

“Cricket, with a Plot”: Nationalism, Cricket, and Diasporic Identities

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The Sri Lankan-Australian dramatist Ernest MacIntyre recently outlined a new play for the Sri Lankan theater, a national epic staged in the form of “cricket, with a plot”. His model was Bertolt Brecht’s call for a new epic theater “like a circus, with a plot.” In the revival of post-Independence Sinhala theater in Sri Lanka Brechtian models have played a germinative role, as traditional forms of verse storytelling, song, and mime were combined with techniques of Brechtian antirealism to produce a distinctive form. In the climate of chauvinist Sinhala nationalism that led to the current civil war, this renewed Sinhala drama is represented as a unique “national” form, expressive of a brave post-independence Sri Lanka.

MacIntyre’s proposal recognizes that both theater and cricket have been mobilized in the service of the Sri Lankan state’s Sinhala nationalism. He seeks a dramatist “fearless in making visible the historical and social material thick in the air or stored under the turf” to produce a new Sri Lankan epic reminiscent of the Brechtian circus, but performed in the form of “slowed down stylized cricket action” to enact a *different* national story. The story will be told, in the style of a Brechtian narrator, by a series of cricket commentators, including the Australian Tony Greig. Instead of Brecht’s acrobats and dancers, MacIntyre proposes “somersaulting fieldsmen, striking and running batsmen . . . bowlers with pace, bowlers with spin, and a solitary bowler with an action as fascinating as it is strange to the eyes of some white men (called umpires).”

This is of course a reference to the “throwing” or “chucking” charges leveled at the Sri Lankan bowler Muthiah Muralitharan (the only Tamil on the team) during two successive tours to Australia. MacIntyre merges the spectacle of theater and the spectacle of sport in the performance of a “national” story that also exceeds the plot of the nation: a story that necessarily includes other relations and histories, the interplay between the various peoples of Sri Lanka, and between white and nonwhite, colonial and postcolonial. By turning cricket into epic MacIntyre cannily brings onstage the implicit relationship between sport (and especially cricket) and nation, between performance and identity, and the

ways in which spectators of this performance are themselves interpellated as national subjects.

Although it refers to recent cricketing contests between the Australian and Sri Lankan cricket teams, this is not an essay about cricket, but about cricket as a site where questions of nation, identity, desire, and agency are played out. It shuttles between there and here, then and now, defeating my attempts to produce a seamless, sequential narrative out of its various parts. As such the chapter is also about the positionalities, locations, and politics of this diasporic subject. It examines some problems of the performance of identity, and of nation, migration, and difference in the context of cricket.

The chapter engages three intersecting discussions: first, a distinguished tradition of writing on cricket and decolonization by cultural critics including Manthia Diawara, Ashis Nandy, Arjun Appadurai, and, most crucially, C. L. R. James. James's *Beyond a Boundary* is a classic autobiography of the decolonization of consciousness and also one of the earliest works to focus, through cricket, on the predicament of the diasporic intellectual (Farred 1996: 177–8). As a text that enabled questions of race, identity, and sport to be asked in other colonial contexts, *Beyond a Boundary* also informs the second set of writings to which I refer, discussions of Australian cricket, racism, and orientalism by Michael Roberts, Subash Jaireth, Colin Tatz, Peter Kell, and others.

In his recent book *Good Sports: Australian Sport and the Myth of the Fair Go*, Kell writes,

Australians have a powerful belief that sport is one of the few social institutions where everyone still gets “a fair go” . . . Far from being a source of unity . . . sport in Australia has always been a source of divisiveness and a site of exclusion. Sport has reinforced anxieties and fears about outsiders . . . heightening irrational fears about Australia's Asian neighbours, China in particular. Some sports have been utilised as a tool of established elites, with imperial and anglocentric linkages. (2000: 10–11)

This chapter examines the spectatorship of non-Anglo Australians in this climate of anglocentrism and divisiveness.

Thirdly, I hope to contribute to a conversation begun by Michael Roberts and Qadri Ismail about Sri Lankan spectatorship, nationalism, and cricket. I address in particular a question posed by Ismail about the possibility of making a theoretical “*space for the spectator unmarred by nationalism, for the spectator who would cheer the team but not the nation*” (1997: 16, original emphasis). Currently, Ismail argues, this space does not exist in South Asian cricket discourse, as “inspired by C. L. R. James. In this reading cricket is nationalism; its spectators nationalist” (p. 16). Taking Ismail's fine essay as a point of departure, I want to complicate his representation of James's writings on cricket as “cricket as nationalism.” Rather, I want to propose, James was ahead of contemporary theorists of nationalism in showing how factors such as diaspora and migration destabilize and challenge the idea of the nation. In theorizing a space for a

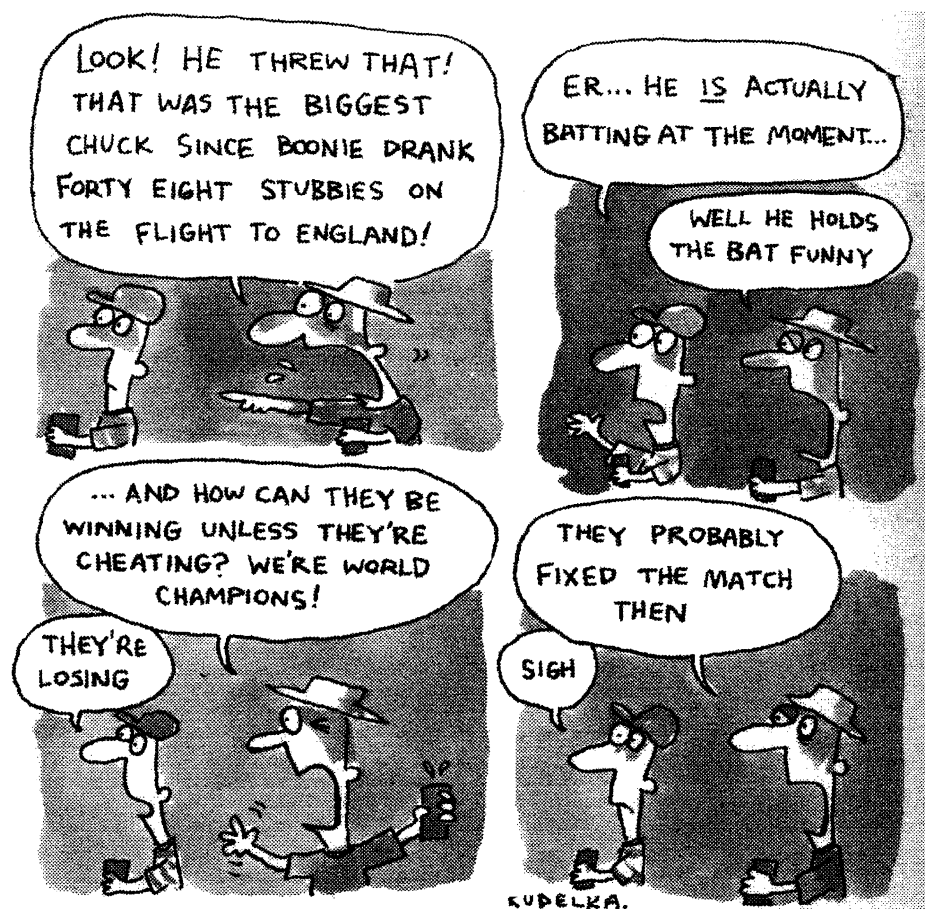


Figure 3 Cartoon by Jon Kudelka, first published in *Weekend Australian*, Nov. 6–7, 1999. Reprinted with permission.

spectator who does not reenact the exclusionary practices of nationalism, I focus on the spectator who is *both* inside and outside the space of “the nation,” the spectator produced through migration, diaspora, and dislocation.

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Ismail characterizes his essay as written both *contra* and “with the Jamesian: with a love for, and intellectual and aesthetic pleasure in observing, the game” (1997: 16). The critics cited above all write, implicitly or explicitly, as loving and knowing observers of cricket; not entirely uncoincidentally, perhaps, these writings are also by male authors. My piece, on the other hand, needs to be subtitled

“Meditations of a reluctant cricket watcher.” It makes no pretensions to cricke-ting expertise.

As the youngest girl in a family of four boys, a good part of my energy during my growing up was expended in NOT knowing about cricket. Appadurai’s comments on female cricket spectatorship in India are also applicable to Sri Lanka, where the game as both spectacle and embodied activity addresses a public gendered as male. “The Indian female gaze . . . is twice removed: watching males watching other males play” (1995: 44). I got on fine not knowing about cricket in Sri Lanka and during the years I spent in the US – until I came to Australia. In retrospect I can point to the exact moment when I understood that from now on my identity in Australia would have to include learning and caring about cricket. Soon after I started teaching at La Trobe in the mid-1990s the subaltern historian Dipesh Chakrabarty, then an academic at Melbourne University, asked me a question about the Sri Lankan cricket team touring Australia at the time. I replied, blithely and unashamedly, that I didn’t know, marking my ignorance as a gendered one. (I think my response sank me irretrievably in Dipesh’s estimation.) When I think about this conversation now I understand that what was being opened up and negotiated here, and what I had failed to respond to at the time, was something about the codes and shared practices of being a South Asian in Australia.

Soon after, during the 1995 Sri Lankan tour of Australia, I found out that there was no way I could be, especially, a Sri Lankan in Australia and have the luxury of remaining ignorant about the cricket. During this tour I was interpellated constantly everywhere *as a Sri Lankan* on the basis of cricket, not just in the context of cultural criticism – of reading newspapers and watching TV – but also at the level of the everyday, at the Victoria market or on Lygon Street. Here I was addressed primarily as a raced subject, since ethnicity marks my salient point of difference as “an *Asian* woman” in Australia (Perera 1999: 195–6).

Simultaneously, I found that the passionate conversations about cricket begun by, say, southern European-or East Asian-Australians who mostly occupy these spaces, people who often had their heritage in countries that historically didn’t play cricket, were really about negotiations of cultural and racial difference in Australia: about the significance of embodied and behavioral practices (for instance, the imperative of shaking hands at the end of a game) and about cultural values (e.g., loyalty versus correctness). During these weeks and months I found out that I had no choice but to know about the cricket – and also that there was no way I could not take sides about the cricket. My discovery is an inversion of James’s, when he declares in *Beyond a Boundary*, “cricket had plunged me into politics long before I was aware of it” (1963: 70). Living in Australia, everyday politics had plunged me into cricket long before I was aware of it.

But cricket’s politics are no uncomplicated matter when taking sides in the cricket, by a series of slippages, is collapsed with taking sides with the state in a climate where sporting wins, both in Sri Lanka and Australia, are constructed largely as victories for a national identity and a national way of life, and

appropriated into the project of the state. When Australia replaced Sri Lanka as champions in the 1999 World Cup the winning team was met with ticker-tape parades and a state reception; its captain, Mark Taylor, was described by Prime Minister Howard as having achieved “almost” the “pinnacle of human achievement” (Booth & Tatz 2000: 228) and appointed Australian of the Year. Rumors surfaced soon after that at Howard’s request Taylor would publicly support the monarchist cause in the republic referendum.

On its return home the Sri Lankan team which beat Australia in the 1996 World Cup had a coin struck in its honor, with the players given the title of “Desha Bandu” or national defenders, and thus placed symbolically on a par with the government’s army. As the cricket team was officially elevated to the status of champions of the state in Sri Lanka, continual attempts were also made to produce the team’s *spectators* as a unified community through the practices of state-controlled media. As Yolanda Foster writes, domestically, in the 1990s “cricket becomes a convenient narrative to write over failed aspiration, instability and atrocities,” acting as both a buffer and a decoy from the war, and from state practices of repression. It is in this context that Ismail, who locates himself “as a Sri Lankan passport holder” living abroad (1997: 22) seeks to locate a space for the spectator who supports the Sri Lankan *team*, but not the project of Sinhala nationalism to which it is appropriated. In sympathy with Ismail’s search, I want to pursue a different set of questions about the politics of viewing and location.

Within the plot of the nationalism, only two opposed positions are made available to the viewer: inside or outside, either as a subject of the nation or as a depoliticized “lover of the game.” In what follows I want to examine the possibilities of a viewing position constituted by wider relations of power, and by forces of diaspora, history, and identity. This is my own version of “cricket, with a plot,” or with several intersecting plots, of places, nationalisms, and histories.

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In 1995, following the bitterness of the Sri Lankan team’s visit to Australia and the “chucking” allegations against Muralitharan, the Australian team canceled a scheduled return tour in Sri Lanka, citing fears about security. The importance the Sri Lankan government attached to the visit was demonstrated by its increasingly extravagant offers of protection, including a proposal to lodge the entire team in India and fly them to and from each game with full military escort. To no avail. Even an undiplomatic taunt of “sissies” by the Sri Lankan Foreign Minister (and, more significantly, a charge of being “lily-livered” by the British tabloids) failed to move the Australians. The team, which had no qualms about playing in England despite IRA bombings, remained determined to give Sri Lanka a wide berth. In mid-1996, however, following their loss to Sri Lanka in the World Cup, an Australian tour did eventuate. Before the first match, sports

writer Malcolm Knox produced this version of what his team could look forward to:

When Ian Healy leads his team into Colombo’s R. Premadasa stadium tomorrow night he will face a crowd whose exuberance makes those pockets of Sri Lankan madness we saw in Australia last summer seem like genteel expatriate chess clubs.

In scenes of utter bedlam, Sri Lanka overran India’s total on Monday night . . . The constant drums, trumpets, dancing, cymbals, hand-clapping and other musical instruments that have no equivalent or name in English, all played with remarkable cohesion, make cricket here more like a fertility feast than a sporting event.

The air will be filled with the smell of rotting garbage . . . Feral dogs, cats and goats will be roaming under the stands . . . A man with . . . an aerosol bazooka will come on at drinks and wicket breaks to shoot the insects down . . . Australia will also be facing two opening batsmen for whom . . . business as usual involves using the cricket bat in ways not previously known.

Mercifully, not too much needs to be said about this exercise in orientalist delirium. Here cricket is transported from the comparatively contained and chaste theater of the “sporting event,” to a wildly carnivalesque performance which collapses the boundaries between players and spectators.¹ Not only bedlamite humans, but also “feral dogs, cats and goats” get in on the action, and the anticipated violence of the location is displaced onto ferocious midges requiring extermination with aerosol bazookas. The stadium becomes a veritable “fertility feast” of licentiousness where the senses swoon in an assault of sights, sounds, and smells, and the proprieties of cricket in more civilized climes – even when these are now contaminated by “pockets of [migrant] madness” – are violently swept away. Worse, there is a method in all this madness: the clamorous “musical instruments that have no equivalent or name in English” are still “all played with remarkable cohesion,” and the two opening batsmen “for whom . . . business as usual involves using the cricket bat in ways not previously known” are following a systematic game plan that, while not infallible, is capable of producing extraordinary upsets and victories and, more significantly, has changed styles of one-day cricket among the established cricketing nations (Bouts, Roebuck).

Knox contemplates the frightening transformation of cricket into something Other. In this fevered vision an implicit body of Australian national virtues is pitted against an onslaught of orientalist terrors, and fears to be found lacking. Appadurai’s discussion of the significance of national styles in cricket is pertinent here. In *Beyond a Boundary*, Appadurai points out, James’s description places cricket in the category of a “hard” cultural form, “in which rigid adherence to external codes is part of a discipline of internal moral development” (Appadurai 1995: 24). Although it may seem to follow from this that cricket resists change in its practice, as James himself demonstrates, cricket as *performance* in different parts of the world became “profoundly indigenized and decolonized” (ibid.).

It is of course at this level of embodied practice, of performance, that the “meaning” of cricket is perceived as a site of conflict, not just between opposing national “styles,” but even as representative of a clash between national ideologies and cultures. For the imperial order, as Alan Clarke and John Clarke discuss, to teach cricket was to teach a whole world of values associated with the “sporting English”; teaching colonial and working-class men to “play the game” was to teach “respect for the rules and authority,” to instill a sense of discipline, “to substitute the constructive and healthy use of free time for uncivilised, irrational or undisciplined time” (1982: 81) – the last a point adds resonance to Knox’s remarks about the “fertility feast” of Sri Lankan cricket. But as English self-representations of a sporting people upheld notions such as “fairplay, respect for authority and self discipline,” they also “silenced divergent experiences and expressions . . . [since] authority, the rule of Law, the sense of order, are not experienced as the universal natural and inevitable good that the mythology of Englishness proclaims them to be” (ibid., 81–2).

Taking this further, Grant Farred argues that on colonial cricket grounds, despite what Appadurai refers to as its “Victorian civilities” (p. 42), “the game constituted the metaphor *par excellence* for the colonizer–colonized relations Britain desired”:

The discrepancy in authority between player and umpire is an unerringly accurate reflection of colonizer–colonized relations . . . [T]he game of cricket and how it is played demonstrates the most subtle interpellation of the colonized into the social arrangement. (Farred 1996: 170)

While a number of intervening elements mediated the teaching of cricket at the level of performance (Appadurai 1995: 29–30), part of what Farred calls the “subtle interpellation . . . into the social arrangement” of empire was the implicit assumption that, along with the embodied practice of cricket, the colonized imbibed the practice of a particular style of English masculinity, one that also underwrote assumptions of future self-government and “national” status.

Anglo-Australia, as a colonizing *and* a colonial society, mobilizes these ideologies of the “sporting nation” in complex ways. According to the government television commercials broadcast in the lead-up to the centenary of Federation in 2001, this is “a country that had a national cricket team before it had a national parliament.” Certainly, a team of indigenous cricketers from Victoria, captained by a white man, did tour England and play at Lords in 1868 – with the indigenous players also performing, in the customary role of colonized-as-exhibit, displays of spear- and boomerang-throwing following each game.² But to represent the players of 1868 as a “national team,” and the team as the natural precursor to the achievement of self-government, is a wild travesty of the power relations that characterize Australian history. None of the indigenous team members, nor their descendants, would play any role as national subjects, *except by their exclusion*, in the process that culminated in the making of a

Federated state, “Australia,” in 1901. In that process the function of the dubious category of “the Aborigine” was to guarantee and consolidate the national status and civic identity of its defining other, “the (white) Australian.” The year after the England tour the establishment of the “Aborigine’s Protection Board” marked a new era of systematized control over indigenous peoples, and a series of legislative moves between 1877 and 1905 effectively excluded them from the rights and privileges of citizenship in the newly constituted state (Booth & Tatz 2000: 40–2).

The federated state of Australia performs multiple roles in the imperial hierarchy. As a “settler” society it unambiguously operates as the colonizer of indigenous peoples, part of the “master race” of empire. The cultivation of selected racial/cultural affinities with Britain also enable it to occupy a superior position among other, especially nonwhite, colonies. Sport played a key role here in proving that despite transportation and migration “the ‘manhood and muscle of their English sires . . . flourished’ . . . and that the English ‘race’ had not physically degenerated in the bright Australian climate” (Booth & Tatz 2000: 4–5). At the same time, in the process of moving from colonial to independent status, nationalist energies were continually harnessed through sport to assert a distinctly “Australian” (that is, non-British) identity. In episodes such as the Bodyline tour of 1934 Anglo-Australia represented itself as the true inheritor of “the spirit of the game” that had degenerated in the “mother country.” These representations continue today, complicated by anxieties of Asianization, globalization, and fears for the dissolution of Anglo-Australian identity.

Self-representations of Anglo-Australia as the true custodian of cricket’s laws and values were very much in evidence during the 1995 and 1998 Sri Lankan tours, when a number of umpires and cricket writers found the Sri Lankan team guilty of “not playing the game” at the level of embodied practice – most obviously in the allegedly “unlawful action” of their main bowler, but also in their “unorthodox” and “swashbuckling” style (words like “violence,” “plunder,” and “loot” were routinely used to describe the Sri Lankan batting). The gesture, performance, and body language of the visitors were frequently under attack, as in the notorious hand-shaking incident when the Sri Lankan team refused to end the game with the traditional show of bonhomie. Also seen as not quite cricket was the visiting team’s use of “expert” testimony, since cricket is enduringly imagined as a “gentleman’s game,” clinging, in spite of its thoroughgoing professionalization, to a romantic image of the “amateur.” The Sri Lankan management’s use of video technology and expert medical opinion to support their case that Muralitharan’s bowling performance could not be judged “unlawful” contradicted common-sense tenets of “calling ’em as you see ’em,” or “seeing is believing.” In 1998 the use of lawyers in the disciplinary tribunal against the then Sri Lankan captain was again seen as a breach of the game’s gentlemanly spirit, not taking into account that a lack of fluency in English might have necessitated professional representation. Also at stake throughout the tour, implicitly or explicitly, were styles of racialized masculinity – images of the “stiff

upper lip” and “taking it on the chin,” as against allusions to the hysterical oriental, or an emotionally uncontrolled, feminized, excess.

The extent to which each team’s cricketing practice was understood as both embodying and performing a drama of national identity was most tellingly manifested in a comment made by the then Sri Lankan Captain, Arjuna Ranatunga, to the British media: “We come from 2,500 years of culture, and we all know where they come from” (Blake 1996). Here Ranatunga drew on a foundational narrative of Sinhala nationalism, used domestically to delegitimize the role of other ethnicities in Sri Lankan history, combining it with a classic colonial snub about Anglo-Australians’ “convict origins” (it is significant that the comment was made in Britain). Ranatunga’s slur made indignant headlines all over Australia, but no one pointed out the commonalities in the official histories of the two groups. Turning one of Sinhala nationalism’s cherished myths on itself, one could say that the Sinhala nation also has criminal origins insofar as it founds its national claims on the dissolute Prince Vijaya, whose father banished him to sail away with his thuggish companions, never to return. The arrival of a convict ship on an island, the violent dispossession of its indigenous inhabitants: a shared foundational moment that in each national story underwrites contemporary repressions of racial/cultural difference.

“Decolonization,” as Appadurai says, “is a dialogue with the colonial past,” and “nowhere are the complexities and ambiguities of this dialogue more evident than in the vicissitudes of cricket” in the former colonies (1995: 23). In the contest of “culture,” “nation,” and “sportsmanship” played out between Sri Lanka and Australia, both parties drew, in selective ways, on colonial representations and ideologies of cricket. It is to the continuing afterlife of these colonial ideologies and representations, undead phantoms and hoary old ghosts, I now want to turn, in an attempt to illuminate the mobilization of cricket in very contemporary nationalisms.

III

In colonial discourse cricket works in contradictory and complex, even protean, ways as a practice that both substitutes for war *and* transcends it. The classic expression of cricket as the great allegory for war is Henry Newbolt’s “*Vitae Lampada*,” where a British rout on some imperial battleground is transformed into a victory by the memory of a school cricket match. At the sametime, cricket, as a memory of childhood, safety, and innocence, is also imagined as an interlude or respite from conflict and “politics,” a space that should be kept decently apart from war.

On the eve of the 1996 World Cup final between Sri Lanka and Australia the newsagency Reuters interviewed Lawrence Thilakar, the Paris spokesperson of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE), the army fighting a war of separation against the Sri Lankan state. Thilakar is quoted as saying, “All Tamils

in the North and East love cricket . . . All the schoolchildren love cricket and football . . . I cannot wish Australia to win. At the same time, it’s difficult to wish Sri Lanka to win” (quoted in Ismail, p. 20). Ismail comments on this:

Though perhaps “spontaneous” this is not a *careless* response. Even the ranks of the LTTE it would seem, could scarce forbear to cheer the Sri Lankan team. The nuance . . . must be noted: while Thilakar “cannot” . . . desire an Australian victory, he merely found it “difficult” – not impossible . . . – to desire a Sri Lankan one. There is a pathos here too. For this statement could be read as expressing a yearning to take politics, the politics of nationalism, out of cricket; so that the LTTE – still *citizens* of Sri Lanka, could cheer the Sri Lankan *team* without embarrassment or treachery, without being complicitous with Sinhala nationalism. (p. 20, original emphasis)

Ismail’s use of the term “citizen” here is interesting, both in contrast to his earlier use of “passport holder,” and given that it is against the very notion of being subjects of the Sri Lankan state that LTTE is waging a war of separation. The submerged allusion in the passage is to a famous line from “Horatius” by Thomas Babington Macaulay. Macaulay is no accidental presence to materialize at this moment. Generations of school children all over the former British empire have him to thank, not only for the tiresome “Lays of Ancient Rome” from which “Horatius” is taken, but for an even more influential document of imperialism, the infamous “Minute” on Indian education. Macaulay’s ghost summons into this thoroughly postcolonial discussion the meretricious romance of the British public school and its comprehensive mystification of cricket, war, and nation.

While Ismail finds a kind of “pathos” in Thilakar’s remarks, there is another story I want to tell against the “yearning” attributed to the LTTE spokesperson “to take politics, the politics of nationalism, out of cricket”. A succinct way to tell it is by quoting from M. R. Narayan Swamy’s history, *Tigers of Lanka: From Boys to Guerrillas*:

On June 26, Chelliah Anandarajah, principal of St. John’s College in Jaffna, was shot dead by the LTTE. Anandarajah was also a leading member of the Jaffna citizen’s committee . . . [His] crime was he had organised a cricket match in Jaffna between Jaffna schools and the Sri Lankan army to mark the [1985] ceasefire. A second match was due when he was killed. (1996: 177)

One understanding of this story is that Chelliah Anandarajah was a casualty of the colonial mystification of cricket, or precisely of the same yearning attributed to Thilakar, “a yearning to take politics, the politics of nationalism, out of cricket.” But before continuing I need to declare an investment here, for this is the withheld cricket story of my life before Australia. Chelliah Anandarajah was my father’s brother’s son, my first-cousin, though in generational terms I thought of him as my uncle, a large, laughing, strikingly handsome man, well

into his twenties when I was born. For years I could read his death only as a cautionary lesson about the dangers of a neocolonial schooling. The Anglican school where he and the older men in my family studied, and which he later headed, the counterpart of the CMS girls' school I attended, traded in just these constructs. Through poems like Macaulay's "Horatius" and Newbolt's "Vitae Lampada," war, cricket, and patriotism were thoroughly confounded. Confusingly, cricket was both a stand-in for war (as in "Vitae Lampada") and something above war ("it matters not whether you win or lose . . ."). Though as members of a colonized society, we all shared the unspoken understanding that winning or losing did matter a great deal, and that what was at stake was far more than a game.

A scene in Shyam Selvadurai's *Funny Boy*, where the central character Arjie is asked to memorize two Newbolt poems for Prize Day, articulates the mystifications associated with cricket even in 1980s Sri Lanka:

the precise meaning of the poems eluded me. They spoke of a reality I did not understand. "Vitae Lampada" was about cricket, but not the way I understood it. It said that through playing cricket one learned to be honest and brave and patriotic. This was not true . . . Cricket, here, consisted of trying to make it on the first eleven by any means . . . Cricket was anything but honest. "The Best School of All" was no better. (1994: 233)

Arjie, a "funny boy" alienated from the homophobic, elitist, and sports-crazy world of the school, can barely bring himself to memorize the poems. But, as a Tamil, he is told that to recite the poems well would strike a blow for the "old" values in the face of increasing Sinhala nationalism. Arjie's triumph is his realization that to pose the problem in this way is to succumb to a false dilemma: the thuggish violence of Sinhala nationalism represents a *continuity*, not a rupture, from the brutality of the colonial school system:

Sundaralingam had said Black Tie was strict, not cruel, but he was wrong. Black Tie was cruel. If not . . . how could he have slapped Shehan for having long hair and then cut off his hair in such a terrible way? . . . I thought of . . . the way Salgado and his friends had assaulted that Tamil boy. I thought of the way Black Tie had beaten both Shehan and me. Was one better than the other? I didn't think so. (1994: 247)

Between the murderous nationalism of the LTTE and the murderous nationalism of the Sinhala state, is one much better than the other? These days when I try to think about Chelliah Anandarajah's attempt to organize a cricket match between the Sri Lankan army and the Jaffna schools, I know he was not caught up in any public school glamorizations of cricket. Rather than yearning to take politics, the politics of nationalism, out of cricket, I think he was acknowledging the inescapable implication of politics in cricket. His action, as the LTTE well understood when they killed him on the streets of Jaffna, was a

political one, rather than any wistful gesture to transcend politics through cricket.

IV

Contrary to imperial mythologies, cricket in the colonies, as in the colonizing country, has been a source not of unity and cohesion, but of division and antagonism. Gyan Pandey and other historians have demonstrated that the ethnic and sectarian division that operate in contemporary India were often produced and reinforced in the colonial period. What is perhaps less well known is the role of sport in solidifying and marking such distinctions in India (Appadurai 1995: 3) and elsewhere. In Sri Lanka, the most prestigious cricket clubs in Colombo still have names like “Sinhalese Sports Club” and “Tamil Union.” Similarly, as James reveals in *Beyond a Boundary*, West Indian clubs were divided according to minute gradations of race, color, class, or “caste.” In *Beyond a Boundary* James describes as a “personal Calvary” (p. 72) the pressure to choose between Trinidad’s two middle-class clubs, Maple and Shannon, representing lighter and darker skinned players:

The British tradition soaked into me was that when you entered the sporting arena you left behind the sordid compromises of everyday existence. Yet for us to do that we would have had to divest ourselves of our skins . . . Nor could the local population see it otherwise. The class and racial rivalries were too intense . . . Thus the cricket field was a stage on which selected individuals played representative roles which were charged with social significance. (p. 72)

The idea of the *national team* continues to rest on the impossible demand that its players “divest ourselves of our skins,” casting aside the layers of social division and antagonism that are, especially, a legacy of most former colonies. This implied demand also continues to underlie representations of the sporting arena as a forge for a unified national identity, where petty rivalries of ethnicity, class, and region can be at least temporarily cast aside or transcended. As Toby Miller has shown, this assumption also underlies the move to de-ethnicize soccer in Australia through the proscription of ethnic names and logos in local clubs (Miller 1992: 109–11; Booth & Tatz 2000: 165–9).

The idea of the team as a unit in which social divisions are submerged in the service of the national cause continues to have a strong purchase across a range of political positions. The respected British critic Chris Searle, recently writing in the journal *Race and Class*, described Ranatunga’s action in the 1999 Adelaide test (where Ranatunga led the team off the field when Muralitharan was “called” for an “unlawful” delivery) as a gesture that moved “Beyond the Boundary of communalism” (Searle 1999: 115). Here Searle discards other possible readings of Ranatunga’s act – say, as a case of different sorts of loyalties between the

players, or as a response to the treatment the Sri Lankans had received in Australia, the constant taunting of Muralitharan by the public (Booth & Tatz 2000: 225), or the mounting climate of media condemnation (Roberts & James 1998: 112–24). For Searle, the Sri Lankan Captain's is primarily an act of *national* solidarity with Muralitharan as the sole Tamil member of the team. Rather than understanding the team as a site of unresolvable contradictions, Searle's reading seeks to place members of the team in the realm "beyond." Such a reading of course coincides with the co-optation of cricket by the Sri Lankan government, where the presence of a Tamil on the team is supposed to guarantee the nondiscriminatory and nonracist nature of the state.

In order for Searle to produce his reading of the Sri Lankan Captain's breach of the rules of cricket as in accordance with a higher priority, to act "Beyond the Boundary of communalism," the team has to be isolated from other Sri Lankan institutions with which inextricably bound up, and by which it is constituted: most obviously, the army, the education system, and structures of state control and patronage. To see the cricket team as acting out a script of ethnic solidarity is also to ignore the ways in which the team is fundamentally shaped by ethnic discrimination: the processes by which the team is selected in an ethnically unequal society, the material conditions of the war which limit opportunities for Tamils to focus on sport, the *de facto* segregation in key cricket-playing schools, and so on.³ None of these factors can be eliminated from the field of play – in fact they constitute that field.

The more interesting, and more difficult, question, then, is not whether or how the team transcends the constraints and inequalities of the state, but how, *in spite of these constraints*, it becomes a site of pleasure and desire for a range of unequally positioned spectators. This is the question I begin to address, in the context of different forms of diasporic spectatorship, in the final section of this chapter.

V

As mentioned above, within Sri Lanka, cricket is a key site through which institutions of the state, and especially state media, attempt to produce a unified national community, or a sense of what Roberts describes as an overarching, "transcendent . . . and composite" Sri Lankanness (Roberts & James 1998: 100). According to Foster, the national telecasting of the cricket by state TV is seized on as a useful means of creating a unified viewing community. Even prior to the cricket team's success, a narrative of television's unifying effects was much favored by optimistic social commentators in a society where television sets are luxury items. In the early days of television in the 1970s for example, domestic workers in affluent households were allowed to complete their labors early in order to watch primetime television in their employers' living rooms (though social distinctions would not be overridden – usually the workers would stand, sit

on the floor, or in some more self-consciously “enlightened” households, be provided with special chairs). Since linguistic distinctions remain a clear indicator of class, some social negotiation did take place: English-speaking households would sometimes tune in to popular Sinhala – or more rarely Tamil – soap operas “because of the servants.” The unifying function attributed to cricket needs to be placed in the context of these preexisting narratives of a collective viewing public produced by television, where distinctions of class, ethnicity, gender, language, and religion were imagined to be submerged. However, as Foster points out, to read a collective viewing situation as producing a unified spectatorship or community is to ignore the differentiated gaze of particular viewers. The elderly Ammes (female domestics) who are often cited in these discussions for example, may read in the spectacle of Australia or England vs. Sri Lanka cricket match not a struggle between East and West or a conflict of postcolonial virilities, but the aspirations of rural, working-class young men (like the current captain Sanath Jayasuriya), who have in recent years supplanted private-school educated, English-speaking young men from upper-and middle-class families on the national team.

While such differentiated positions of class, gender, and language characterize an internal viewing audience, the community of diasporic viewers is constituted by a range of additional factors. In order to discuss this point I want to shift, briefly, to two key moments in Australian sporting history. The first is a meditation on the great Anglo-Australian cricketering hero, Sir Donald Bradman, but via James. James tells us, “it took an Australian . . . in a little book on Bradman . . . to make me fully conscious of what I had always known about our cricket heroes and their worshippers in the West Indies of my day” (p. 97). He then quotes a passage by a starving Australian journalist in London, Philip Lindsay, who keeps himself alive by reading newspaper reports of Bradman’s successful 1930 tour. “Perhaps,” James remarks at the end of this passage,

it is only we on the periphery who feel this way . . . I do not know of any West Indian in the West Indies to whom the success of a cricketer means so much in a personal way. There may be some among the emigrants . . . Jimmy Durante, the famous American comedian has popularised a phrase in the U S: “that’s my boy.” I am told that its popularity originates in the heart of the immigrant struggling with the new language, baffled by the new customs . . . Wilton St Hill was our boy. (p. 99)

Here James moves between a number of vastly different *diasporic* scenes: from an Anglo-Australian in 1930s London, to Chinese migrants in the West Indies and West Indian migrants in Britain, to the non-Anglo migrants of Durante’s USA, to suggest the forms of desire and identification that constitute the gaze of a diasporic spectatorship. Migration, colonization, and assimilation are the key factors in each scene, modifying and mediating the viewers’ relationship to an originary country, whether Australia, the West Indies, or China.

I want to juxtapose with James's catalogue one more diasporic group, as represented in a letter to the editor that recently appeared in Melbourne's *Age* newspaper. The letter comments on a famous 'mark' at the 1970 Australian Football League Grand Final:

the significance of the impact on Australian culture of that mark, and Jesaulenko cannot be underestimated. At the age of 14, and with my dark Mediterranean complexion and black curly hair, I was sitting on the top deck of the northern stand when Jezza on his ascent pierced a hole in the sacred canopy of Anglo-Celtic Australia's prejudices; and, as he grabbed the ball out of the hands of an angel, the messenger whispered what Jezza heard as a tremendous roar from the crowd: "wogs are ok."

Jesaulenko made the "ethnic" supporters feel as if they belonged . . . He couldn't be put down by the Anglo-Celts. Carlton supporters of ethnic background don't just admire Jezza; they adore him. He made them feel lovable in a rejecting society. (John Bacash)

The power of this decades-old memory, one experienced, indeed, as a revelatory moment, in which a whisper from the heavens is echoed in a roar from crowd, is the consolidation and confirmation of a new identity: "wogs are ok." The affirmation of 'wog' (a word whose problematic aspects I am bracketing in today's discussion) has little to do with Turkish, Macedonian, Italian, Bosnian, Greek, or Lebanese nationalism on the part of the audience. Rather it is a response that affirms an identity produced in, and referring to, the viewer's Australian context.⁴

Whereas much of the writing on migrant and diasporic communities tends to see them as focused nostalgically on the past, on "imagined *home* lands," less attention is paid to diaspora as dynamically producing or *creating* identities, identities that, as in this instance, exceed the nationalist reach of an ordinary state or nation through the claiming or formation of new categories of identification (Gilroy). These identifications, like 'wog,' are conscious responses to the inhospitality of the viewer's location: here the writer significantly refers to a 14-year-old self who at this moment for once felt "lovable in a rejecting society." Against the institutionalized and everyday racism of seventies Australia, a reactive identity, "wog," is announced from the heavens, splintering open the notion of a unified Australian team or nation.

It is worth pursuing the connections between this scene of annunciation and the one cited by James, Jimmy Durante's famous line, "That's my boy." In both scenes, a child – a "boy" – is conferred an identity from on high, an identity constituted in response to pressures of racism and assimilation. In his discussion of this passage Farred unpacks the "provocative" implications of James's transposition of a scene of assimilationist anxiety from Durante's United States to Afro-Caribbeans in London. As the migrant child masters the language and lessons of the dominant culture,

A fissure, drawn mostly among lines of generation and class, opens up between the “boy” and his, it is seldom her, community. There is an anxiety contained in the enthusiasm with which the immigrant community claims the “boy” as “ours.” Having learned the new language and customs, he could easily become someone else’s boy More disturbing is the possibility that the cultural remove could translate into an economic dependence upon the dominant community, literally reducing the immigrant boy to the diminutive The public embracing of their “boy” by the immigrants represents both an effort to secure links with the primary community and a . . . recognition that . . . the immigrant community has to create a new understanding and functioning of community. (Farred 1996: 184)

What occurs in all three scenes is a renegotiation, or changed understanding of the space of “home” and belonging as new identifications and oppositions are articulated. Throughout *Beyond a Boundary*, Farred argues, James is engaged in an “ongoing negotiation with the concept of home” (Farred 1996: 179), a negotiation constituted by diaspora and removal. To characterize James’s position as simply “nationalist” is to miss *Beyond a Boundary*’s location as a text of the Afro-Caribbean diaspora, and the complexities of his reimagining of “home” for the diasporic spectator. As Paul Gilroy puts it (via Rakim) in another context, “*it ain’t where you’re from, it’s where you’re at*” (Gilroy 1991: 3–6). The defiant and creative identifications produced by migration are not necessarily the result of a subject’s interpellation by an unproblematized nationalism of the “homeland,” but a response to the realities of the present: “where you’re at.”

To return to the questions with which I began, a Sri Lankan, Tamil, woman suddenly called on to ‘take sides’ in the cricket: my viewing position can be explained neither by my assent to the nationalist appeal of a unitary Sri Lanka, nor by a position “outside” politics, as a knowing connoisseur of the game. It is constituted, rather, by my constant interpellation as foreign to the country whose *passport* I now hold, but whose privileges of *citizenship* I can never fully assume. A discussion that does not take account of these dialectics of diasporic identity will remain unable to comprehend the forms of agency available to an oppositional spectatorship. Such a gaze, moreover, exceeds the narrow identifications of “country of origin”: as I said at the outset, anti-Australian, pro-Sri Lankan sympathies during the tour extended to include many categories of minoritized “wogs” and “ethnics” in Australia.

But the question remains open: can this minoritized, oppositional spectatorship coincide with, or be recuperated by, that of Sinhala nationalism? I have tried to suggest that the mobilizations of “culture,” “nation,” and “sportsmanship” by Australian and Sinhala nationalisms are in fact complicitous and complementary. To the spectator located between nationalisms, the two work together to open up the historical and ongoing frameworks, the “plots,” within which such contests are played out.

Notes

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- 1 On the role of the boundary between players and spectators see Burton 1991: 9–10.
- 2 For more on indigenous cricketers in the years leading up to Federation, see Martin Flanagan's remarkable novel, *The Call*.
- 3 An editorial in the *Daily News* of March 10, 1998, laments the "shaming ethnic divide" that turns cricket into an "apartheid regime" in some city schools. In this context I find a little disingenuous Ismail's remark that "whereas the nationalist would support the team no matter what, the kind of spectator I have constructed here wouldn't – for instance if the selection of the team was 'ethnically discriminatory' " (1997: 26).
- 4 For a discussion of the complexities of the word 'wog' see Perera and Pugliese 1998, and Perera 1999.

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