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H-France Review Vol. 12 (November 2012), No. 154

Philip Dine, *Sport and Identity in France: Practices, Locations, Representations*. Oxford, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Frankfurt am Main, New York, Wien: Peter Lang, 2012. Cultural Identity Series. viii + 375pp. Footnotes, bibliography, and index. \$74.95 U.S. (pb). ISBN 978-3-03911-898-4.

Review by Corry Cropper, Brigham Young University.

Nicolas Sarkozy's establishment of a Ministère de l'Immigration et de l'Identité nationale in May 2007 took the debate about national identity out of whispered conversations and provocatively placed it in the center of official public discourse. Mr. Sarkozy thereby usurped the platform of the far right and positioned himself as the president and protector of Frenchness. The question of identity has been studied by scholars for decades--indeed, Anne-Marie Thiesse contends that the phrase "national identity" was coined in the 1980s, the very moment the nation as an entity began to evaporate in the face of regional, continental, and global forces. Benedict Anderson, Stéphane Gerson, Anne-Marie Thiesse, Graham Robb, and others have studied French identities in recent years. But Sarkozy's actions have given a new urgency to the subject, making Philip Dine's current work on sport and identity in France of great topical significance.

Professor Dine acknowledges in the opening pages of his book that the concepts of identity and sport are too vast to treat comprehensively in a single volume. He instead proposes "a representative sample of activities and images, aiming at precision and penetration in...treatment of the selected fields" (p. 5). Dine opts to organize each chapter around a specific sport and examines various identities that come to light through the prism of rugby, soccer, horse racing, or fencing, among others. The chapter on the Olympics, for example, ranges from questions of evolving class identity, to issues surrounding identity and colonialism, to the renewal and reordering of French national identity in the Fifth Republic; while the chapter on the Tour de France looks at regional versus national identities, French masculinity, and the empowerment of the working-class. Chapters are typically organized chronologically: the chapter on tennis begins with an overview of the sport's famous ancestor, *le jeu de paume*, then moves to tennis as played among the upper middle class in the early twentieth century (with a focus on Marcel Proust's descriptions of the sport), then to a description of Roland Garros and Suzanne Lenglen, before concluding with a section on Amélie Mauresmo and Yannick Noah.

More broadly, the book is divided into three parts. Part one is titled "Practices" and it examines horse racing and trotting, the Olympics, and cycling. Part two, titled "Locations," perhaps ironically, focuses primarily on sports that are precisely not bound to one location--sailing, auto racing, parkour, and mountaineering--although they all exploit the notions of space, freedom, and conquest. Part three, "Representations," tends to analyze sports--boxing, judo, rugby, and soccer--a bit more through the lenses of art, literature, aesthetics, and the social imaginary. The book concludes with an examination of Pierre de Coubertin as one whose athletic vision embodied French ideals and who exported those to the world with mixed results. Individual chapters are often very wide-ranging and their titles indicate as much. Here are a few examples: "Combat sports: Masculinity, ethnicity and memory;" "From the Great Loop to the Hell of the North: Cycle road racing, work and suffering;" "Looking for liberty--and finding France--in the desert, the mountains and the city."

The advantage of such a wide-ranging approach is that it allows the author to connect very diverse sports via common cultural contexts or problems. Thus, Dine links both yachting and parkour, for example, to “the individual citizen’s desire for ‘liberty’ from the everyday constraints of contemporary French society,” but demonstrates that these individual pursuits are ultimately appropriated “by the homogenizing forces of the republican nation-state” (p. 177). Dine also demonstrates that both the Tour de France and horse racing help strengthen national and regional identities: the former by its march through the regions and triumphal finish in front of the presidential palace in Paris; the latter via the breeding of turf champions that win prestigious races near Paris and overseas thereby furthering the reputation of the nation, and through trotting, a type of horse racing that remains popular primarily at small venues spread throughout provincial France. The Paris-Dakar automobile race, the coverage of track events, parkour, and soccer all reflect the evolving attitudes of the French toward their former colonies. The direct ancestors of the Paris-Dakar motor race began as an imperialist expression of sporting expansion into primitive deserts of North Africa (although that has recently been moved to South America for security’s sake). While some Algerian athletes have been forgotten or ignored, others are remembered for their contributions to the French Republic, particularly in the wake of Algerian independence. “Through parkour,” Dine writes, “the colonial sins of the fathers are effectively ‘played out’ in the postcolonial city;” and in the figure of Zinedine Zidane, the nation found the symbol of a new, hybrid French identity. The Olympics and rugby are linked by their organizational structures and leadership and through the role played by the government in promoting both—including Charles de Gaulle’s reliance on the national rugby team and French track stars to symbolize his *France qui gagne*.

While it is difficult to write much new about the hyper-analyzed Tour de France, Dine intelligently studies the Paris-Roubaix road race, calling it a microcosm of the Tour de France. This proves to be one of the stronger sections of the book as Dine posits that the race’s continued popularity stems from the French taste for commemoration and for the “museumification” of a bygone industrial era where regional products and practices (in this case cobblestones and mining) held pride of place (p. 109). The riders themselves, covered with grime and dust, take on sepia tones and call to mind photographs of a past that comes alive the Sunday of the race.

Later, in the chapter “Looking for liberty—and finding France,” Dine carefully reads Maurice Herzog’s account of his ascent of Annapurna, a Himalayan peak of over 26,000 feet in elevation. He demonstrates that Herzog’s descriptions continually return him to France, “the strangeness of Nepal and the Himalayas [becomes] the familiarity of home” (p. 203). Furthermore, Dine points out that this French mountaineer, who would go on to play a significant role in de Gaulle’s state-managed sports program, viewed the Sherpas, foreigners often diminished in other mountaineering narratives, as equals. Indeed, they saved his life. Dine explains: “Not only were these life-saving individuals not Frenchmen, they were not even Europeans; a fact which raised uncomfortable but urgent questions against the background of France’s belated and reluctant retreat from overseas empire” (p. 206).

The last two chapters come as a nice change of pace, as each focuses on a single sport: first rugby, then soccer. The chapter on rugby is an excellent analysis of French exceptionalism and regionalism. Dine argues that rugby’s popularity in the southwest grew out of defiance of Parisian authority and was enhanced by the region’s festival culture, natural local rivalries, and modernity-resistant traditions of *la France profonde*. The chapter harks back to Dine’s outstanding *French Rugby Football: A Cultural History*, published by Berg in 2001.<sup>[1]</sup> The following chapter on soccer begins as one would expect, with a discussion of France’s win in the 1998 World Cup, the subsequent euphoria, and the shared feelings of national unity in national diversity. Dine follows this section with a discussion of local identity and regional soccer rivalries (most notably the rivalries between Saint-Etienne and Lyon and between Paris and Marseille), before offering a short history of ethnicity and French soccer. The chapter concludes by looking at Thierry Henry’s handball in the France-Ireland World Cup qualifier in 2009 and the French team’s debacle at the 2010 World Cup, before returning to Zidane, his infamous head butt, and his status as the symbol of a new France.

As for underpinning models, Dine's debt to Richard Holt, author of *Sport and Society in Modern France* is foremost; Dine also points to C. Richard King and David J. Leonard's study, *Visual Economies of/in Motion: Sport and Film*, as important for his analysis of sport.<sup>[2]</sup> He explains that in their approach, "sporting representations [stand] at the interface of the individual and the social, thus offering privileged scholarly access to the creation and circulation of identities, as well as insights into their articulation with collective memory" (p. 3). Dine's theoretical models for the notion of identity are less clear. While he does draw briefly on Benedict Anderson, Maurice Agulhon, Pierre Nora, and Eugen Weber, a more rigorous approach to identity or identities may have given the study more coherence. But in any study of this breadth, some territory inevitably remains under-explored or under-analyzed. On the plus side, this work's admittedly broad scope means that it never gets bogged down in arcane minutiae and that the reader is exposed to a broad swath of French sporting history in a fast-paced, readable style. Such a wide-ranging study is a gamble, but Dine wins his bet and has produced a significant contribution to understanding the central role sports have played in negotiating French identities over the last century and a half.

#### NOTES

[1] Philip Dine, *French Rugby Football: A Cultural History* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).

[2] Richard Holt, *Sport and Society in Modern France* (North Haven, CT: Shoe String Press, 1981); C. Richard King and David J. Leonard, *Visual Economies of/in Motion: Sport and Film* (New York, Bern, Berlin, Bruxelles, Frankfurt am Main, Oxford, Wien: Peter Lang Publishing, 2006).

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