

“Volkekunde” in the academic and rugby world of South Africa’s Dr Danie Craven¹

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Abstract

This article is a foray into the field of anthropology (“volkekunde” in Afrikaans) and sport history. It examines aspects of the sport-related thinking of a noted luminary in South Africa’s rugby world, Dr Danie Craven of Stellenbosch. He was not only an outstanding rugby player but also for many years an influential chairperson of the South African Rugby Board. The possibility is probed that his outlook was at least in part informed by his background as an anthropologist or the Afrikaans variant of a “volkekundige” with its own emphases. It is argued that to some extent his academic exposure to “volkekunde” heightened for instance his understanding of the role of the New Zealand Māori in that country’s rugby culture and some insights spilled over into his attempts to bring coloured South African players closer to the mainstream of rugby in South Africa, not always with the necessary political sophistication or finesse. Finally, it is argued that what he called the “spirit” of rugby, might have been informed by anthropological precepts.

Keywords: Sport and anthropology; Rugby culture; Maori; Fandom; Apartheid; “Volkekunde”; Stellenbosch.

Introduction

There are a fair number of publications on the anthropology of sport in South Africa, dealing for example with acculturation, fandom, identity, and the internal properties of certain sporting codes.⁴ This essay hopes to expand on the literature

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4 Compare C Hanekom, “Ontspanning en vryetydsbesteding by die Bantoe van Suid Afrika” (MA, University of the Free State, 1958); NA Scotch, “Magic, sorcery, and football among urban Zulu: A case of reinterpretation under acculturation”, *The Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 5(1), 1961; B Magubane, “Sport and politics in an urban African community: A case study of African voluntary organizations” (MA, University of Natal, 1963); CM Anderson, TA Bielert and RP Jones, “One country, one sport, endless knowledge: The anthropological study of sports in South Africa”, *Anthropologica*, 46(1), 2004; S Cubizolles, *Le football en Afrique du Sud: Vécu d’un township au Cap occidental* (Paris, Editions Karthala, 2010); RJ Gordon and M Grundlingh, “Going for the reds: Max Gluckman and the anthropology of football”, A Schwelle, N Szogs, MZ Kowalska and M Buchowski (eds.), *The new ethnographies of football in Europe: People, passions and politics* (London, Palgrave Macmillan,

through a historically grounded exploration and an informed anthropological analysis pertaining to the outlook of a prominent South African sportsperson, Dr Danie Craven, who had a background in “Volkekunde”.

Born in 1910, Craven had gained his reputation as South Africa’s Mr Rugby, first as a rugby player and later as captain of the national team, then as an outstanding coach and eventually as an influential and long-serving chair of the South African Rugby Union from 1956 to 1993. During these tumultuous apartheid times he attracted fire from the political left and right, and at times also made himself a target because of his ill-conceived judgements that rugby transcends formal apartheid structures.⁵

Conceptually, our specific focus is on the possible nexus between the discipline of “Volkekunde” and the way in which Craven came to understand certain wider dimensions of rugby and society in South Africa. Whereas Craven had a huge reputation in rugby, he does not feature in the pantheon of luminaries or villains of the discipline. This is not surprising as he did not publish academically in “Volkekunde”; for all intents and purposes he was a far lesser known “volkekundige” than his peers. It does not, however, preclude the possibility that the knowledge and insights he had gained during his early grounding as an academic, even if dormant, later heightened his sensibilities for a deeper understanding of some sports issues and functioned as conceivable wellsprings of his outlook. If that was indeed the case, Craven would have been in good company. None other than the renowned Max Gluckman, the South African/ British anthropologist, has analysed his favourite British soccer team, Manchester United, along anthropological lines, focusing especially on the dynamics of interaction between fans and players.⁶

It is important to note a key difference between “Volkekunde” as it used to be taught at Afrikaans-speaking universities and anthropology at English-speaking universities. “Volkekunde” during the embryonic years of Afrikaner nationalism focused broadly on the notion that each “volk” or “nation” in South Africa, possessed a sense of ethnos which determined its innate characteristics as opposed to the more individualistic and broader societal concerns emphasised by social anthropology.⁷

2016); I Niehaus, “Warriors of the rainbow nation? South African rugby after apartheid”, *Anthropology Southern Africa*, 37(1/2), 2014.

5 A Grundlingh, “The contrariness and contradictions of South Africa’s ‘Mr Rugby’”, V Bickford-Smith and B Nason (eds.), *Illuminating lives: Biographies of fascinating people from South African history* (Cape Town, Penguin, 2018), p. 161.

6 RJ Gordon and M Grundlingh, “Going for the reds ...”, A Schwelle, N Szogs, et al., *The new ethnographies of football in Europe...* p. 27.

7 For example, RJ Gordon, “Apartheid’s anthropologists: On the genealogy of Afrikaner anthropology”, *American Ethnologist*, 15(3), 1988, pp. 535-553; RJ Gordon, “Early social anthropology in South Africa”, *African Studies*, 49(1), 1990, pp. 15-48; RJ Gordon, “Serving the volk with volkekunde: The rise of South African anthropology”, J Jansen (ed.), *Knowledge and power in South Africa: Critical perspectives across the disciplines* (Johannesburg, Skotaville, 1991); RJ Gordon and AD Spiegel, “South Africa revisited”, *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 22(1), 1993, pp 83-105; CS van der Waal, “Long walk from volkekunde to anthropology: Reflections on representing the human in South Africa”, *Anthropology Southern Africa*, 38(3/4), 2015, pp. 216-234.

"Volkekunde's" general point of departure was described as a quest "towards the identification of core differences between Self and Other" rather than a focus on cultural adaptations and interaction".⁸ Perceived as fundamental shortcomings these approaches were over time castigated mainly by English speaking anthropologists working with a wider lens. The criticisms became even more strident as a number of "volkekundiges" were drawn to the apartheid project with its ethnic emphases. Whilst obviously an important issue in the discipline, in its more extreme form it ran the risk of what has been called "primordial paranoia", where ethnic dimensions of whatever kind are *de facto* regarded as suspect.⁹

Academic beginnings in Stellenbosch

Danie Craven arrived at Stellenbosch in 1929, eleven years after the establishment of the university. The university has initiated a reputation for becoming the Athena of the south – a place of excellence and also of a unique student life amidst scenic natural surroundings. In terms of intellectual life what Oxbridge universities were to the national life of Britain and the Ivy League universities to America, Stellenbosch was to Afrikaners. From its inception it subscribed to an Afrikaner ethos in contradistinction to the nearby University of Cape Town which was imbued with more of an imperial ambience. In political terms, the establishment of Stellenbosch was to be closely allied to the emergent Afrikaner nationalism of the time.¹⁰

Craven's decision to come to Stellenbosch was not necessarily based on political considerations, but rather on the fact that it was the only tertiary institution where he could pursue theological studies with a view of becoming a Dutch Reformed Church minister of religion. Closely related to this was the young Craven's infatuation with rugby at which he had excelled from a young age. The university had already by then developed a reputation for its rugby prowess under the guidance of a crusty but astute coach, AF Markötter, widely known as "Oubaas Mark". From the deep interior of the Eastern Free State, in the town of Lindley where Craven went to school, word was sent to "Oubaas Mark" that the young rugby prodigy was on his way to Stellenbosch. Markötter took him under his wing, well aware of his sporting talent and without pampering him, sought to develop his abilities further.

In contrast to his rugby feats, Craven had a rather spotty academic record at school and in his final year, his parents had some doubts whether he would meet the university entrance requirements. They were relieved when he did. It took a while

8 A Bank, "Broederbande [brotherly bonds]: Afrikaner nationalist masculinity and African sexuality in the writings of Werner Eiselen's students, Stellenbosch University, 1930-1936," *Anthropology Southern Africa*, 38(3/4), 2015, p. 181.

9 M de Jongh, "Primordialist paranoia, essentialism and South African realities: Participating and observing across the 'anthropological divide'," *Anthropology Southern Africa*, 30(3 & 4), 2007, pp. 75-84.

9 A Grundlingh, "Trends in Afrikaner nationalism and language over a century," A Grundlingh (ed.), *Perspectives on Stellenbosch 100* (Sun University Press, Stellenbosch, 2018).

for him to adapt to Stellenbosch, but once he had found his feet the university held a special appeal. One of his biographers remarked: "Life suddenly opened up, as he came into contact with men of the world, scholars who were in contact with the rest of the world. His academic awakening took some time in coming, but when it did it had the force of a sudden revelation".¹¹ Linking up with this, a journalist graphically described that that "he has spent really all his life buried in a rugby scrum or a heavy tome in the library". Significantly it was added that these two sets of interests were not separated and influenced "his judgement enormously".¹²

Craven's intention, however, to study as a minister of religion came to an abrupt end in 1932 when he received a hard blow to his vocal cords during a rugby match for South Africa against Scotland. At the time it was thought that the injury could damage his career as a preacher. Craven was not too perturbed – he seemed to have outgrown his sense of calling – and preferred to carry on with what was known as "Volkekunde" at the time.¹³

Initially in the 1920s, "Volkekunde" was looked at somewhat askance in status-conscious Stellenbosch, where the study of black people which also entailed doing fieldwork amongst them, was in some quarters considered *infra dig*.¹⁴ This changed with the appointment in 1926 of the competent Werner Eiselen, the son of a German missionary, who had studied in Germany in linguistics and ethnology (as "Volkekunde" was also known) under the renowned "Bantuist" Carl Meinhof. Eiselen was not only an inspiring lecturer, but also a productive researcher and between 1928 and 1932 had written four books. With him as head of department, the student numbers for the subject grew exponentially.¹⁵ Eiselen has also been exposed to a broader education and was knowledgeable about British, American, and German anthropological theories. Intellectually he was not one-track minded. At Stellenbosch there was some distance between him and purveyors of idealist nationalist thinking.¹⁶ Eiselen, however, later joined the civil service and under Prime Minister Hendrik Verwoerd became so-called secretary of Native Affairs, and gained some notoriety for promoting separate education and the homeland system under apartheid.

11 P Dobson, *Doc: The life of Danie Craven* (Cape Town, Human & Rousseau, 1994), p. 22.

12 *Sunday Times*, 23 October 1988.

13 P Dobson, *Doc: The life of Danie Craven*, pp. 25-26.

14 WD Hammond-Tooke, *Imperfect interpreters: South Africa's anthropologists, 1920-1990* (Johannesburg, Wits University Press, 1990), p. 121.

15 RJ Gordon, "Apartheid's Anthropologists: ...", *American Ethnologist*, 15(3), 1988, p. 539.

16 A Kuper, "South African Anthropology: An inside job", *Paiudema: Mitteilungen zur Kulturkunde*, 45(1), 1999, p. 93; C Kros, *The seeds of separate development: Origins of Bantu Education* (Pretoria, Unisa Press, 2010), p. 44.

Craven and Eiselen: Student and supervisor and the politics of the time

Craven came to "Volkekunde" not as an Afrikaner nationalist, but as a supporter of General Jan Smuts. Craven later recalled that Smuts had visited the Stellenbosch campus and impressed upon them that they should study "Volkekunde" with the view of finding a "solution to the native question".¹⁷ Craven who also studied African languages in his undergraduate years, and like many of his "Volkekunde" peers, had grown up in rural areas and had plenty of interactions with black people, which in some respects would have him well placed to embark on studies pertaining to African societies.

Craven had to juggle his time between playing international rugby and studying. Eiselen as his supervisor for both his MA and PhD was surprised at how diligently Craven managed to stick to his task. He obtained the MA with distinction and after two years finished his PhD in 1935. The title of his doctoral dissertation was "Ethnological classification of the Southern African Bantu" (translated from Afrikaans). He literally worked himself to a standstill and collapsed from fatigue immediately after he had submitted the dissertation and had to be revived by a medical doctor.¹⁸

His thesis was mainly a classificatory description of cultural similarities and differences between various African groupings. Writing in general on the kind of theses produced during this time at Stellenbosch, W.D. Hammond Tooke from the University of the Witwatersrand commented that whilst these theses imparted solid ethnographic information, they lacked theoretical content and were based on limited fieldwork and relied mainly on informers instead of extended periods of participant observation.¹⁹ These criticisms would also have applied to Craven's work. He finished in record time and during the viva deliberately shied away from questions with too much of a theoretical bent.²⁰ It was a thesis cast in the ethnographical mould of the time. However, it also has to be borne in mind that ethnographic studies such as Craven's were not necessarily beyond the pale; the discipline in South Africa was in its infancy but such studies nevertheless at least contributed towards an initial academic understanding of the basic structures of some black communities and variations in between.

Scholars differ on the extent to which Eiselen, as an academic, subscribed to race as a biological determinant as opposed to culture. In part this was the case because Eiselen has shifted his position after his appointment in 1926, and in the early 1930s gave greater prominence to culture. Andrew Bank, however, in examining this trend

17 P Dobson, *Doc: The life of Danie Craven*, p. 26.

18 P Dobson, *Doc: The life of Danie Craven*, pp. 29-30.

19 WD Hammond-Tooke, *Imperfect interpreters: ...*, pp. 120-121.

20 P Dobson, *Doc: The life of Danie Craven*, p. 30.

has warned against an interpretation which overemphasises the “contrast between his [Eiselen’s] “racial discourse” in the late 1920s and his “cultural discourse” of the 1930s”. According to Bank “[d]ifference and hierarchy remained at the core of his thinking”.²¹ Craven held Eiselen in high regard and later claimed that as supervisor he left a lasting impression.²²

Bank has characterised Eiselen’s graduate students as a cohort of young men from farming backgrounds, born a few years after the Anglo-Boer War (or the South African War of 1899-1902), went to Afrikaans schools, came to Stellenbosch at a young age, many of them to study as a minister of religion and belonged to Stellenbosch University’s BTK (“Berg en Toer Klub”) or Outdoor Society, of which Eiselen was the head or “Kaptein”.²³ Craven’s life history seems to adhere to Bank’s framework as he hailed from a farm, was born in 1910 and initially came to Stellenbosch for theological studies and also joined the BTK.

He was, however, not part of the inner circle of Eiselen’s protégés. Here men such as PJ Coertze, later to become particularly influential at the University of Pretoria, and others like PJ Grobler, PJ Schoeman, HF Prinsloo and AA van Schalkwyk loomed large and were also set to make their mark later in “Volkekunde” and nationalist government circles. During the late thirties, they all joined right-wing Afrikaner organisations such as the *Ossewa Brandwag* (Oxwagon Sentinel) for which their mentor Eiselen had developed a predilection. Craven was the dog that did not bark, or at least not in the manner of the rest of his pack.

He did, however, wish to work in the Department of Native Affairs. On a rugby tour to Pretoria, Craven had personally approached the department with a view of obtaining a position. He was rudely shown the door with an official telling him that they did not need men with doctoral degrees to tell them how to resolve the “native problem” and that they were perfectly capable of doing it on their own. Craven left in a huff, telling the official: “Thank you very much, I am glad that you have solved the native question. I was under the impression that it still exists. Thank you and good-bye”.²⁴

His career took a different trajectory after the completion of his doctorate. In 1936 he accepted a teaching position at St Andrew’s College in Grahamstown (currently Makhanda). His teaching career was to be of short duration, and he left in 1938 to join the Union Defence Force as Director of Physical Training. This position took him to Germany for a study visit of six months, exposing

21 A Bank, “Fathering *volkekunde*: Race and culture in the ethnological writings of Werner Eiselen, Stellenbosch University, 1926–1936”, *Anthropology Southern Africa*, 38(3/4), 2015, p. 177.

22 *Matieland*, 3, 1982.

23 A Bank, “Broederbande [brotherly bonds]: ...”, *Anthropology Southern Africa*, 38(3/4), 2015, pp. 181–182.

24 H Gerber, *Craven* (Cape Town, Tafelberg, 1982), p. 74 (Translated).

him to different training methods. Craven respected the rigour of German physical training, but rejected the fanaticism and at times vindictiveness with which it was pursued. He experienced this first-hand. A German instructor who had taken a dislike to Craven, maliciously exhausted him physically with a torturous gym routine. To the instructor's ire, Craven managed to survive the ordeal. Craven then spoke up and said:²⁵

I will tell you one thing, you may well have tried to break me today, but I believe in my principles just as you do. You may well be the master here and I the student, but in South Africa I have a position to uphold. I have some status, and a man like you would never be able to live in my country. We don't take stock of rubbish such as you.

Craven also clashed with a fellow South African, the rabid Nazi supporter, Robey Leibrandt. They were often at loggerheads and on several occasions, the antagonism between the two almost spilled over into fisticuffs. Intellectually he also failed to get much of value. One of the subjects he was exposed to was called "Politische Antropologie", but he was disappointed as the course did not really deal with "Volkekunde" as he had expected but had more to do with Nazi propaganda. At times when the lecturers discussed material that they considered sensitive, the foreigners were asked to leave the classroom.²⁶

The fact that Craven had signed up in the Defence Force and stayed throughout the duration of the Second World War and till 1949, marked him as a committed Smuts man. This was in contradistinction to Eiselen's position and those of his students who were opposed to South Africa's participation in the war against Germany. He had to pay a price for involvement in the Defence Force. At the time there was considerable animosity directed against Afrikaners who had joined up. Craven experienced this when he entered the Dutch Reformed Church in uniform and as he recalled, was looked upon as if he were "rubbish". It was an experience that rankled for a long time and although he remained religious, he decided not to go to church again.²⁷

Craven came from a family that was loyal to the notion of a broader white South Africanism. Despite the fact that his father fought in the Anglo-Boer War on the side of the Free State commandos, the Cravens did not subscribe to the deep resentments towards Britain that animated many of their Afrikaner counterparts. South Africanism at the time, found a ready home in the United Party, and was an ideology that purportedly supported voluntarism, cooperation, consensus, and harmony amongst whites in contrast to narrower ethno-nationalism promoted

25 T Partridge, *A life in rugby* (Cape Town, Southern Book Publisher, 1991), p. 45.

26 H Gerber, *Craven, ...*, pp. 110-115.

27 *Vrye Weekblad*, 5 October 1990.

by the National Party.²⁸ In terms of racial policy segregation, the forerunner of apartheid, held sway under a patchwork quilt of “benevolent paternalism”. Craven was not given to the niceties of unpacking the ideology of South Africanism and had an almost intuitive understanding of what it constituted. “My politics was South Africa”, he said, “Whatever was good for South Africa, that was my politics”.²⁹ Such an uncomplicated view of the many interests submerged under the notion of South Africanism was later to come under heavy fire as Craven had to face up to the fact that his idea of what constituted South Africa’s best interest was much more complicated than what he was aware of.

In the thirties though, the fact that Craven steered a different career direction from that of Eiselen and his protégés, was enough of an indication that he was his own person. He thought that South Africa’s interests were best served by someone like General Jan Smuts and that the robust nationalism of the National Party had too much of a sectional ring to it which might divide white South Africa. The way the Dutch Reformed Church treated him during the war provided him with ample proof of the negative consequences of forging sectional interests.³⁰ Similarly, although he regarded himself as an Afrikaner, he stayed well clear of Afrikaner political pursuits. He is on record as saying in 1985 that “Afrikaners ruined our country and are now not prepared to step off the throne they had built for themselves”.³¹

Craven’s case illustrates that tutelage, even if vigorously pursued, is not an assembly line for producing exact replicas. Craven had the same supervisor and followed the same courses as his fellow students, but the impact of that exposure was not so powerful as to push him into the directions they pursued. His keen interest in sport which opened up a different professional avenue and his early perception of white South Africanism most likely played a part in him ultimately not following the standard route of his “Volkekunde” contemporaries. He never openly complained about this, nor did he begrudge his peers their career paths. He maintained a healthy respect for Eiselen and the possibility of questioning the validity of his mentor’s decisions, not to say his academic paradigms, did not occur. Regardless of what the shortcomings of “Volkekunde” might have been, for Craven the discipline did open the door to learning. In 1949, on the basis of his strong sporting background and his known academic proclivities, he was appointed as Professor of Physical Education at Stellenbosch, a position he held for more than 25 years.

28 A Grundlingh, “The King’s Afrikaners? Enlistment and ethnic identity in the Union of South Africa’s Defence Force during the Second World War, 1939-145”, *Journal of African History*, 42(1), 1999, p. 359.

29 P Dobson, *Doc: The life of Danie Craven*, p. 10.

30 *Vrye Weekblad*, 5 October 1990.

31 South Africa Rugby Archives, DH Craven Personal correspondence, 3. 10, 1985-1987, DH Craven to E Jokl, 27 November 1985.

Intellectual fermentation and applied knowledge

In one of the biographies written on Craven, there is a reference to an apocryphal conversation about Craven that could have taken place in certain English-speaking quarters in South Africa, it went something like this:³²

That man Craven hasn't a brain in his head.

But hasn't he several degrees?

Yes, but all in rugby. Hardly an academic achievement.

But he's a university professor, isn't he?

Oh, yes – at Stellenbosch. That's like being a high school teacher. Anyway, they're so mad about rugby at Stellenbosch they'd do anything to get the great high priest of rugby there – including dishing out professorships for all sorts of tinpot subjects. He's probably professor of rugby!

Whether such an exchange actually took place as reported, is not the central point here; more important is the message it conveyed. Such a sneering attitude did Craven an injustice. He maintained a lifelong interest in research. In 1990 in his eightieth year, he could with justification proclaim that he had remained a student and academic, and that he also proudly regarded rugby as his field of study. Knowledge, he liked to argue, also had to have a practical application.³³ He had strengthened the academic contents of the physical education courses at Stellenbosch and was regarded as "academically adventurous".³⁴ A teammate of Craven and a lecturer in Psychology, JN Smit, also recalled that Craven had an insatiable thirst for knowledge and was keen to explore new avenues.³⁵

Besides his doctorate in "Volkekunde", he also completed two other doctorates, one in Psychology (1973) on personality traits and sport participation, and the other in Physical Education in 1978. The latter dealt with the evolution of major games. The thesis was well received by the external examiner, Prof. Maxwell Howell of Santiago, California. He regarded the work "as a brilliant, in my opinion the most definitive work ever written on the origins of games. There is, simply, no thesis in the Western World in sport and games that matches it in quality. It is the most extensive work attempted and will reflect most favourably on the University of Stellenbosch".³⁶

This was high praise indeed, even too fulsome. A perusal of the thesis reveals that whilst it is extensive and wide-ranging in its approach, it lacks analytical depth. It

³² P Dobson, *Doc: The life of Danie Craven*, p. 20.

³³ *Vrye Weekblad*, 5 October 1990.

³⁴ Stellenbosch University Archives, Senate Papers, "Motivation for an Honorary Doctorate for Prof. DH Craven", 1979.

³⁵ South African Rugby Archives, Stellenbosch University, Craven personal correspondence, 5.3, Interview with JN Smit, 2 February 1979.

³⁶ Quoted in Stellenbosch University Archives, Senate Papers, "Motivation for an Honorary Doctorate for Prof DH Craven", 1979.

is mainly descriptive in providing information of different sports codes according to a classificatory system. In his work, he classified and described what he termed four sport “families” which shared similar characteristics and rules. Those included racket, target, batting and goal families. In this one can find echoes of his early “Volkekunde” thesis which also worked with the idea of classifying characteristics and practices in an orderly fashion without much evidence of deeper interpretation. The basic approach seemed to have cast a long shadow.

Besides his formal academic work, Craven was also an astute observer during his travels as a player and coach. Amongst his teammates, he stood out for his scholarly interest in the countries they visited.³⁷ On a student tour to Kenya in 1935 Craven who at the time was busy with his doctorate, keenly observed the landscape and took elaborate notes on the cultural practices of local inhabitants.³⁸ It was, however, especially the Springbok tour to New Zealand in 1937 which heightened Craven’s insight and interest in cultural variations. In contrast to South Africa, New Zealand sport, by and large, functioned as an integrative force, with the Māori’s since the late 19th century being part and parcel of the country’s rugby landscape.³⁹ The tour, though was dogged with controversy on whether the Springboks should play against a Māori team.

These issues stretched back to the 1921 South African tour to New Zealand when claims of racial antagonisms between a Māori team and the Springboks during a game which the Springboks narrowly won, surfaced in the press. In 1936 there were outspoken reservations on the part of prominent members of the South African Rugby Board that the Springboks should not play against the Māori as a separate team. The argument was put forward that the parents of the players would not countenance their sons playing against Māori’s and that players themselves had reservations. In contrast to this, it was argued the Māori’s were treated on an equal footing in New Zealand and that the local “custom” should be respected. This view prevailed.⁴⁰ The New Zealand rugby authorities though, eager to prevent possible further repercussions did not include a match against a Māori team in the itinerary. Individual Māori’s did, however, play against the Springboks in provincial teams and as members of the New Zealand rugby team.⁴¹

37 H Gerber, *Craven*, ..., pp. 91-92.

38 *Die Stellenbosse Student*, June 1935; South African Rugby Archives Stellenbosch University, Craven’s personal correspondence, 5.3, Interview with JJ Oberhoster, 21 August 1978.

39 P Labuschagne, “The political sociology of power in sport: A comparative analysis of the 1956 and 1981 Springbok tours to New Zealand,” *Journal for Contemporary History*, 27(1), 2011, p. 40.

40 South African Rugby Archives, Stellenbosch University, Board Minutes, Confidential Council minutes, 12 August 1936.

41 G Ryan (ed.), *Tackling rugby myths: Rugby and New Zealand society 1854- 2004* (Dunedin, University of Otago Press, 2004), p. 120; P Dobson, *Doc: The life of Danie Craven*, pp. 157-158.

The Springboks played three such matches in Gisborne, Rotorua, and Auckland. While the team had frequent interactions with Māori's, both on and off the field. Craven, the vice-captain of the Springbok team at the time, was taken aback when upon arrival at Auckland a Māori walked up to him, stuck out his hand and asked: "I am a Māori. Will you shake my hand?" Craven immediately responded with an outstretched hand and said: "I am very pleased to meet you".⁴² Such little social exchanges underlined the sensibilities of the time. On the whole, a Springbok rugby player and a good acquaintance of Craven, Dawie Snyman, later remarked significantly on how the 1937 tour contributed to the fusion of sport and academe in Craven's outlook. In conversations with Craven, he was struck by the way the tour had "left an indelible impression on Craven – specifically because of his background in anthropology and the complexity of South Africa's future".⁴³

Craven himself later recalled that his background in "Volkekunde" came into good stead as he had read a great deal about Māori culture before the tour to New Zealand. He learnt about the Māori's Polynesian ancestry and that they had come to the two volcanic islands of New Zealand in the late 900s. He continued:

What I wasn't quite prepared for, however, was the beauty and grace of the Māori's – particularly the young girls, who can be stunningly beautiful. Although most Māori's today live in the cities of north island where they are totally integrated with the white people, there are many traditionalists who have kept alive much of the traditional culture – the age old Māori lore, customs and credo.

He embroidered on the culture he encountered:⁴⁴

Much of the custom and tradition is embodied in the smallish, multifarious and in many ways unique town of Rotorua, which is the centre of New Zealand's geothermal area. The Maoris read many things into the volcanic explosions of sulphur steam they call geysers, and those eerie bubbling mud pools, which sometimes explode with powerful force, spreading the grey, gooey mud all over the place with a loud plop.

Craven also had a comparative view. After having had frequent contact with Māori players and administrators, he stated that "it is in the South African blood to be prejudiced against natives, because the natives we have are very primitive. It would be ridiculous to compare them with the Māori's. To be candid, we came here with some prejudices against the Māori's. I am glad to say that prejudice has been removed as a result of our tour to Rotorua where we were able to see the Māori at home and enjoy their genuine hospitality and kindness".⁴⁵

42 P Dobson, *Doc: The life of Danie Craven*, p. 158.

43 *Die Burger*, 29 September 2018 (translation).

44 T Partridge, *A life in rugby...*, p. 91.

45 Quoted in G Ryan (ed.), *Tackling rugby myths: ...*, p. 120.

Craven's outlook, however appreciative of Māori culture, should not blot out his comment pertaining to South Africa's black people, framed in the familiar terminology of the time of "levels of civilisation" and smacking of supremacist thinking. The notion of "civilisation" was a common debate among anthropologists, but was usually couched in more careful language.⁴⁶ The statement is furthermore important as it was wrapped up in the dualism of culture on the one hand, and difference and hierarchy on the other which constituted much of Eiselen's academic probing. This thinking, as formulated by a former student in a setting far away from South Africa, carried a further irony. Intriguingly there was also a sense amongst the Māori themselves, similar to that of Craven, that they were a "proud people, proud of their age-long traditions, and their standard of intelligence and culture is far beyond that of any other native race".⁴⁷

Craven maintained close relationships with some of the Māori families he had befriended during the tour and continued to make private visits to Rotorua to visit them, even later in life. During the Springbok tour to New Zealand in 1965 Craven also saw to it that some impecunious Māori's who could not afford test tickets, were able to watch the game.⁴⁸ He was particularly riled by National Party's government policy under prime minister's Hendrik Verwoerd's sway in the mid-sixties that Māori's were not welcome to tour South Africa as part of the All Black team.⁴⁹ During the political transitions in South Africa in the early 1990s, Craven made sure, shortly before his death in 1993, that an apology reached the Māori people for the embarrassment and humiliation they had to endure by not being allowed to tour South Africa.⁵⁰

The issue of culture had further ramifications. In the late twenties, Eiselen was adamant that South African coloureds were part and parcel of Afrikaner culture and should be treated accordingly.⁵¹ Craven held a similar view and rejected the ongoing exclusion of coloureds from mainstream South African rugby. As early as the 1950s he was explicit: "Whites and coloureds speak the same language. The coloured people are our people, and therefore we must also play together on the rugby field".⁵² It was almost a throwback to Craven's view of the Māori's; the same way the Māori's were integrated in New Zealand should also apply to coloureds in South Africa. Culturally he regarded the two groups as on par. Without wishing to imply that Craven's views on coloureds were singularly determined by his initial training under Eiselen, it is surely more than coincidental that his outlook dovetailed

46 RJ Gordon, "Apartheid's anthropologists: ...", *American Ethnologist*, 15(3), 1988, p. 540.

47 G Ryan (ed.), *Tackling rugby myths: ...*, p. 115.

48 G Ryan (ed.), *Tackling rugby myths: ...*, p. 120; L Blom & H Swart (eds.), *Craven stories* (Sun Media, Stellenbosch, 2019), p. 8.

49 T Partridge, *A life in rugby...*, pp. 91-92.

50 *SA Leadership*, 1 September 2010.

51 RJ Gordon, "Apartheid's anthropologists: ...", *American Ethnologist*, 15(3), 1988, p. 540.

52 L Blom and H Swart (eds.), *Craven stories...*, p. 107.

so neatly with that of Eiselen.

As chairman of the South African Rugby Board, Craven was very active in organising rugby clinics across the colour line. Between 1982 and 1991 more than 314 clinics were held and these were attended by over 88 000 players. The clinics involved children from all races and also led to senior feeder teams mainly from the platteland, comprising white as well as African and coloured players. They took place within the general ambit of the government's sport policy pertaining to sport at lower levels.⁵³ For Craven, it can be argued, these events centred primarily on rugby as a common denominator. He recalled that in part it was informed by his youthful experience as a youngster in rural Free State where black and white often without any tension at all played rugby together.⁵⁴ On the rugby field, of course, they might have been equals, but once they left the field a completely different situation prevailed.

Craven's general outlook was fatally devoid of a sense of political power and the overall nature of political differentials in South Africa. From a relatively early age he had a disdain of politics; in the mid-thirties he dismissed attempts by the United Party to recruit him as an organiser. "Be damned with politics", he said, "I won't be drawn into it".⁵⁵ Craven can, as one commentator observed, be regarded as "political ingenu[e] who would rather stroll through Milton's Groves of Academe than walk CP Snow's Corridors of Power".⁵⁶

Whilst Craven publicly took an anti-apartheid stand and regularly opposed the government, he was in certain respects essentially conservative. He readily acknowledged the wrongs of apartheid, but as far as politics was concerned, as late as 1987 he was only prepared to support a qualified franchise for black people, an option which the Progressive Federal Party, as the white opposition in parliament for the greater part of the 1980s, had already abandoned in 1978. Craven's position on the vote indicates that he was out of touch with the dynamics of South African society during the 1980s as the country went through a period of dramatic and often traumatic upheaval. Support for a qualified franchise, amidst these circumstances, showed a limited understanding of the nature of black aspirations and the process of change that was underway. Indeed, in a biography of Craven, P Dobson, in an otherwise flattering portrayal, is not far off the mark in describing Craven's political outlook as naive.⁵⁷ Craven also battled to fully understand the South African Congress of Sport's (SACOS) and its affiliate the South African Rugby Union's (SARU's) position of "no normal sport in an abnormal society" and their principled resistance to have any dealings with the Rugby Board or the coloured and black

53 A Grundlingh, *Potent pastimes: Sport and leisure practices in modern Afrikaner history* (Pretoria, Protea Books, 2013), p. 103.

54 T Partridge, *A life in rugby...*, p. 120.

55 H Gerber, *Craven*, p. 80.

56 *Sunday Times*, 23 October 1988.

57 P Dobson, *Doc: The life of Danie Craven*, p. 135.

federations associated with the board. Although Craven was on a good personal footing with certain individuals from SARU, he failed to assess the logic and depth of their position properly.⁵⁸

What is of particular interest here, is how actively Craven worked within the cultural space of rugby and managed to draw in various groupings with rugby affinities across the colour line. To him, rugby was primarily a “pure” cultural formation that had the potential to function optimally across boundaries without political interference. As this was his basic point of departure, he was much more at sea when it came to dealing with wider political dimensions. One can even argue that as a result of his earlier studies he was more in tune dealing with cultural expressions *per se*, while politics was a necessary evil and a different arena.

Genealogy and lineages of rugby players, ritualistic behaviour and the “soul” of the game

Craven’s roots in “Volkekunde”, arguably also led to his interest in tracing the personal histories of players. He accumulated detailed genealogical charts of Springbok rugby players, and recorded statistics on their biographical details (see Images 1 and 2). There are over a hundred files on specific rugby players, in which he recorded their family lineage. He went about collecting family history data of players and sent out an information sheet requesting that family members of players provide information on their lineage. His office boasted a map of South Africa on which drawing pins were inserted to indicate the geographical areas where Springbok rugby players came from.

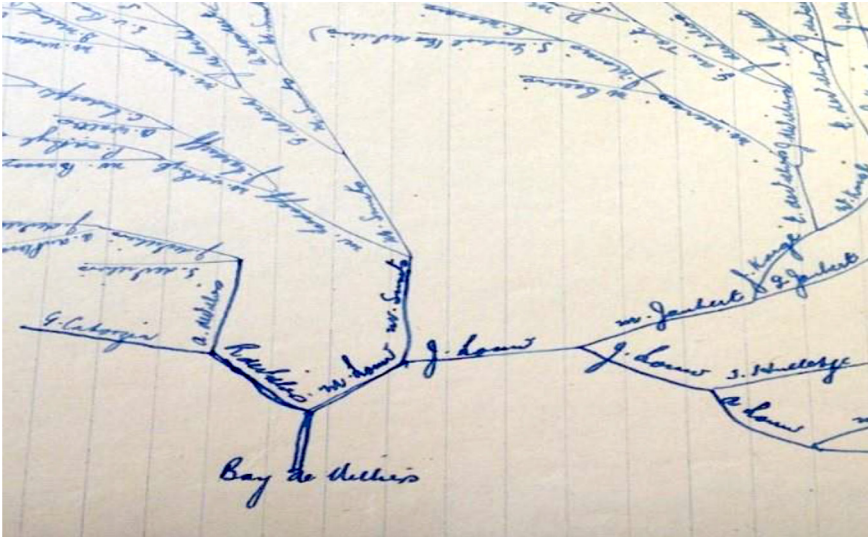
Although Craven’s interest in the kinship structure was not based on understanding stateless societies, he was able to transfer his understanding of family networks to rugby players and the probability of them playing competitive rugby. His research on the lineage patterns of Springbok teams incorporated not only a rugby player’s physical capabilities and skill, but was also informed by his personal history and lineage. His thinking on this later appeared in print.⁵⁹ Furthermore Craven was not shy, in a jocular fashion, to encourage liaisons between young male and female students who according to him had the potential to produce outstanding rugby off-spring.⁶⁰ Of course, all of this would nowadays be frowned upon as an intolerable discourse that unduly foregrounds genetic elements, but Craven’s explorations in a singular way, had in mind a better understanding of the sport he was so enthusiastic about.

58 A Grundlingh. *Potent pastimes: ...*, p. 102.

59 H Gerber, *Danie Craven se top Springbokke* (Cape Town: Tafelberg, 1977), pp. 102-103.

60 L Blom and H Swart (eds.), *Craven stories...*, p. 15.

Image 1: Examples of family trees (kinship charts) of rugby players, produced by Danie Craven



Source: South African Rugby Board Archives, Box B 1.17, Craven Collection, Stellenbosch.

He was also pertinently aware of the importance of social factors in producing excellent rugby players and singled out some prominent rugby schools to make his point.⁶¹ What he missed, however, were the wider implications of what Pierre Bourdieu has called the dynamics of “habitus”, which provided accumulated social capital and operated almost invisibly for those in the loop. In doing so it tended to shut out those who were not part of the network.⁶²

Craven's view of rugby as a communal affair is also of interest and his meta-perspective on this is reflected in the title of his 1980 book, *Die Groot Rugby Gesin van die Maties* (The Big Rugby Family of the Maties). To him “the rugby ground was only a starting point of an educational process embodying the whole community”.⁶³

This included spectatorship, as he explained in 1977:⁶⁴

If only people can realize rugby is a medicine, not only for the players, but for the spectators and when we have internationals in this country, they are in actual fact reunions of thousands and thousands of people. It boils down to this that such occasions take people away from themselves, from the routine work and from boredom and anybody that gets away from himself gets a greater benefit than is generally realized.

61 H Gerber, *Danie Craven se top Springbokke...*, p. 104.

62 B Cros, *Rugby in South Africa*, Unpub Manuscript Private Collection, p. 15.

63 P Dobson, *Doc: The life of Danie Craven*, p. 224.

64 South African Rugby Archives, Stellenbosch, Craven Collection, Box 1.17 Craven to Myers, 13 September 1977.

This view holds various interpretative possibilities. The “therapeutic” effect of sport as a release valve for wider societal tensions, can certainly be one way of looking at the nature of fandom. Of no lesser importance though, are the ritualistic behaviour patterns of fandom weekend after weekend. The spectators themselves lacked introspection, but an outside observer with a trained eye might well have been able to assess the meaning of such repetitive group performances. Craven, it can be argued, was one such person; he understood the game and its cultural appeal from the inside, and as an academic, he was also sufficiently primed to assess its dynamics from the outside. His “Volkekunde” doctorate is replete with descriptions of the functions of a variety of African rituals. This is not to say that he necessarily consciously recalled his doctoral work when he penned this observation. But it might just have been so ingrained in him that he almost subconsciously made such a comparison. This is akin to the observation of a young South African anthropologist, Shannon Morreira in 2012 “that the field is not something we enter and leave but rather a state of mind and a place we continually inhabit”.⁶⁵

Image 2: Example of a letter sent to family members of rugby players, requesting information about family lineage

1. Dear Mr Nel, could you please help me to get the information about your late grandfather; also please state of birth, school, etc. (Otto)

2. DEAR Mr Nel, and maybe also is played for R. (hanna)

3. I am busy compiling a record of our Springboks and need for this a.o. the different family trees. I shall esteem it a great favour if you could give me as much information as you possibly can. Do consult some of your relatives if you are stuck.

4. (Use this form and return it to me please).

5. 1. Name of father... Jan Gideon Nel

2. Name of mother (and maiden name) Sophia Solomina (born Otto)

3. (a) Name of father's father... Theunis Jacobus Nel

(b) Name of father's mother (and maiden name) Maria Johanna (born Roux)

3. (a) Name of mother's father... Petrus Albertus Ryno Otto

(b) Name of mother's mother (and maiden name) Elsie Elizabeth (born Erasmus)

6. 5. (a) Father of father's father... Louis Jacobus Nel

(b) mother of father's father (and maiden name) Johanna Magaretta (born Botha)

(c) Father of father's mother...

(d) Mother of father's mother (and maiden name)...

6. (a) Father of mother's father... Andries Otto

(b) Mother of mother's father (and maiden name) Elizabeth Catherine Rynira (born van der Riet)

(c) Father of mother's mother...

(d) mother of mother's mother (and maiden name)...

7. If you know your ancestors further back I shall be glad to have it.

7. Are you related to any Springbok or international player?

(a) To whom? Husband (Pieter Otto)

(b) What is the relationship? Wife

8. Your address... HARMONY, Greytown, Natal

Thanking you in anticipation

Yours,

R. Nel is second cousin

J. V. B. Raven

Source: South African Rugby Board Archives, Box B 1.17, Craven Collection, Stellenbosch.

⁶⁵ S Morreira, “Anthropological futures? Thoughts on social research and the ethics of engagement”, *Anthropology Southern Africa*, 35(3/4), 2012, p. 103.

In similar vein it is instructive to look at Craven's view on what he described as the "soul of the game":⁶⁶

It may sound strange to assert that rugby, or any game for that matter, has a soul. But it has. The soul does not die. Neither does the soul of rugby die ...The soul of the game is the law of God engrained [sic: ingrained] in everything that exists and which has a potency for development which has no end. When that potency is discovered, it must be developed and will not develop if incorrectly used.

Shades of his research can be detected here. In his thesis, Craven was keenly aware of the salience and importance of ancestral spirits and the way in which certain rituals were required to keep the spirits alive and satisfied. The "spirit" of rugby as projected here, it can be argued, likewise demands sacrifices. The dynamics which Craven used to describe as the "soul" of the game, resembled the way he perceived the overall symbolism and role of ancestral spirits to function in certain African societies. In essence, it is seen to revolve around the need to ensure immortality and potency.⁶⁷ The term "law of God" which Craven uses and the way he deploys it, has less to do with Christian beliefs than with the conceptual way ancestral spirits operate in an all-consuming and regenerative fashion. The "soul" of rugby then, is recycled from generation to generation and kept intact, often through ritualistic transference from father to son, reminiscent of the way cattle and chiefs were imbued by ancestral spirits as continuing life forces. Of course, one does not wish to imply that Craven necessarily drew a linear comparison, but the similarities in discourses do point to a certain anthropological sensibility and agreement.

Conclusion

Historical documentation hardly says "no" to "yes" type questions. Yet, while bearing this in mind, it can be concluded in a qualified way that Craven's "Volkekunde" background, at times perhaps even unwittingly, impinged on the way he perceived certain dimensions of the rugby world. His academic exposure, it is argued, heightened his understanding of New Zealand Māori culture and alerted him to possible linkages with South African coloured people. Equally so, it is possible to draw some inferences between the study of "Volkekunde" and Craven's interest in the lineages of Springbok rugby players, his sense of a rugby community and the nature of the so-called "soul of rugby".

This is not to say that his "Volkekunde" exposure was the only factor at play here; undoubtedly his personal outlook, the other disciplines he studied and

⁶⁶ South African Rugby Archives, Stellenbosch University, Undated private notes, Box B 1.17, Craven Collection.

⁶⁷ D Craven, "Volkekundige indeling van die Suid-Afrikaanse Bantu" (PhD, thesis, Stellenbosch University, 1935) p. 39.

his wide-ranging knowledge of rugby also played a role. But the most pertinent application in terms of understanding the wider cultural dimensions of the game with its distinct properties, was probably “Volkekunde”. He might not have been a practising career anthropologist, but one can claim with a certain degree of conviction that there was a curious connection between his fascination with sport and in his own way he refracted some sporting configurations in an anthropological manner or more precisely along the lines of “Volkekunde” as practised at the time.