative relations between men that a sport like rugby imposes. If the film does little to disturb or deconstruct gendered spheres, it does imagine a use for politics outside of politics-as-normal. This imaging relies on international paradigms of positive recognition through media representation and is, one might say, a neoliberal model, cognizant of the transnational shift toward cultural representation and branding as productive of political and material realities. The film stages the "two worlds" of James's colonial youth (on and off the field) as potentially compatible with—and ultimately transformative of—each other as strategies of nation-building. We, as spectators, stand back with admiration as the code of conduct, the script of good sportsmanship—however "irrational"—is followed. Unlike the ambivalent desires that James comes to have about the place of colonial gamesmanship in the public education of formerly colonized citizenry, *Invictus* asks us to watch in shared optimism, with eyes determinedly looking forward, not backwards, towards South Africa's conflicted history of race and politics. As in sports narrative, all we need is political skill and a capitalist work ethic to make national, and international, politics work.

Among men, *Invictus*'s Mandela knows how to play the complicated game of national and international re-branding. Freeman plays the part of the erstwhile head of state (and perhaps we should remember that Clint Eastwood was also a former official in his capacity as the conservative mayor of Carmel-by-the-Sea) and with each shot of Mandela shaking hands and making pre-game appearances he emphasizes the power and politics of public appeal (as mediated, of course, via the tropes of the biopic). But as the recent discourse around the 2010 World Cup in South Africa can attest—the fear-mongering around potential crime, the uproar



about the noises from the vuvuzelas in the stadium—international narratives around race and Africa are far more than national affairs. The film itself is a post 9-11 American view of South Africa immediately post-apartheid. The subtext of some of the film's cuts to Mandela speaking on television in various international locales cements this film's concern with political spectatorship and (inter)national reputation—and *Invictus*'s ultimate investment in that narrative of savvy politician Mandela, resting alongside a more comfortable representation of him as humanitarian idol. Freeman as Mandela on a filmed television screen says to the world: "Open your markets to us." In the wake of apartheid, Mandela's struggle is to present a new commodity of national identity for trade on the international political scene. Eastwood's film cannily packages that in the venue of sport as a transnational strategy of recognition that goes beyond the state and good governance. This stabilization entails the management rather than the invisibility of difference in both the political and cultural spheres in obvious ways; but rather than offer a critique of the calculated politics of multiculturalism (and perhaps this is too much to ask of a popular film), *Invictus* offers an endorsement of these strategies of national and transnational branding. It is a masculine melodrama of individual exceptionalism put to a charismatic, collective use, with the political leader functioning as a coach helping his team to overcome psychological blocks, "asking one man to do the impossible," as the trailer states. The film does not expose the thick material and ideological consequences of the systemic violence of inequality; instead *Invictus*' tactical seams reveal both its virtues and its limits as a film about South African history. It ultimately traffics in the technoscapes of the feel-good sport movie and biopic genres, harnessing the (hard-won) public feelings of good sportsmanship as a way to transcend catastrophic political legacies and reassure us about their uncertain futures.

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