

Philip A Mosely, Richard Cashman, John O'Hara and Hilary Weatherbum, eds, *Sporting Immigrants: Sport and Ethnicity in Australia*. Walla Walla Press, Sydney, 1997. Bibliog., illus., index. pp. 323. \$29.95 plus postage from Walla Walla Press, PO Box 717, Petersham 2049.

Several weeks ago, the irrepressible Al Grassby sent me the manuscript of his latest book, *The Struggle for Multiculturalism*, to have a bit of a squiz at. In its present form, it is of encyclopaedia thickness, tracing the story of Australia's multicultural fabric from the 26 (!) ethnic groups represented on the ships of the First Fleet in 1788 up to the ignorant stereotypes of the Oxley moron in the last year or two. It is a grand story of Charles Chauvel proportions. Of course, while it is over two centuries old, the bulk of the news emerges in recent times, first in the boom of post-World War II migration to this country, and secondly in the 25 year aftermath to the then Federal Minister for Immigration's new policy of multiculturalism as outlined in the historic 1973 document *A Multicultural Society for the Future*.

Since Minister Grassby's blueprint, Australians have been steadily feeling more comfortable with their country's increasingly diverse fabric. Pluralist policies now have bipartisan political backing and the clear support of the large majority of Australians.

What we are now involved in as a nation is learning how to do best the 'multicultural' thing. Excluding the Hanson blip and the Howard paralysis, in the last couple of decades we have done it about as well as anyone - in the process establishing Australia as one of the world's most successful, and tolerant, liberal democracies. It is with such ruminations about present and future possibilities that I read *Sporting Immigrants*. It is a timely and very readable contribution to one of our most pressing contemporary debates.

In his Foreword, Warwick Smith, former Federal Minister for Sport, endorses the book as 'a pioneering work'. He's absolutely right. It was some three years in the compiling, beginning when the Bureau of Immigration, Multicultural and Population Research and the Australian Sports Commission commissioned the Australian Sports Consultancy (a grand name for the nice little earner of a few of our ASSH colleagues) to produce a preliminary study on ethnic involvement in Australian sport. Phil Mosely was lined up as the main writer, but fifteen others contributed an interesting (albeit uneven) range of case studies. The report was submitted in late 1996, and then revised as *Sporting Immigrants*, published by the wonderfully though curiously named Walla Walla Press (as in 'further back than...'), a trotter of legendary talent who used to give rivals prodigious starts in races, and who now has a plaque in his memory on the lawns of Goulburn racecourse).

In the Introduction, the editors articulate variously the project's principal problem: a serious lack of primary data and secondary sources. Ethnic involvement in sport has (tabloid beat-ups of soccer aside) not suffered from bad press, it has had no press at all - prompting, not editorial chagrin but a worthy statement of philosophy and intention:

[This] is an area which affords scholars and researchers unlimited opportunities to explore significant, even crucial, aspects of the Australian experience. Arguably, one of the chief dynamics of modern Australian society has been the impact of post-Second World War immigration. As the study of the nation's sporting heritage has proven so fruitful in other areas, such as tracing the evolution of Australian nationalism, further studies of a much neglected area, the exploration of the role of sport in the lives of Australia's immigrants and the impact of their involvement on the sporting and cultural life of the nation, must surely be a continuing imperative.

Sporting Immigrants represents an important start, a first-base study which is divided into four accessible sections: a two-part Overview; eight community case studies; ten individual sport case studies; and 'Women, Ethnicity and Sport'. Aboriginal issues are canvassed in each section.

Phil Mosely is responsible for both parts of the overview, 'Approaches to Immigration, Ethnicity and Sport' and 'Australian Sport and Ethnicity', providing us with a succinct historical sweep, international (and theoretical) approaches and precedents, and sociological parameters. American-based academic Young Yun Kim, a scholar of note in the area, is used by Mosely to confirm what will eventually be the socio-political terrain of the book. Commenting on the assimilation versus pluralism argument, Kim writes:

At the root of these conflicting perspectives is a tendency to view opposites as divorced from each other and irreconcilable ... the cultural assimilationist view and the cultural pluralist view represent two sides of the same cross-cultural adaptation phenomenon. Adaptive change can never be complete, and, at any given moment in any given individual, both the aspect that indicates adaptation and the other aspect that indicates lack of adaptation can be observed.

Assimilation and pluralism are simply components of the 'key process in ethnic relations', we are informed - namely, 'adaptation'.

This ultimately emerges as the trenchant insight into the case studies that follow in section II, where the editorial choices about which ethnic groups to include were made according to country or region of origin, size, cultural distinctiveness and longevity of existence. Analysis of the chosen groups - the Croatians, Greeks, Irish, Italians, Jewish, Pacific Islanders, Poles and the Vietnamese - leads to several interesting conclusions: first, while the media and general public usually perceive immigrant communities to be 'unified and tightly organised, the reality is often different' (such communities can, in fact, be fragmented according to class, geography, age, politics and religion); second, sport is not necessarily important to each community; third, community attitudes generally change over time; and, finally, sport assumes various roles in different immigrant communities. No two communities are identical.

Individual community differences prevail. For the Croatian community, 'intense nationalism' determines soccer involvement, while the Greeks use soccer to unite along religious and political lines. For the

Irish, it is nostalgia and to a lesser extent politics (more recently through the Gaelic Athletic Association) which create a sense of community; for the Italians, it is principally the sports of soccer, bocce and boxing which have enabled them to establish close-knit community clubs; while a desire for 'self-help' has underpinned sport within the community-based Polish welfare associations. By contrast, Vietnamese and Jewish immigrants have not accorded sport the same level of significance. Not only do different communities apply their own specific mores and codes to sporting participation, but different generations within those communities might, as well. Broad-brush assessments of ethnic participation, we realise, are impossible.

Section III's sports case studies provide the reader with some keen insights into the histories (and inequalities) of each sport. The study, in this section, attempts to establish some balance between team and individual sports, and considers 'whether explanations for levels of sporting participation lie in the character, forms and ideologies of particular sports and/or in the lack of opportunities for access to particular sports and appropriate facilities'. Why are some sports more popular in certain immigrant groups than others? What we get in Part III is a documentation of the immigrant role in Australian sports, a role, it is correctly asserted, that 'to date, has been largely undocumented and unacknowledged'. The compilers of *Sporting Immigrants* aim 'to rectify the situation'. Within the prescribed scope of the study, they are successful.

All ten sections in Part III educate and inform - some, perhaps inevitably, more than others. Greater ease of access to information makes the more established sports - soccer, cricket, Australian rules and rugby league - more thorough and engaging accounts than less populous sports such as softball and surf lifesaving. This is to be expected.

Part IV, focussing on 'the experiences of and attitudes to sport of women from culturally diverse backgrounds' is a bare ten pages in length. Again, given the number of editorial disclaimers in the book's first pages, this was to be expected. In fact, several pages of this section are devoted simply to presenting the results of an individual study of 27 women with ethnic backgrounds, and nineteen focus groups, in an eight-month period in 1996. While the results are commendably recent, the pitifully small scale of the study accentuates the problems for scholars in this field: virtually no precedents, few funds and presumably limited enthusiasm.

If the achievement of *Sporting Immigrants* rests with its trail blazing, then the downside is that these first pioneers can only plough of necessity shallow furrows. As the Conclusion suggests, 'Overall this work highlights the need for further research and the collection of qualitative data on ethnic participation rates in particular sports'. *Sporting Immigrants* does succeed in setting an agenda. What is needed now is for a generation of sport scholars to act on that agenda.

David Headon
Director
Centre for Australian Cultural Studies, Canberra