

BATTING AGAINST THE BREAK: ON CRIKET, NATIONALISM AND THE SWASHBUCKLING SRI LANKANS

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To score, he had to get the leg-break away through two short-legs and force the off-break through two gulleys. Against the break all the time... There are new roads for batsmen to explore.

C.L.R.James. *Beyond a Boundary*

'Twas the eve of the vernal equinox, well before the south-westerly monsoon rains of 1996. Sri Lanka, naturally, was hot. The kind of heat that, as Michael Ondaatje puts it, walks around "hugging everybody"; an omnipresent, omnipressing, suffocating heat. Things were a little cooler in Lahore, where the Sri Lankan team had made the final of the World Cup cricket tournament. In previous competitions, dating back to 1975, the side had lost no less than 20 of the 24 matches it had played. This time, it sought to end the drought. This time, the little island nation was to beat all comers, including Australia (a continent) in the championship game.

A frame already exists to view "international" matches in South Asia, one inspired by C.L.R.James. In this reading, cricket is nationalism¹; its spectators, nationalist. My argument, against such a reduction is two fold. First, that cricket and its spectators cannot be covered thus. Nationalism endeavors to fence the game in and exhaust its meaning; just as it tries, in Partha Chatterjee's phrase, to "seduce, apprehend and imprison" all phenomena within its grasp. But cricket runs out. In this brief space, a careful examination is possible of just one such attempt to catch the game: Sinhala nationalism's hegemonic move to produce a seamless Sri Lankan nation out of (those who applauded) the cricket team's success at the World Cup. The examination will, hopefully, be adequate illustration of this frame being out of joint, of the bind between cricket and nationalism not being natural, or inevitable, but produced — by the latter. I argue, therefore, that the meaning of cricket cannot be exhausted by nationalism and that the current discourse on cricket in South Asia needs revision. The second, consequent and perhaps more important thrust of this argument is *the identification, if not construction, of a space for the spectator unmarred by nationalism, for the spectator who would cheer the team but not the nation*. The existence of and necessity for such a space isn't recognized in or allowed by South Asian cricket discourse. Indeed, even making the claim for such a site is hazardous, given nationalism's omnipresence; and I am not entirely convinced that this paper successfully produces such a space. But the attempt, the commitment, is necessary — if not imperative; not just in the interests of cricket, but as a part of the critique of nationalism. Without such moves, however risky they may be, South Asian politics cannot be taken beyond the suffocating grasp of nationalism.

This paper, therefore, is written contra the Jamesian representation of cricket as nationalism (one enabled, in part, by the very Leninist understanding of nationalism found in James's work). It is also, crucially, written with the Jamesian: with a love for, and intellectual and aesthetic pleasure in observing, the game. Chattetjee has stated, on another occasion, that "interpretation [in these circumstances,] acquires the undertones of a polemic" (52); what follows is analogous to a cheeky single.

Roy Dias, a former Sri Lankan cricket star, wrote in the *Indian Express* on the Sri Lankan World Cup performance: "At last we have found voice on an international stage." These sentiments were echoed and amplified in the Colombo *Observer* by Tissa Jayatilaka, who played at a parochial level:

It was not a terrorist bomb. Neither was it a natural disaster nor a political scandal of epic proportions. And yet, Sri Lanka had made the world headlines. The island nation won the cricket World Cup

In these assertions, cricket is not about the skill and fortunes of the eleven men who actually play; but about the self-respect and pride — if not the vindication — of an entire, albeit small, nation.

The illustrious predecessor of — and in some respects sanction for — this post-colonialist take on cricket is, of course, the work of Cyril Lionel Robert James. His magisterial, impeccably crafted and moving quasi-autobiography *Beyond a Boundary* (1963), discussed the question: What do they know of cricket who only cricket know? In so doing, James transformed our comprehension of the game, took it out of the sports pages. He asserted that "social passions" used "cricket as a medium of expression" (60); that, in Victorian England, the great W.G.Grace helped incorporate cricket "into the life of the nation" (169); and that, in the West Indies, an emergent, anti-colonial nationalism found voice most powerfully not through organized political groups, but at international cricket matches. It found voice both in the players' performances and its commemoration by the massive crowds in attendance at these games. James's text is written in and with this voice; it is a powerful, defiant, celebratory instance of anti-colonial West Indian nationalism.

But we must remember that *Beyond a Boundary* is the product of a very different conjuncture from ours: that could be emblemized by the publication of Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* just two years before. It was possible then to be sanguine about the liberatory potential of nationalism; though even Fanon's faith in nation and national liberation was qualified, we, on the other hand, inhabit a

conjuncture where we know that the nation, as an idea/ of community, is untenable; we know it to be inherently oppressive of its working classes, its women, its homosexuals its ethnic minorities. In contemporary South Asia, we know that the present moment demands, at the very minimum, suspicion of the claims of the nation.² And therefore, for the purposes of this paper, of its exclusivist claims upon cricket.

In a recent essay, Arjun Appadurai posed the problem pivotal to any discussion of the relation of the two phenomena: "how [did] the idea of the *Indian nation* emerge as a salient *cricketing* entity" ? This question in particular, and Appadurai's provocative theses in general, animate my paper. His own answer to the question is part sociological; and part ideological, found in "the dialectic between team spirit and national sentiment, which is inherent in the sport" (24). What follows is largely an attempt to investigate the implications of that statement, which is of the same discursive universe as James. For, as I argue, to make an analogy between team and nation is to place both entities outside a field of power; which is how nationalism represents the field of play.

We, however, must be wary of the ubiquitous and authoritative presence of nationalism. Rerniniscent of Ondaatje's heat, nationalism tends to encompass everything, appear everywhere, affect the meaning even of phenomena apparently unrelated to it. Take, for instance, the fifth sentence of my opening paragraph: "In previous competitions, dating back to 1975, the side had lost 20 of 24 matches." At first glance, this is an innocuous, descriptive, nonideological statement; one that Foucault might have called "tranquil" (25) — serene, self-evident, hiding nothing. But, surely, only within a nationalist frame, only if one assumes them to be representing the nation, can one presume a continuity between the cricketers who wore the lion cap at the first World Cup, in 1975, and those who did in 1996.

I do not base this assertion merely on the fact that the players who comprised both sides are different. More importantly, the two teams were classed and gendered differently.³ In the 1970s, the Sri Lankan side was composed almost entirely of upper-middle class, Sinhala, male products of two exclusivist Colombo schools — who were not paid to play. In the 1980s, after test status, these "amateurs" gradually stopped making the team. Today, it comprises rural and urban, working- and middle-class, men from a variety of schools in the Sinhala-dominated parts of the island; the new players are, to a man, professional. Hanif Markar has written of the transition: "the 'gentlemanly' cricketer has disappeared from sight. It [now] matters not how you play the game but whether you win or lose" (120). Thus the contention that the masculinity staged — and perhaps at stake — in these two periods is radically different. Up to the 1970s, it was bound to what Appadurai terms the "capability to mimic Victorian elite values" of sportsmanship: never disputing an umpire's decision, treating both imposters — victory and defeat — the same, and such like. This stiff-lipped masculine ethic was helped by the structure of the game: though played over five days, every test did not necessarily end in a decision. At the risk of sounding cynical, one could argue that it is relatively easy for those who do not have to contemplate losing both face and money, to maintain a stiff upper

lip. In the limited-overs variety, one team wins at the end of every day — and is rewarded very well for so doing. It quite literally pays to win, be aggressive, take risks. The pace of the game is no longer leisurely, or "pre-industrial," as James put it; now it releases much adrenalin and anxiety, in sportsman and spectator. The masculinity performed, being tough in the 1990s, bears no relation to the Kiplingesque. This is the age of an in-your-face masculinity.⁴

The two teams, therefore, share nothing — except being selected by representatives of the Sri Lankan Cricket Board of Control, which is not the nation. Still, nationalism produces a continuity and insists upon an analogy between team and nation; one predicated on both being represented as groups or communities of homogenous equals. To investigate the analogy, nationalism must first be interrogated — if very briefly; and its community, nation, situated in relation to power (before the same is done with team). *Nation must also be seen in relation to country: the two are distinct categories.* For instance, one can speak of *one country*, Sri Lanka, being inhabited by two competing nationalisms, the Tamil and the Sinhala, which in turn presume *two distinct nations*. Country, here, is a geographic and juridical category (schematically put = territory + state): its subjects, citizens, have, at least on paper, certain rights and privileges, for instance, passports — and are to be distinguished from the nation's subjects — nationals, in my usage — without rights, only obligations.⁵

To an alarming degree, our current understanding of nationalism is informed by a single work by Benedict Anderson. As every cultural critic and his/her second cousins know, he defined the nation as an "imagined community"⁶ Anderson deserves credit for insisting that we (re) think the nation as construct; though not necessarily for the reasons he insists upon, as a close reading of this text will show. This is one of the passages where he clarifies his definition:

It is imagined as a *community*, because, regardless of the actual inequality and exploitation... in each, the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship. Ultimately it is this fraternity that makes it possible ... for so many millions of people, not so much to kill, as willingly to die for limited imaginings (7).

Two quick questions arise from this. Can something be deep and horizontal simultaneously ? Is it necessary to mention the autobiography of Robert Graves, or reports of the Vietnam war, to inquire whether those who died "for England", or the United States — who ostensibly died "for" their "nations" — did so willingly ?

The more important point to note about this passage is that it contradicts Anderson's thesis: it states that the nation is *real* (a site of inequality and exploitation) *and imagined/conceived* (represented as fraternity). A most intriguing hypothesis; but one that isn't explored further. For it to be held, a theory of ideology is required; otherwise one cannot explain how inequality — to stick with Anderson's terms — is represented, *successfully*, as comradeship. This theory must also situate ideology in relation to hegemony; otherwise, the only possible explanation of how the exploited get persuaded *and* coerced into feeling a comradeship with their ex-

plotters would be false consciousness⁷ Such a theory is available, of course, in Althusser, whose arguments could be crudely summarized thus: no hegemony without ideology; or, among the functions of ideology is the enabling of hegemony.

For foregrounding the question of "inequality," for bringing the cardinal issue of hegemony back into the study of nationalism, one must thank the collective effort of *Subaltern Studies*, most notably, the work of Partha Chattetjee and Ranajit Guha. Chatterjee has demonstrated the nation as an idea to be unthinkable without a notion of hegemony. Guha, in a fundamental and breathtaking rearticulation of Gramsci — who spoke often of the state as "coercion plus hegemony" — demonstrates hegemony to be a relation of dominance; that the element of "persuasion" cultural critics are so enamoured of isn't innocent of force; that, even if persuasion "outweighs" coercion in this equation, it doesn't negate the latter; that *persuasion is buttressed by, impossible without, coercion*. Read together, Guha and Chatterjee show that, in so far as the subaltern classes could be said to do anything for the nation, it is not tenable to hold that they do so "willingly"⁸; subordinated groups are, if anything, "appropriated" for the nation. It is nationalism as ideology that represents this appropriation as a relation of consent.

These are, of course, not arguments unfamiliar to those acquainted with the history of Marxism;⁹ they resonate strongly with Luxemburg's critique of the Leninist position on the right of nations to self-determination. Consequent to Lenin's yoking of the national with the colonial question, and Stalin's definition of the nation as an "integer" with positively identifiable attributes, interrogating the notion of nation as a seamless entity lost priority within the Marxist tradition. Thus, to return for a moment to the conjuncture of James and Fanon, making it easier for them, committed Marxists both, to oppose colonialism with the idea of *national* liberation. As indicated before, the present South Asian conjuncture requires revisiting the "loser" of the famous debate, Rosa Luxemburg.

She wasn't, of course, the first Marxist to point out that the notion of "rights" is foreign to Marxism, or that nationalism and socialism should be considered incompatible; she was the first to do so systematically. A single longish quotation will have to take the place of a reading:

a homogenous...concept of the "nation" is one of those categories of bourgeois ideology which Marxist theory submitted to a radical revision..... *In a class society, "the nation" as a homogenous sociopolitical entity does not exist. Rather, there exist within each nation, classes with antagonistic interests and "rights" "...There can be no talk of a collective and uniform will, of the self-determination of the "nation" in a society formed in such a manner..... Who has the authority and the "right" to speak for the nation and express its will? How can we find out what the "nation" actually wants (135-141, emphasis added)?*

One would, today, identify nation as split along more lines: gender, "ethnicity," region, religion, sexuality and so on¹⁰, all expressing unequal relations of power between social groups. Nationalism as ideology must — and does — deny all these power lines. Luxemburg, though in a different vocabulary, relentlessly foregrounds the same concerns: the nation as "antagonism"¹¹. Thus my amazement at Anderson's blithe proclamation that nationalism was an "anomaly" for Marxism, or that it elided the topic. What requires investigation, rather, is how Marxism elided Luxemburg.

But, to move from one group of supposed equals, nation, to another, team, her work demands this query of Appadurai's Jamesian reading of a cricket team: who has the authority to speak for the Sri Lankan side? During the World Cup, the appropriately named Board of Control for Cricket in Sri Lanka allowed one person to address the media — the captain; the rest of the team signed contracts — were persuaded, no doubt — agreeing not to do so. This happening reinforces my contention that a team should not be seen as a group of free and equal (male) individuals, or a fraternity with a common cause¹². It is, at best, a fragile unit(y): composed of a captain, a vice-captain and nine other members; of superstars, role-players and reserves. *A team, any team, is not an assembly of homogenous equals, but an entity enmeshed in power, marked in various ways*. Like nation, it is no integer.

We can now scrutinize Sinhala nationalism's attempt to appropriate the cricket team, for its own ends, during and after the World Cup final. This analysis is dependent upon the following understanding of Sinhala nationalism: that, as political process, it sought to hegemonize the non-Sinhala social groups in post-colonial Sri Lanka and refused to accommodate itself to the demands of, most particularly, Tamil nationalism — preferring, instead, to oppose the latter, politically and militarily. As ideology, Sinhala nationalism acts often in the name of the country, Sri Lanka, and tries to pass for Sri Lankan nationalism. Through this process and ideology, it attempts to produce a Sri Lankan nation under Sinhala nationalist hegemony; and, as implied earlier, it makes use of every opportunity to do so, tries to appropriate, if not apprehend, every happening, including cricket, for its purposes.

Michael Roberts has asserted that:

At all international matches played in Sri Lanka... the identity evoked among onlookers has been that of "Ceylonese" or "Sri Lankan". This overarching identity transcends internal divisions and encompasses Tamils, Sinhalese, Moors, Burghers, and Malays within one category (411).

How this "overarching identity" is produced by or at the cricket is not spelled out, and no evidence is presented to back up the pronouncement; presumably, the game somehow "evokes" a transcendental Sri Lankanness. At play here is the specifically Sri Lankan version of the South Asian discourse on cricket as nationalism: like the team, the nation "transcends internal divisions". Roberts, in other words, purports to take post-colonial Sri Lankan history into account: that even if the nation has been divided, even if its "ethnic groups" have been fighting each other, the nation

somehow comes together during international matches. This can only be characterized as an incredible position. For, if cricket indeed unites Sri Lankans, then the national or ethnic problem could be solved very simply, by having the cricket team play 365 days of the year (resting, perhaps, on religious holidays — the number of which may consequently have to be reduced). But Roberts's position actually coincides with the Sinhala nationalist claim upon cricket: that international games make the country and nation coincide, that they make possible a Sri Lankan nation. As we shall see, Tamil nationalism disrupts this.

Roberts, of course, is not alone in buying the Sinhala nationalist story. Sri Lanka during the World Cup final was portrayed thus by the local correspondent of the *Indian Express*: "life in the island [came] to a complete standstill"; "all the beer was sold out in Colombo"; "residents in north-central Anuradhapura even cancelled weddings to watch the match". There was, in short, no higher priority on this day for any Sri Lankan, rural or urban, alcoholic or teetotaler, unmarried, married, or about to be, than cheering the team. This phenomenon cut across gender: "women finished their cooking for the day early in the morning, so that they could watch the match". At moments like this, however, the production of a utopic, single-minded community around cricket begins to fracture: women, we are told, had to change their plans, their routine, in order to participate in this "community"; the cricket match does not allow them, even temporarily, to abandon the kitchen. In fact, in this account, it inconveniences them even further: they will watch the game; but only after doing their duty by the male viewers. In other words, the ideology of the nation, its representation of itself as consisting of equal nationals, unburdened by gender, cannot sustain itself. Women, here, are represented as playing one of the (supporting) roles nationalism persuades them to fulfil — being nurturers of the (masculine) nation.¹³ Interestingly enough, the game apparently did not inconvenience even its male Sri Lankan spectators at war. The *Express* story made it a point to note that the Sri Lankan military, officers and troops, in barracks and battlefield, were not busy safeguarding the nation from the LTTE, but followed the game on television.

The most remarkable feature of this news report is its self-evident tone: it does not explain the much ado over a cricket match. Given the discursive conditions of its production, it assumed no need to. For, *not only was there no other or higher priority, there couldn't have been any, for Sri Lankans on the 17th of March*. As observed before, cricket in this argument is nationalism; and, more crucially, *nationalism on that day is cricket*. All Sri Lankans — including soldiers will put on hold whatever else they are doing; sit, stand, stagger or shiver in front of the television set; and cheer. All Sri Lankans will cathect the team, uniformly and universally, regardless of ethnicity, class or gender. The "dialectic" is at play; the united nation comes into being.

The Colombo *Sunday Times* editorial after the Sri Lankan team's victory shares these discursive norms:

Little Sri Lanka's spectacular emergence as World Champions in cricket, has brought about positive factors that go far

beyond the scoreboard Almost everybody in Sri Lanka started smiling again from last Sunday night and there was a happy feeling in the heart, despite all the crises facing us. Sri Lanka's revolution in World Cricket also brought about deep unity among people of all races and religions here. We hope the unity rebuilt on the playing fields will grow into other areas.....

While echoing Roberts, this statement is also the product of a very different moment and politics. Thus its pathos. What anchors it is not celebration or joy, as might be expected, but nostalgia, a profound sense of loss: it is assumed here that there once was a time when Sri Lankans smiled and were happy *because* they were without crisis. This pathos is of a piece with that of Dias and Jayatilleke, and requires attention, for the seamless Sri Lankan nation produced — if transitorily — in the passage cannot be understood without it.

From the early 1980s, Sinhala nationalism's military attempts to defeat the Tamil nationalist militancy had failed. In the fall of 1994, a new president was elected, on an anti-war platform. Chandrika Kumaratunga negotiated with the LTTE and, for four brief months in 1995, there was no combat; until the LTTE unilaterally broke off the ceasefire and resumed, among other things, its bombing campaign against the Sri Lankan state. The most spectacular target attacked in this new round of fighting was the Central Bank building, in the heart of Colombo's financial district, in January 1996. Saying they feared for their lives, the Australian and West Indian teams then refused to play scheduled World Cup games in Sri Lanka. At the beginning of the World Cup, therefore, Sinhala nationalism had nothing to rejoice about; no ethnic peace in sight, though once promised; just endless, seemingly unwinnable, war; not even a transitory salve in the form of a boost from successfully hosting the tournament.

With victory in the final, a new claim could be made: that, "at last," this little island—once reputed internationally for persecuting its minorities and thus made to feel even littler—had made the world headlines," or "found voice" for positive reasons. The rest of the world had realized, acknowledged, that Sri Lankans (read Sinhalese) were capable of positive achievements. And, perhaps most importantly, that the country was united. Only for a moment—thus the pathos; but a moment that made Sinhala nationalism optimistic about its future: now it felt it could, despite the continuing war, "hope the unity rebuilt on the playing fields will grow..."; that its hegemonic project may, yet, be successful.

The war, the LTTE, would interrupt this happy story. But it must first be noted that the argument of Dias, Jayatilaka and the *Times* is enabled by two slips: from team to nation, and from Sinhala (nation) to Sri Lanka (country). It is assumed, merely because the eleven players wore lion caps, that they represented the nation; whereas they could have been representing the country — or just themselves; they could have been representing nothing — just playing for the money, or status, or for pleasure¹⁴. Only within a nationalist frame can this slip appear natural. Second slip: again because of the symbols on the caps, and consequent to the first, it is assumed that

because the nation was being represented on the field, those watching did so as Sri Lankans. But those cheering may not have done so as (ethnically unmarked) Sri Lankans — though, no doubt, some must have; they may not even have watched as “ethnics” — though some, perhaps many, would have; indeed, it is entirely possible that some watched as cricket fans — fans of the team of the country they were socialized in. But, for cricket to be nationalism, Sinhala nationalism must represent all those watching as Sri Lankan, as cheering not so much their team as themselves; in other words, make nationals out of citizens. It must, to use Guha’s term, produce the nation “as an integer” (1992, 97); it must reassure its constituency that what was “lost” wasn’t lost permanently; that the unified nation could be “rebuilt”; and it must deny all other meaning and imprison cricket, naturalize the nexus between team and nation.

With regard to a very different politics and conjuncture, anti-colonial Gandhian India, Guha has argued — echoing Chatterjee and Marx — that:

Gandhi had a use for the masses. It was of fundamental importance for the philosophy as well as the practice of his politics that the people should be appropriated for and their energies and numbers ‘harnessed’ to a nationalism which would allow the bourgeoisie to speak for its own interests in such a way as to illustrate the illusion of speaking for all of society (1992, 109).

It is beyond my brief to examine here the class, or elite-subaltern, “antagonisms” within Sri Lankan nationalism. My particular concern is with the “ethnic” contradiction, to which Guha’s argument also speaks, because his essay fundamentally addresses the issue of antagonisms as such, relations of power, that nationalism must flatten. Nationalism claims to speak for the seamless whole; it will use every opportunity to do so; therein lies its pervasive, omnipresent power. Thus one might say, to paraphrase Guha, that *Sinhala nationalism* — of which the *Sunday Times* editorial is an instance — *had a use for those citizens who watched the cricket final: they could be represented as Sri Lankan nationals* (because the team wore caps marked Sri Lanka); and they were. In other words, nationalism, here, tries to apprehend cricket. But every cricket fan is not so easily seduced; for some of them the game will have other meanings; some of them will run out of nationalism’s suffocating clasp.

For interpellation to work, the interpellated subject must, in Althusser’s phrase, make a “one-hundred-and-eighty-degree physical conversion” (174) acknowledging the hailing. In this instance, every spectator must acquiesce to Sri Lankanness, *must cheer as Sri Lankan nationals*. For Sinhala nationalism to successfully hegemonize Sri Lanka, for the ethnic “antagonism” to be erased, the Muslim and the Burgher must join the Sinhalese in being Sri Lankan. Most importantly, the Tamil must do so; but Tamil nationalism disrupts the Sinhala nationalist story and hegemonic move.

On the eve of the final, Reuters interviewed the Paris-based spokesperson of the LTTE, Lawrence Thilakar. I would, given the war, not

have expected him to give a damn about the outcome of the game, at least officially. But Thilakar had something to say:

All Tamils in the North and East love cricket. It’s a part of their lives in school. 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.

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, however slight, must be noted: while Thilakar “cannot” — the language expresses certainty — desire an Australian victory, he merely found it “difficult” — not impossible, just difficult — 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. The *Times* editorial, in contrast, would take a politics from cricket, if not *make* a politics from cricket.

But the *Times*’s is a politics that fails. Thilakar who can never be both Lawrence Thilakar, Sri Lankan cricket fan and LTTE spokesperson could not publicly acquiesce to Sri Lankanness under any circumstances. He will not publicly support the Sri Lankan side — even if he might want to; even if, as I suspect, he actually did in front of his television. In other words, this statement indicates that Thilakar’s rationalness was in contradiction with his citizenship; or, more generally, that even if non-nationalist Tamils supported the Sri Lankan team, an *ethnically unmarked Sri Lankan nation could not be and was not produced on this occasion*. The (Sri Lankan) nation isn’t united in cheering the team. Sinhala nationalism might say so, attempt to produce such a nation, impose such subject-positions on the spectators; but, at least with Tamil nationals, it cannot escape its own history.

My contention is that Sinhala nationalism can never do so. Markar argues, that when the Indian cricket team toured Sri Lanka in 1985, a time when Sinhala nationalism appeared unlikely to compromise on its hegemonic claims on Sri Lanka, and when the Indian state was not so covertly backing the Tamil nationalist resistance:

The [cricket] battle was between the Sinhalese (not Sri Lanka) and India (acting in the minds of some Sinhalese as a proxy for the Tamils)... very few Tamils wanted “their country” to win... [And] during the recent series with Pakistan, many Sri Lankan Muslims had their sympathies with the Muslim country, some going even to the extent of lighting crackers when Pakistan won (119).

What this implies of Sinhala nationalism need not detain us here. Markar’s statement contests Roberts’s claim that international cricket matches produce an “overarching” Sri Lankanness.¹⁵

Remarkably enough, Roberts’s text itself is prompted by an instance of Sinhala nationalism actually preventing the assertion of Sri

Lankanness at a cricket match. During a Sri Lanka versus Australia one-day game in 1981, a Burgher (“indigenous inhabitant of European descent”) and, more importantly, Burgher “looking” (405) spectator, Laddie, doubted the patriotism of another Sri Lankan, Sinha, who was, says Roberts, excessively friendly to an Australian player. This was, one might recall, the time that the “gentlemanly” ethos was beginning to fade. Thus, even if the ethic of sportsman(sic)ship demanded courtesy to the opponent, Laddie could be read as representing both the nascent professional ethos, and the possibility of Sri Lankanness, when he accosted Sinha. An irritated Sinha “wrapped up the issue,” says Roberts, with a simple riposte: “I am a Sinhalese” (405). Roberts makes the important point that, if addressed to a Tamil or Muslim, an occupant of either of those subject-positions,

could not conceivably have resolved the conflict in his [sic] favor by announcing that he was a Tamil [or Muslim]. Such a riposte would not even have occurred to him... because it could not have carried the same import (418).

Such a riposte is only possible from a powerful, if not hegemonic, subject-position, the Sinhala nationalist; which will, as long as its project is hegemonic, always disrupt the possibility of Sri Lankanness. But, despite the only evidence he produces contradicting his argument, Roberts sticks to his faith in this being an extraordinary moment: “in the world of cricket this antagonism is normally submerged” (412). My argument is that these antagonisms do not, cannot, be submerged by international cricket matches; that Sri Lankan national community isn’t produced at these events. Sinhala nationalism’s hegemonic move to produce a seamless Sri Lankan nation always fails.

Yet, the questions remain: Why did Thilakar have something to say about the game? Why did he not disdain its outcome? What was at stake in him feeling obliged to say that not just he, but “all Tamils in the North and East” — in LTTE-dominated Sri Lanka — “love” cricket? The answer will take us to that tenuous space I read as unmarked by nationalism; to get there, a detour via Ondaatje and a return to James are required.

Michael Ondaatje’s *Running in the Family* is a hyper-orientalized story of an elite Sri Lankan brood. In this Sri Lanka, the fantastic is the everyday and Ondaatje’s family, his father in particular, get away with the most outrageous exploits, including a drunken disruption of the Sri Lankan railway during the war in 1943. It is, of course, class that allowed the father this privilege: something that doesn’t occur to Ondaatje. In RF, Sri Lanka sounds like a classless paradise, without even servants — until the subaltern classes interrupt the smooth flow of the narrative. Once, they came looking for guns — and stayed to play cricket (a “quaintly decadent” sport, as Lazarus reminds us, to the North American audience addressed by this text).

On the eve of the Janatha Vimukthi Peramuna’s (National Liberation Front, JVP) insurrection against the Sri Lankan state in April 1971, the Front appropriated as many weapons as possible from the general populace¹⁶. This included a shot-gun that belonged to

Ondaatje’s stepmother, living then in Kegalle, a town in central Sri Lanka. Ondaatje represents the JVP as consisting of “essentially the young..... a strange mix of innocence and determination and anarchy...” (100). Typically, he never once says what these “insurgents” were rebelling against; does not discuss their class or caste composition, or the social circumstances the JVP emerged from; finds the fact that the group consisted exclusively of Sinhalese unremarkable; is not interested in their own depiction of their ideology, as mixture of the Maoist and “Che” Guevarist — by no means anarchist. He sees no need, in short, to comment upon its project of revolutionizing the Sinhala nation. After securing the family shotgun, we are told:

the insurgents put down their huge collection of weapons, collected from all over Kegalle, and persuaded my younger sister Susan to provide a bat and a tennis ball. Asking her to join them, they proceeded to play a game of cricket on the front lawn for most of the afternoon (101).

Thilakar would enjoy this story. Because, unconstrained by the cricket-is-nationalism discourse, produced as he is by a different relation to both, Ondaatje produces a game that is a part of the Sri Lankan everyday.

Growing up in Kegalle, the young Ondaatjes would have their “hair cut on the front lawn by a travelling barber. And daily arguments over Monopoly, cricket, or marital issues...” (145). Monopoly — a game which can only be played by those to whom property isn’t a presumption or to be appropriated, but a self-evident possibility — would not be a part of the JVP everyday. Cricket, on the other hand, is; so much so, that it enables the subaltern and Susan Ondaatje to meet. It is easy to read this meeting as cricket producing community — across, in this instance, the power-lines of class and gender. But, the circumstances of the meeting are not so sanguine: the gun-owner also possessed the bat and ball; and, even if the latter have no exchange value, and are personal not private property, they are property nevertheless. Property that enabled a game only when Susan Ondaatje was “persuaded” — a choice of term Guha would no doubt approve — to provide the implements, and to join in. Put differently, this game would not have taken place if the power relation between subaltern and elite hadn’t been altered — if only for a while. Cricket, then, does not produce easy community, even at the quotidian level. The import of this story lies elsewhere.

It lies in the instant that the *weapons — instrumental in and therefore meonym for the political project of redefining the nation — were put aside, momentarily, for the game*; for pleasure, a pleasure produced by cricket. What Ondaatje offers, in an admittedly fantastic story, is a way of thinking and talking cricket (literally) outside the ambit of nationalism. (It is instructive of the reach of nationalism that one can find such a story only in a text like *RF*, which does its best to keep politics beyond its boundary.) *This way of thinking cricket, the space this fabricated, is by no means idyllic; it isn’t one unmarked by power; but it is outside the tentacles of (hegemonic Sinhala) nationalism.* Which is why Thilakar would enjoy Ondaatje’s story. As would James, despite his own nationalism, who said towards the beginning of *BB*:

E.W.Stanton has written in the *Daily Telegraph* that in the West Indies the cricket ethic has shaped not only the cricketers but social life as a whole. It is an understatement. There is a whole generation of us, and perhaps two generations, who have been formed by it not only in social attitudes but in our most intimate personal lives (49).

James is describing a process of socialization: cricket is a part of the masculine West Indian everyday — as it is the Sri Lankan. Because of this, a certain combine of routine and pleasure learnt and internalized early in life, the JVP “insurgents” will put their guns aside and play; Thilakar would yearn, to put his militancy aside and watch. This socialization, this playing everyday, during the interval at school and in somebody’s garden or on the street after school, produces the spectator of international games. In so far as school and cricket are part of the ideological state apparatus, and the state is nationalist, so the spectator thus produced will be nationalist, too. But, as Althusser allows, *interpellation doesn’t always succeed*.¹⁷ *If it did, we would be doomed always to be suffocated by nationalism*. If it did, one cannot have spectators who may be in profound contradiction with the nation — as were Ondaatje’s JVP’ers, as is Thilakar and, at another remove, myself-as-spectator. Those successfully interpellated and/or hegemonized by nationalism might enjoy the game as nationals. Our pleasure — as citizens, fans of the team, who grew up loving cricket — is of another kind.

It is, therefore, with pleasure that a Sri Lankan passport holder writes the concluding section of this piece, on the championship game itself, presenting himself as a spectator:¹⁸ someone who enjoyed watching the World Cup final; someone socialized into cricket in the country Sri Lanka, who cheered the team ardently while watching the final on a big screen in Chicago. But, perhaps most importantly in this context, as someone who, when a group of nationals sang the (Sinhala) anthem upon the victory, pointedly sat down. I am not arguing that this spectator did not share community with these Sri Lankans — not to mention other, mostly South Asian, spectators supporting Sri Lanka — while the game was in progress; of course he did. An important component of the pleasure of such spectatorship is communal. But, it is a community defined by purpose, not essence or allegiance to nation; one not exhausted by citizenship; a community, in Jean-Luc Nancy’s terms, that is “exposed,” whose bases must be articulated, and are not pre-given. Community, in other words, that is finite in both ambition and time; that, unlike nation, does not aim to reach indefinitely forward (or project itself as reaching infinitely back); a community that coalesced, on this occasion, to cheer the team (even if some, or most, of those present were simultaneously cheering the nation).¹⁹ A purely occasional community, one without essence. However, this spectator did not share the *meaning* imposed on the game by other spectators, as an *achievement of the nation*; but saw the victory as an achievement of the team — which, as stated earlier, isn’t seen as a bunch of homogenous equals. He also did not share the “instinctive” production of a nexus between team and nation. In short, he refused to be interpellated by Sri Lankan nationalism (though, not being Tamil nationalist, for reasons different from Thilakar).²⁰

What follows, my account of the game, is not posed as a description but as a reading, as an interested intervention from someone who supported the team, but not the nation; from someone who insists upon this possibility. *What follows is offered as an instance of this possibility, of that tenuous, slender, precarious space unmarred by nationalism*. It is a product of my experience of Sri Lanka, nationalism, cricket — and politics; with “experience” understood, in Joan Scott’s excellent re-articulation, as that “which we seek to explain” (26); and not as some truth which only I have access to because I was there when it happened. What follows, then, from this spectator, is also an intervention between Thilakar and hegemonic Sinhala nationalism; for, Thilakar, too, occupies a space marred by nationalism — not to mention the particular horrors of LTTE nationalism.

One of the adjectives most often used by the foreign media to describe the Sri Lankan team is “swashbuckling”. This is meant to be endearing; but, like Ondaatje’s insurgents, or a pirate, might be: brave, romantic, yet somehow illicit. The Sri Lankan performance, this word suggests, was peculiar; the team did something it was not supposed to. A subsequent editorial in the *Madras Hindu* on what it termed Sri Lanka’s “epochal” victory, is symptomatic of this attitude:

the team that played the most impressive brand of cricket and played it consistently won the competition. In the event, it may even be a touch patronising, if not patently unfair, to describe Sri Lanka’s historic victory as a miracle..... After Lanka’s comprehensive defeat of Australia, arguably the best and the most thoroughly professional team in contemporary cricket, one can say that the gutsy bunch of cricketers from the emerald island have certainly proved their point.

What exactly was the point the Sri Lankans proved? They played the “most impressive cricket, and did so “consistently,” but that does not qualify them to be labelled the best team. That honor must be reserved for the “thoroughly” professional Australians. There is a term for this kind of thinking and it is not “patronising” — though, coming from an Indian publication with a history of putting Sri Lanka in its place, the word would not be inappropriate; the term is racist.

I will argue here that the Sri Lankans were the most talented *and* the most professional team. It won every match it played because it had outstanding batsmen in a version of the game that emphasizes batting;²¹ and, most of all, because it had a plan, which was executed to perfection. The plan consisted, when bowling, of keeping every ball tight, no matter what happened with the previous delivery; when fielding, of hustling to save every possible run and making innovative placements, like a man wide of deep-mid-wicket; and, when batting, of scoring hugely in the first fifteen overs, when new rule changes regarding fielding restrictions make boundaries easy. (Traditional one-day wisdom demands hitting out only in the last few overs when, ostensibly, there is nothing to lose. Teams adopting this routine against Sri Lanka discovered, too late, that by then the game was lost. Since the championship, many teams have changed

their strategy, with the English doing so explicitly. If this does not work, the rules will perhaps be changed again.) In game after game, led by their unheralded — soon to be called swashbuckling — openers, the Sri Lankans raced to mammoth scores, mostly made in those first fifteen overs; this required not just talent but endless practice and intelligence — knowing how and where to hit the ball, not only the ability to do so. After every game, Arjuna Ranatunga, the Sri Lankan captain, was asked if he had a plan. After the third victory, it should have been obvious to even a cub reporter that there was strategy at work; that there probably was a Plan B as well. The questions, therefore, bespoke of a different anxiety: swashbucklers were supposed to go out there, hit hard and pray — South Asia, after all, boasts a zillion gods — not carefully execute a strategy; swashbucklers, were not even supposed to have one — that being the province of the professional.

The mental discipline that went into the Sri Lankan effort can be illustrated at length. I will discuss just one over in the final. It has, in Sri Lankan cricket discourse, a history: in the winter of 1995, the Sri Lankan team toured Australia and was defeated in both the test and one-day series. During the tour, the side was accused of a variety of unfair practices, including ball tampering and chucking; and it, in turn, accused the Australian umpires of many bad decisions. The Sri Lankan press portrayed the Australians, including the umpires, as cheating in order to win at any cost, and as having insulted an entire nation (the dialectic at work, again). Later, when World Cup tickets went on sale in Colombo, those for the Australia game sold out first, within hours of being available. As said before, the Australians refused to play the scheduled game in Sri Lanka, scared of becoming collateral damage. This despite the Sri Lankan president offering security at the same level as herself, and a statement from Thilakar saying the LTTE did not and would not target cricketers. The Sri Lankan press now portrayed the Australians as fearing defeat if they played with “neutral” (third country) umpires. In a widely reported remark, Shane Warne, Australia’s best known bowler, justified the refusal: “Imagine you’re looking in the shops and there’s a drive-by bombing.” Desperate to persuade the Australians to play, and to prevent further bad international publicity, the Sri Lankan foreign minister, Lakshman Kadirgamar, himself responded to this, with a comment designed to dare the Australians to change their minds by challenging their virility: “shopping,” he said, “is for sissies”. The tactic did not work; preserving life, in this situation, was presumably more important than asserting manliness.

Thus the Sri Lankan press portrayed the final, against Australia, as a grudge game. On its eve, Ranatunga was asked how his team would play Warne, who was having a superb tournament; some called him the world’s best bowler. In a response as considered as Thilakar’s, Ranatunga called him “over-rated”; there were, he said, other equally good bowlers. He was, deliberately, setting the stage for a confrontation. As James has observed, in these situations, “the antagonisms and differences appeared in the actual cricket, the strokes [etcl]” (60). Ranatunga, as captain, had to put his bat where his mouth was. He did.

He won the toss and, because his side preferred chasing a target,

asked the Australians to bat. No team batting second had won the championship; no matter. Chasing was part of the plan. Australia made 106 for just one wicket at the end of their first 25 overs and a large total, seemed probable. But the Sri Lankans, did not lose concentration or commitment — kept the bowling tight and the fielding crisp; kept the pressure on. Consequently, the Aussies finished with just 241/7; a respectable but not necessarily a winning score.

When Sri Lanka batted, its reliable, swashbuckling openers both got out with just 23 runs on the board. Then, unflinching at the sight of trouble, Aravinda de Silva, the team’s best batsman and vice-captain, and Asanka Gurusinghe, another veteran, batted very carefully. De Silva, often called swashbuckling in the past, played with great tenacity and purpose: he only went after the loose balls — which he sent scurrying to the boundary. Gurusinghe, on the other hand, was dropped twice. Indeed, the Australian fielding was most untidy, very unprofessional; they played, as a friend suggested, as if they knew they were guilty (of cheating in the past). The score was 148 when Gurusinghe got out to a weak stroke. Ranatunga walked in to join de Silva and the fate of the game was still uncertain; given their performance, first in the field and now at bat, given a De Silva “on the go” as James might have said, it did not look like the Sri Lankans would lose. Still, you never knew. The skipper and his deputy, again batting without being in the slightest hurry or taking the slightest risk — after all, they could not disappoint the women who had cooked early, or the men with all that beer to drink, in that magnitudinally challenged island — advanced the score to 212 at the end of the 43rd over. Balls left.. 42; runs left: 30; even the foolhardy would have thought twice about betting against a Sri Lankan victory.

On the fourth ball of the next over, Ranatunga faced Warne. He hit it back so hard the ball seared through the bowler’s fingers for four. The skipper had waited patiently for this moment. It was easy to call Warne over-rated; he also had to demonstrate it. He had to hit Warne — but only at the right stage of the game. If he had got out then, if Warne had made the catch, Sri Lanka was still likely to win; there was enough batting left. It was the right instant to make his point: a thoroughly professional, unswashbuckling, point. On the next ball, Ranatunga stepped up, took it on the full and lofted it to mid-wicket for six. Fireworks were heard, in the little island. A quiet two runs were made off the last delivery. A Sri Lankan win was certain. Ranatunga, if you like, had displayed a rubbing-it-in-your-face masculinity.

I enjoyed that moment. Shane Warne had not been hit like this by any one else in the tournament. Here was superbly skilled and masterfully intelligent batting; here, too, was a racist being put in his place. For, as dozens of people inquired (rhetorically) at the beginning of the World Cup, why did the Australians not refuse to play in England, or Warne make similar remarks, fearing an Irish Republican Army bombing? There was, of course, more than antiracism at play in those questions, in that over. The nation felt itself vindicated — otherwise, fireworks would not have been lit. So, one must ask: is it possible not to be complicitous with nationalism (at its most masculinist) at that moment, especially if one

enjoyed Ranatunga's hitting? I want to leave open the possibility that, at least with hindsight, the assertion of a distance is possible; otherwise, as I've said before, one would never be able to escape the grip of nationalism. Otherwise, the kind of space and spectator I am trying to construct cannot be.

So, I would rather see my pleasure as akin to that at an analogous put down, during another sport I enjoy watching. Danny Ainge, providing expert commentary of the Knicks-Bulls play-off series in May 1996, referred repeatedly to the large print used in Dennis Rodman's autobiography, released just a few days before the game; this was necessitated, said Ainge, by the outspoken Bulls defender's many "illiterate readers" — presumably a reference to Rodman's large following in the "inner cities". After the game, Ainge asked Rodman himself about the font size; without batting an eye-lid, the red-head replied, "Yes, Danny, I did it for you."

To get back to the cricket. Fourteen balls after the demolition of Warne, the captain, appropriately enough, nudged a delivery to third man and the game was over. Whereupon, wrote Asiaweek, "fans in Sri Lanka abandoned their TV sets and poured into the streets to celebrate". In Lahore, de Silva, who ended with 107 masterfully stroked runs, the first century in a final since 1979, was asked about his performance. Given his knock and the victory, he could take the risk of speaking, of defying his contract; the deeds of "the boys," he said, referring to the lesser-known players, had brought the team to the final; on this, the most important occasion, the "senior players" (men?) — the skipper and the deputy — had to and "did their duty". Even triumph could not erase distinctions between the players; relations of power couldn't but surface. The victory may have belonged to the team, but not all performances contributed equally to it.

Not surprisingly, the ultimate leader of the team/nation also staked a claim to the deed. President Kumaratunga declared (in a by now predictable statement): "We have shown that even a small nation can achieve great heights." The dialectic, again — "we have shown" — team and nation are one. But we can see now that this is nationalism at work, that there isn't an inherent dialectic between the two. That the answer to the pivotal question is: cricket is cathected because it is there. Sociological factors do contribute to it being a suitable object, to cricket being a very popular sport in the country; but, while there is no doubt something in cricket which makes it so popular, there is nothing inherent in it to make it especially attractive to nationalism. Nationalism appropriates and engulfs cricket because it uses every opportunity to further enhance its reach; because it seeks to impose everything possible with its own meaning; because it must be omnipresent; because, otherwise, it cannot be.

A few days after the great victory, the question of power surfaced in an entirely different sense. The Sri Lankan Electricity Board announced country-wide power cuts. 'Twas the vernal equinox. The little island, which generated most of its electricity through hydropower, had been experiencing a drought for months; the water level in its reservoirs was drastically low — a condition worsened by the consumption of an unprecedented quantum of electricity

during the previous two weeks, culminating on the 17th of March. The country's power-lines, like its tanks, were almost dry. The Electricity Board had wanted the cuts earlier, but, the president considered it impolitic to authorize blackouts during the World Cup: yet another instance of nationalism over-riding the country's priorities. So, the reservoirs were allowed to lose more water than advisable. And the monsoon, as implied before, was at the tail end of the batting order.

This paper could not have been written without the generosity of Rob Nixon and a conversation I had in Chicago, two days before the World Cup final, with Mala de Alwis, Pradeep Jeganathan, Kanchana Ruwanpura and David Scott. Pradeep kept insisting that night, though we did not follow, that it must be possible to cheer the Sri Lankan team without being complicitous with or implicated by Sri Lankan nationalism. I seek here to continue that conversation. Other conversations, comments, criticisms, also contributed considerably to the making of this paper: my heartfelt thanks to Tony Anghie, Sanjay Krishnan, Fenella Macfarlane, Toby Miller, Sonali Perera, Bruce Robbins, Radhika Subramaniam, Milind Wakankar and Tim Watson.

I would like to dedicate this article to Richard de Zoysa, with whom I have talked cricket at a match or two. He would have found much to smile about while reading it — if he was around to do so.

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Hindu. Madras, 19th March 1996.

End Notes

1. Ashis Nandy, alone, resists this reading and rails against the appropriation of cricket by the nationalist masses. I cannot be sympathetic to such a position because Nandy resists from a peculiarly elitist, anti-modern "Indian" space he finds analogous to the "authentic," original, leisurely/timeless (anti-)Victorian spirit of cricket which, he says — drawing upon, but not altogether acknowledging, James — was also anti-modern and anti-industrial. Upon inspection, this Indian space turns out to be Hindu (and Brahmin). Consequently, Nandy reads the Pakistani superstar, Imran Khan, as a "lapsed" Indian (47); blithely dismissing, in a single stroke, the history of (H)Indian nationalism that produced partition and Pakistan. My desire to respond vehemently at this point is tempered only by the possibility that Nandy's text is an elaborate joke. (Yes, Alan Sokal haunts this article.) For, apart from the ironic tone in which his judgements are delivered, Nandy consistently flouts the protocols of conventional argumentation (though he could be employing an indigenous Indian logic which I, being Sri Lankan, have no access to): he flitters often from point to point without any effort to connect them; and, oftener, makes grand assertions without backing them up with anything remotely resembling evidence. For instance: "Indians, Pakistanis and Sri Lankans, who have a greater cultural respect for fate, have also... shown a greater tolerance for draws" (21). Nandy's text, in other words, demand assent, not engagement. Thus I cannot converse with it.

2. This argument is expanded upon in the Introduction to Jeganathan and Ismail. Similar arguments with respect to contemporary India, which the Hindutva movement seeks to hegemonize are plentiful; Nivedita Menon puts it admirably: "terms such as.... 'nation' no longer offer themselves to us in a form we recognize" (67).

3. This point owes much to Judith Butler's remarkable — and by now deservedly part of our received wisdom — reading of gender as a performative, not a constitutive category; as "not always [being] constituted coherently or consistently in different historical contexts" (3); and as not being determined by "sex" — It follows, therefore, that there cannot be just two genders.

4. Such a masculinity is paralleled in and heightened by corresponding changes in apparel. In test matches, players on both sides dress in white — as they have done for decades. In one-dayers, including the world championship, players wear distinctive colored uniforms, which further emphasizes the differences between them and intensifies the competitive aspect of this version.

5. The above is drawn from an argument expanded upon in my 'Nation, Country, Community'. There, I advance a reading of nationalism as both ideology and political process, and interrogate the idea/I of community — "nation" — promised by nationalism to its subjects ("nationals"). I also argue that, as ideology and political practice, the principal project of nationalism, the task that it sets for itself, is nothing more -or less — than conserving the nation. Thus nationalism seizes upon cricket, as it does other appropriate phenomena, to advance this endeavor.

6. Partha Chatterjee has convincingly argued that Anderson "seals up his theme with a sociological determinism" (21); that he does not convincingly demonstrate, *theoretically*, the nation to be a construct; that he doesn't interrogate the status of the real in his text. Chatterjee's brilliant *Nationalist Thought* (1986) is an extended critique of *Imagined Communities*; however, I am yet to see a reference to NT in a discussion of IC.

7. Anderson digs his own grave, as it were, because he explicitly refuses to see nationalism as ideology; it is, to him, an anthropological phenomenon.

8. For specific illustrations of this, see Chatterjee's chapter on Gandhi, and Guha (1992). For an excellent (ethnographic) illustration, in relation to Sinhala nationalism, see Pradeep Jeganathan; his essay minutely delineates a moment of such hegemony, enables one to understand that subaltern admission into the nation, or subject-position 'national,' is always conditional, conjunctural, impermanent and to be negotiated — on bourgeois terms.

9. Anderson, interestingly enough, represents his position as a supplement to Marxism. Which is perhaps why his text contains just one reference to Marx: "nationalism has proved an uncomfortable **anomaly** for Marxist theory and, precisely for that reason, has been largely elided... How else to explain Marx's failure to explicate the crucial adjective...: 'The proletariat of each country must, of course, first of all settle matters with **its own** bourgeoisie'" (4). This is an astoundingly arrogant and ignorant formulation. The only evidence Anderson marshalls to damn all of Marxism is a single passage from *The Communist Manifesto* — a call to action, not a theoretical work. In any event, Marx in that passage speaks of the proletariat having a "country," not a "nation" — two terms he uses quite distinctly.

10. A similar lack is to be noticed, of course, in *Subaltern Studies* as well; as a collective project, it has not adequately addressed the question of the Muslim ("minority"), or gender. What it has demonstrated — what makes the comparison with Luxemburg apt — is the nation as idea/I of community to be theoretically untenable. Unlike the position enunciated by Lenin and accepted as an article of faith by a certain tendency within contemporary Indian Marxism, *Subaltern Studies* has demonstrated, as did Luxemburg before, that it is theoretically unacceptable to take the position that each and every Nationalism must be judged individually, with a view to measuring their "reactionary" or "progressive" content. The latter, incidentally, requires a merely empiricist response to nationalisms; it denies the possibility of a generalised understanding of nationalism, situating the phenomenon not in, but outside, theory.

11. One would today, following Althusser, prefer the term contradiction.

12. Nevertheless, as Rob Nixon has pointed out, the ideology of the team is of crucial service to nationalism, which uses it to "stage the suppression of self-interest for the collective good", (135). Nixon also argues that the profoundly masculinist thrust of the nationalist project is to be noticed in the fact that only male teams are so deployed. In other words, while the figure of woman is often invoked to represent the nation metaphorically - motherland, 11 "Singapore girl" and so on — *women* will not be allowed to represent the nation.

13. For more on the general relation of women to nation, see Floya Anthias and Nira Yuval-Davis; for an account of the Sri Lankan Tamil instance, see Maunaguru.

14. As Janaka Biyanwila reminds us, "Professional cricket is about a money economy where financially the players are remunerated for their labor... [and devote] their lives to it because it's their livelihood", (22). This is something often forgotten in the nationalist rush to deprive the game of any profane meaning.

15. It follows, therefore, that when Appadurai calls "cricket matches between India and Pakistan... thinly disguised national wars" (43), this begs the question of how the Indian nation is cathected at these moments. It assumes that, during these games, all Indian citizens are Indian nationals. However, the relation of Indian Muslims to Indian (and Pakistani) nationalisms at such moments — in other words, whether they have been successfully hegemonized, and whether hegemony is a permanent "victory" -cannot be deemed transparent, but requires investigation.

16. The JVP rebellion was confined to southern, Sinhala dominated parts of the country, and crushed ruthlessly; see, for instance, Kumari Jayawardena. Tamil militancy in Sri Lanka has a different history.

17. Althusser states: "Experience (!) shows that the practical telecommunication of hailings is such that they hardly ever miss their man. . . ." (174). In other words, sometimes hailing does not work; but Althusser does not explore the full implications of this. It is "misrecognition," hailing the wrong person, that concerns him, not the consequences of the right person refusing to make that

physical conversion. This lack is symptomatic: to explore the consequences of the failure of interpellation would be to incorporate an explanation of change into a theory, structuralist Marxism, notoriously resistant to explaining change.

18. However, it is written without a theory of pleasure, which must be incorporated into a fuller version of this argument; as must Appadurai's suggestion that the spectator's pleasure is brought about by agency in nationalism.

19. One could contend that, in cheering the Sri Lankan team, I too was being nationalist — if not in the same way as those who sang the anthem. The argument here is that one is always within nationalism. This paper, however, is also written against such intellectual and political pessimism. The more important point to note in this connection is that, whereas the nationalist would support the team no matter what, the kind of spectator I have constructed here wouldn't — if, for instance, the selection of the team was "ethnically" discriminatory.

20. As said earlier, structuralist Marxism allows for 'but doesn't explain, this possibility — thus leaving my assertion above open to the charge of voluntarism. I offer, as a somewhat shaky alibi, Madhava Prasad's reading of two categories of Raymond Williams and Edward Said (in the course of that excellent exegesis of Fredric Jameson and Aijaz Ahmad): "To be part of an existing constituency, whether it is race, nation, gender or a left formation, is not to be *committed* at all but affiliated. On the other hand, any of these [Saidian] affiliations, when historicized and retheorized, would give us, in Williams' sense, the basis for a commitment. The difference lies in the historicizing break that the intellectual has to make with natural affiliations,' (76, emphasis added). The break isn't just different; it is difficult to move from a naturalized affiliation to a commitment; especially at a moment when, like the current Sri Lankan, the emancipatory project offered (though not exhausted) by organized Marxism has, quite literally, been killed by organized (Sinhala and Tamil) nationalism (the JVP and LTTE, respectively). My spectator, then, can also be read as a lament for this lack: a lack, of course, that cannot be amended just by watching cricket.

21. This is not a silly point: against the Kenyan team, these batsmen left no swash unbuckled, scoring a one-day record 397 runs.