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**SAFE ENACTMENTS OF DIFFERENCE:
AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF CRICKET AND
SOCIAL CHANGE IN POST-WAR SRI LANKA**



Benjamin Marcus Hildred

A Thesis Submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Anthropology

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2022



Abstract

Safe Enactments of Difference: An Ethnographic Study of Cricket and Social Change in Post-War Sri Lanka

In the aftermath of Sri Lanka's civil war (1983-2009), claims have been made that cricket can help with ongoing processes of reconciliation. In this thesis, I critically assess these claims through an ethnographic study of Sri Lankan cricket, detailing the potential and limits of the social relations that sport can produce. In doing so, I explore whether and how sport can indeed play a reconciliatory role in post-conflict states. Predominantly based in Colombo, my ethnographic research covers a diverse cross-section of the Sri Lankan 'cricket community', homing in on one amateur cricket club. By considering a wide range of cricketing activity, including playing, spectating, coaching, and development, I convey how my interlocutors come to understand themselves and others through cricket. I show how people deploy and negotiate social ideals derived from cricket, mapping out the various tensions that emerge when individual and collective interests come into conflict. I argue that in managing these tensions, my interlocutors learn also to manage differences between persons. As such, I argue that cricket involves engagement in '*safe enactments of difference*'. I suggest this is evidence that cricket has some merit as a tool for social good. However, I also contend that cricket promotes personal responsibility to the wider whole, placing excessive emphasis on individual change. Through cricket people are taught *control*, learning how to manage their circumstances. So, while cricket helps individuals make change in their own lives, it rarely leads them to question the social system they exist within. As such, I conclude that cricket seems unlikely to effect social change at a systemic, structural level, and the prospect of using cricket for reconciliation is limited. In this ethnographic study I therefore reflect on the wider issues around attempting to use sports in the hope of enacting positive social change.

Keywords: cricket, reconciliation, social change, Sport for Development and Peace (SDP), sport.

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All photos by the author unless otherwise stated in text.

List of Acronyms

CCC	Colombo Cricket Club
CSR	Corporate Social Responsibility
FoG	Foundation of Goodness
ICC	International Cricket Council (cricket's international governing body)
LLRC	Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission (Sri Lankan TRC set up in 2011)
LTTE	Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam
NCC	Nondescripts Cricket Club
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODI	One Day International (A 'short form' of cricket)
OTSC	Old Thomians' Swimming Club
SCRM	Secretariat for Coordinating Reconciliation Mechanisms
SLU	Sri Lanka Unites
SfD	Sport for Development
SDP	Sport for Development and Peace
SLC	Sri Lanka Cricket (The national cricket board)
SSC	Sinhala Sports Club
TCC	Titans Cricket Club
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
UN	United Nations

Statement of Copyright:

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A note on quotations:

For the avoidance of doubt, phrases given in single inverted commas ('control') are quotations from written works or are concepts. Phrases in speech marks ("it comes down to control") are directly reported quotations from interlocutors in the field.

A note on 'batters' and 'batsmen':

While it is now commonly accepted in the game that all men and women who bat are referred to as 'batters', in this thesis I retain the names of 'batsman/batsmen'. As my fieldwork took place before this change and as my interlocutors often referred to batters as 'batsman/batsmen', I do this for consistency between direct quotations and my own words.

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In memory of Jeremy Bolling, who possessed the warmest welcome in Sri Lanka.

1962 - 2019

Epigraph

“I cannot be the first to wonder if what we see, when we see men in white take to a cricket field, is men imagining an environment of justice.”

Joseph O'Neill. *Netherland*.

SECTION I
SETTING THE SCENE

INTRODUCTION

A CLAIM FOR CRICKET

In 2011, at the Marylebone Cricket Club's annual dinner in London, the famous Sri Lankan cricketer Kumar Sangakkara gave that year's 'Spirit of Cricket' lecture.¹ Previously, former international players had discussed various issues in the game surrounding fairness and sportsmanship, including neutral umpires, the benefits of certain rules, or the use of technology in decision-making. Speaking two years after the end of civil war in Sri Lanka, Sangakkara used it as a platform to proclaim the merits of cricket for reconciliation in his country. Detailing the history of the game in Sri Lanka and depicting his own experiences during the civil war, Sangakkara spoke passionately about the capacity of cricket to unite. He concluded by claiming that 'the conduct and performance of the [national cricket] team will have even greater importance as we enter a crucial period of reconciliation and recovery', further noting that 'the spirit of cricket can and should remain a guiding force for good within society' (Sangakkara 2011).



Figure 1. Sangakkara in 2011. Photo: islandcricket.lk

Sangakkara received a standing ovation for his lecture. It was widely praised by the cricket community across the globe, deemed evidence of Sangakkara's qualities as a 'gentleman', as

¹ The MCC Spirit of Cricket lecture is held in the memory of former England captain Colin Cowdrey, who is noted for initiating the 'Spirit of Cricket'.

an ambassador for the game and for Sri Lanka. It received an even warmer reception back home, where it has had great impact on cricket during the post-war period. The game and the moral values it is supposed to promote have often been associated with reconciliation by various public figures in Sri Lanka. Numerous international cricketers, politicians, and local NGOs have all made claims about the power of cricket for reconciliation, with some actively trying to ‘use’ the game as a reconciliatory tool. From 2012 to 2016 local NGO the ‘Foundation of Goodness’ held a cricket tournament in the war-affected north called the ‘Murali Harmony Cup’, with the aim to foster relations between young men of different ethnic groups.² Elsewhere, the rhetoric of reconciliation and unity has become prominent in mainstream and professional cricket. In 2016 the national team’s official slogan became ‘One Team, One Nation’, and this remains a central part of their branding to this day (SLC 2016a). Similar rhetoric has been employed by the Sri Lankan Cricket Board’s charity arm ‘Cricket Aid’, who stated that in Sri Lanka, ‘cricket is the one unifying force that transcends all boundaries of race, religion, cast [sic] or creed, in an extremely diverse culture’ (SLC 2016b/38). In Sri Lanka, it is taken for granted that cricket can be used for social good.



Figure 2. The Sri Lankan National Cricket Team in 2017. Photo: Sri Lanka Cricket Facebook

² This is named after famous Sri Lankan cricketer Muttiah Muralitharan, who is a Tamil.

The situation is naturally far more complicated than these claims for cricket convey. Reconciliation in Sri Lanka is a complex issue, while there is limited evidence that cricket could beneficially affect it. That an association has been made in the first place raises other important questions regarding the nature of Sri Lankan society. In this thesis, I explore these claims through an ethnographic study of cricket in Sri Lanka. For two years, I undertook fieldwork in Colombo to understand the nature of these claims and their purchase in everyday life. I examined a cross-section of the Sri Lankan ‘cricket community’, covering a broad range of cricketing activity including playing, spectating, coaching, and development. Yet predominantly, I spent time with a single amateur cricket team who formed the core of my research. At Titans Cricket Club, a multi-ethnic group based in a Colombo suburb, I came to understand how people get along with others through cricket in Sri Lanka. Within this broader context of cricket for reconciliation, I detail the potential and limits of the social relations that cricket can produce. In doing so, I assess how and if sport can indeed play a role in post-conflict states.

A Story About Change

In this thesis I relate a story about a group of people who believe that cricket is a force for good in the world. Rightly or wrongly, my interlocutors believe in the power of sport to act as a vehicle for effective social change. On previous trips to Sri Lanka people told me that cricket had taught them life lessons, that it made them better people. During fieldwork, I noticed this widespread pre-occupation with change even more. I became interested in how people thought about change, what kinds of change were deemed possible, and how people tried to enact this change. This change takes many forms, whether at the local or national scale, or at the level of the individual. Fundamental to this idea of change is a belief that a common understanding forged through sport can break down the barriers that have caused distrust, prejudice, and most of all, war. In the aftermath of 26 years of ethnic and religiously motivated conflict, there is a surprising amount of hope poured into a game brought to the island by its former colonisers. In Sri Lanka, cricket is a game that is universally loved. The story I tell is about a group of people who put faith in this social enterprise.

However, in studying cricket at the level of day-to-day practice I found the rhetoric of cricket often falls short of its claims. Like other sports, cricket is often seen as pure and ‘outside’ society.

Yet cricket is a social phenomenon like any other, open to the same forms of manipulation. The idea that cricket can simply ‘do’ reconciliation is clearly flawed and should not be taken for granted. Despite the critique I offer here, this is a story about how positive effects occur through cricket regardless. It is simply that these effects are not quite those being claimed. Rather than fostering some form of simplistic unity among participants, in my experience cricket offered people an opportunity to learn far more nuanced lessons. My time in the field revealed many small acts in which people negotiated inter-personal relations and anticipated potential conflict. These negotiations are crucial in understanding the social potential of cricket in a complex pluralistic setting, such as exists in post-war Sri Lanka. In telling this story about a hope for change, I offer suggestions about making change happen quicker and more effectively in the future.



Figure 3. We huddle before our first warm up match of the season.

Layout of the Thesis

This thesis comprises five sections, each made up of two or more chapters (I-V). In Section I, I outline this study in more detail. In Chapter 1, I provide context that explains why claims have been made about cricket and reconciliation. I cover anthropological theory which reflect on the merit of these claims, and sharpen the questions I explore in the ethnography. Then in Chapter 2 I depict my field-site, Colombo, describe a history of cricket on the island, before detailing my method.

Sections II, III, and IV comprise my ethnographic findings, where I describe and explain various cricketing contexts. In Section II, I lay out the nature of different cricketing spaces and what is understood to happen there. In Chapter 3 I introduce Titans Cricket Club, and explore my interlocutors' desires to be *tested*. In Chapter 4 I assess the various cricketing spaces that exist across Sri Lanka, before looking at the management of these spaces in Chapter 5. In Section II I make the broader argument that the Sri Lankan cricket ground is understood as an arena of experimentation with social values, a space for *safe enactments of difference*. How these enactments function has ramifications for the kinds of change that cricket could induce in Sri Lanka.

In Section III, I deal with the more fundamental social ideas that are negotiated during cricket. In Chapter 6 I examine ideas about 'The Team' and their contradictions, before looking at local concepts of talent and how this meshes with the notion of *role* in Chapter 7. Altogether I portray the tensions that exist between individual and group, which I argue shows that cricketers experiment with very fundamental social ideas. The pre-occupation with talent and the concept of *role* reveals a modernist set of ontological assumptions about how individuals and collectives relate to one another. This suggests that my interlocutors comply with certain constraints while participating in cricket.

In Section IV, I describe ideas of change specifically, and how people attempt to deal with these constraints. I explore the ways players attempt to negotiate their constraints by rhetorically deploying cricketing discourses in Chapter 8, to cement their social position or establish a sense of self. In Chapter 9 I show how individuals more often deal with constraint by focusing on themselves, mobilising cricketing discourses to find *control*. In Chapter 10 I

examine the life lessons people derive from cricket, and how they take this sense of *control* out of the arena and into their own lives. In all three chapters, I show how cricket advocates a strong sense of individual responsibility. Finally in Chapter 11, I illustrate the consequences of this focus on individual responsibility for enacting change more broadly. I suggest that if change is conceived of as mostly individual driven, then practitioners take a particularly formulaic approach to change which focuses on expanding participation, which means that implementation of SDP programmes in Sri Lanka is usually poor.

In Section V I offer a discussion of this ethnographic work, using theory that can make sense of these various topics and ideas. In Chapter 12 I provide a final example that brings all the themes of this work together, before drawing back out to a theoretical discussion in Chapter 13. My ethnography suggests cricket is certainly not a panacea for reconciliation in Sri Lanka, and more broadly suggest that sports facilitate social regulation more than social change. If one wishes to better mobilise sport for development and peace purposes, then one needs to change sport itself. Finally, I conclude by drawing out the implications of this for future assessment of Sport and SDP, and offer some thoughts on using cricket as an intervention for social change.

CHAPTER 1

CRICKET AND RECONCILIATION: THE CLAIMS

In this chapter I delimit the scope of my study. I provide background that frames these claims about cricket and reconciliation, context which explains why these specific claims have been made. I also introduce anthropological theory that can comment on the merit of these claims, but more importantly indicate how to make sense of them ethnographically.

Firstly, it is important to state that since the end of the civil war in 2009, Sri Lanka has remained in a difficult period of post-conflict recovery, experiencing bouts of political instability and sometimes violence. The 26-year long civil war (1983-2009) was a brutal conflict, which only exacerbated numerous pre-existing rifts across the country. Sri Lanka is an ethnically and religiously complex island, comprised of a number of different ethnic and religious groups, which morphed and became more distinct during the colonial period (Wickramasinghe 2014). These distinctions are further complicated as ethnic and religious demographics are slightly different.³ So while the war has often been framed as a secessionist dispute between a Tamil minority and a Sinhalese majority, this elides the involvement of other groups in the war like the Moors and the Christians. The rise of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism during the twentieth century has continued to problematise the integration of minority ethnic and religious identities into the present day (Spencer 1990a, Spencer et al. 2015). Sri Lanka's diversity poses problems for national identity that precede the war, and suggest that any forms of reconciliation will be more complex than simply 're-uniting' two opposing sides. Within this context, cricket has been associated with reconciliation for three main reasons: the popularity of cricket in Sri Lanka; broader discussions regarding reconciliation and national identity; and the wider Sport for Development and Peace (SDP) movement.

³ Ethnically, Sri Lanka is majority Sinhalese (75%), with distinct Sri Lankan Tamil (11%), 'Moor' (Tamil Muslims) (9%), and Indian Tamil (4%) minorities (Census 2012). Religious breakdown is as follows: Buddhism (70%), Hinduism (12.5%), Islam (9.5%), Christianity (7.5%). (Census 2012). See Wickramasinghe 2014 for a fuller explanation of how these categories developed and hardened during the British colonial period. Spencer et. al 2015 is particularly informative about the ramifications of this complexity in the present.

Cricket has been Sri Lanka's most popular sport for decades. Importantly, it is a pan-Sri Lankan activity, engaged in across the various ethnic, religious and caste groups in the country, and is something of a common denominator on the island (Roberts 2005). Although it was a game played by the cultural elites for most of the twentieth century, cricket gained mass appeal when Sri Lanka won the ODI World Cup in 1996. This was a moment of immense national pride as Sri Lanka rarely competes on the global stage, and offered an opportunity to conceive of Sri Lanka as a unified nation. Indeed, there is a style of play identified as 'Sri Lankan': aggressive, free flowing, but primarily fun and happy-go-lucky (Sangakkara 2011, Fernando 2015). This widespread participation across Sri Lanka underpins an assumption held by many that cricket must be in some way unifying. Indeed, it is often given as an exemplar of ethnic and religious inclusion, as players from minority backgrounds including Tamil, Burgher and Moor have all played for the national team (Roberts 2011). Of these players, Muttiah Muralitharan is perhaps the most celebrated. Muralitharan is not only arguably Sri Lanka's best player, he is also a Tamil,⁴ and therefore many Sri Lankans see him as an icon of cricket's power for unity. Since the civil war ended, the prominence of this inclusive rhetoric has only become stronger, with cricket increasingly associated with national unity. Cricket is presented as a potential antidote to the issues of Sri Lankan diversity.

'Reconciliation' and particularly 'National Reconciliation' is a concept that has gained traction in recent decades, having come to describe a particular sense of redress in light of a violent past (Wilson 2003, Eltringham 2009, Mookherjee 2022). This particular sense has been established by supranational organisations like the United Nations in the 20th Century (2004), and often involves the establishment of accountability (Wilson 2003), the making of an apology (Mookherjee et al. 2009), and the exhibition of ideals of regret and remorse (Mookherjee 2022). In practice, reconciliation is a broad spectrum of activities that can be roughly separated into 'hard' activities that involve legalistic frameworks and address relations to the state, and 'soft' activities that focus on establishing a sense of unity and goodwill between previously hostile groups (Thiranagama 2013). Literature on reconciliation in Sri Lanka suggests that an acceptance of identities and accommodation of diverse localities will be key for progress

⁴ Muralitharan is an 'Indian Tamil', a descendent of migrants brought over by the British to work in the tea plantations. Sri Lanka has not included a 'Sri Lankan Tamil' from the north in a cricket squad since 1969 (See Roberts 2005:135).

(Thiranagama 2011, Spencer et al. 2015).⁵ This will involve a process of negotiating what such groups mean in the post-war period. Thiranagama suggests that at an individual level, the civil war created new modes of knowing the self that now have to be ‘negotiated anew’ (Thiranagama 2011:12). I contend that this same re-negotiation must take place at larger scales too, including the meaning of categories like ethnicities and the state.

One way of doing this at the state level is to ‘develop a Sri Lankan identity’, as the ‘Lessons Learnt and Reconciliation Commission’ (LLRC) suggested in 2011 (Thiranagama 2013:98). This government established commission advocated forging a new, cohesive identity beyond ethnic and religious politics (*ibid*). This negotiation of Sri Lankan identity is not new however, as the ‘national question’ is a far older concern which well precedes the war. Following 400 years of colonial rule, political instability post-independence, and a civil war, Sri Lanka has struggled to forge any kind of unified national identity (Thiranagama 2011). As Thiranagama puts it, Sri Lanka is in many ways a ‘nation that has never been one’ (2011:256). Recent history in Sri Lanka suggests that debates about the ‘national question’ have progressed little. The ‘constitutional crisis’ of October 2018, the Easter Sunday terrorist attacks in April 2019, and the ten-year anniversary of the war in May 2019 all caused tensions between different groups in Sri Lanka. The quick succession of these events spurred several local commentators to proclaim the ‘national question’ had to finally be resolved (See Ananda & Jegathesan 2019, Kadirgamar 2019).

Minorities and ‘The National Question’

As Titans Cricket Club were a predominantly Muslim team, the rise of anti-Muslim sentiment since the end of the civil war became central to my research. Detailing the tensions this particular minority faced after the Easter Sunday attacks illustrates intricacies of the national question and how it is perceived. The Islamic community is a prominent ethnic minority that amounts to 10% of Sri Lanka’s population (Sri Lanka Census 2012).⁶ Although mostly ‘Sri Lankan Moors’ – Tamils descended from Arab traders – the community contains other smaller

⁵ As Thiranagama and Spencer et al. use it, ‘localities’ refers to a greater sense of place that incorporates history, future aspirations and power dynamics. See Thiranagama 2011:89.

⁶ Central Colombo holds a greater proportion. About a third of the city’s total population follows Islam (*ibid*).

groups, including Memons, Bohra, Mowlani and Malay.⁷ As a whole, Muslims have regularly been the target of majoritarian Sinhala Buddhist Nationalism (Holt 2016, Bastin & de Silva 2020). However, recent times have seen a marked increase in explicitly anti-Muslim rhetoric and action, including riots in Aluthgama in 2014, and Digana and Ampara in 2018 (BBC 2014, BBC 2018). The Easter Sunday terrorist attacks in 2019 further accelerated this anti-Muslim sentiment. As the series of bombings was orchestrated by ISIS, retributive action against the Islamic community was seen across the country, with targeted attacks by rioters on people and property (Safi 2019, Srinivasan 2019).⁸

Numerous opinion pieces were published in the immediate aftermath of these anti-Muslim riots. Most commentators simply decried this targeted violence and voiced their concern at this upsurge in anti-Islamic rhetoric since the end of the war (Amarasingam & Fuller 2019, Gunasekara 2019). Several alluded to the discrimination against minorities more generally, echoing academic literature that states Sri Lankan nationalism often privileges the majority Sinhalese and presents minorities as an external threat (Spencer 2007, Holt 2016). Sinhalese nationalists frame their nationality with reference to the Sri Lankan soil itself, and therefore see Muslims as intruders (Bastin & de Silva 2020). Similarly, Widger details how successive post-war regimes in Sri Lanka have progressively ‘islanded’ the country, creating a body politic which imagines a whole, pure Sri Lanka (Widger *Forthcoming*). Consequently, these regimes mobilise a rhetoric of sickness to galvanise Sinhalese nationalists towards the country’s defence (*ibid*). Following Easter Sunday, Senaratne claimed that Sri Lanka must ‘critically confront all ideas and teachings which seek to promote theories of purity’ (2019), whereas Kabir suggests the focus on the ‘other’ breeds prejudice and limits discussions about pluralistic national identity (Kabir 2019). Gunasekera pithily noted that during the civil war ceasefire in 2004, Christians were the target of Sinhala nationalist discrimination, only for this target to fall back on the Tamils once war resumed in 2006 (Gunasekara 2019). In this light, recent anti-Muslim action can be seen as an ‘ideal type’ of ethnic violence, mobilising a discourse of anti-minority sentiment. Many commentators recognised that the ‘new enemy’ has become the Islamic community.

⁷ While being integrated into Islamic communities more widely, Malays are categorised as a separate group with a specific culture.

⁸ ISIS targeted churches across the island along with several high-profile hotels in Colombo.

Only a few commentators noted that Muslims were hardly a ‘new’ target. Yehiya notes that anti-Muslim actions had taken place throughout the twentieth century, including riots as far back as 1915 (2019). Wettimuny meanwhile describes the 1915 violence as a pogrom, and suggests that a similar set of resentments about economic and cultural position fuelled violence in both 1915 and 2019 (2019). She therefore suggests those hoping to reconcile at present should look further than ‘surface level symptoms’ (*ibid*). Situating the recent racially motivated violence within this broader timeline highlights that anti-Muslim violence has been a problem in Sri Lanka for much longer than is usually depicted. This further reflects that the national question has been an issue in Sri Lanka for decades, even centuries, and will require careful negotiation into the future. Occurring only a month after Easter Sunday, the 10th year anniversary of the civil war fuelled further reflection on the national question. Many suggested that the recent violence only highlighted deep-rooted problems and proved how far Sri Lanka had to go. Amarasingam & Fuller advocated ‘working across communities’ to better understand ethnic tensions (2019), while Thiranagama asserted that ‘the Easter Sunday bombings are an attack on Sri Lankans as a whole — on our possibilities of plurality’ (2019). It is clear from these recent events and the responses of various commentators that issues of reconciliation are understood to be nuanced and complex, and that answering the ‘national question’ is a long-standing issue that needs resolving.

One Team, One Nation?

Despite the increasing awareness of these complexities and their pitfalls, many efforts in the post-war period went into fostering the idea of a Sri Lankan whole. In the same year that the LLRC highlighted the need to ‘develop a Sri Lankan identity’ (Thiranagama 2013:98), Sangakkara suggested that this identity could be expressed in the cricket arena during his Cowdrey lecture. The subsequent establishment of the ‘One Team, One Nation’ branding by the Sri Lankan cricket board (SLC) in 2016 shows that they assimilated Sangakkara’s claims. As a political body with widespread influence, the SLC in effect also legitimised these claims. The link between the LLRC and cricket makes further sense when one considers that reconciliation commissions often become part of a ‘nation-building project’ (Wilson 2003), while in a similar vein ‘sport as spectacle is a means through which the state displays its legitimacy’ (Besnier and Brownell 2012:452). Both the LLRC and cricket are heavily implicated in performances of the nation, just like art, literature or cultural property

(Mookherjee 2011). Yet unlike the LLRC, cricket *is* participated in by all groups in Sri Lanka, and therefore appears an obvious, logical place to build this new unified state. If answering the national question requires merely forging a new ‘Sri Lankan identity’, then claims have been made about cricket because it is an enticing, apparently safe solution to this problem.

However, literature suggests that state building projects which attempt unity in similarly diverse contexts are often problematic. Furthermore, the treatment of minorities I outlined above suggests that the national question is far more complex than this apparent solution. By being involved in a ‘nation-building project’, reconciliation commissions can cause harms by legitimising and benefitting one group at the expense of others (Wilson 2003, Eltringham 2009). Similarly, the LLRC was widely criticised for being biased in the government’s favour (Thiranagama 2013). Thus, the commission’s recommendation to ‘develop a Sri Lankan identity’ (*ibid*:98) may be merely a particular form of majoritarian – Sinhala Buddhist – nationalism.⁹ Traces of this majoritarian nationalism can be seen in cricket, when looking at three aspects of the ‘One Team, One Nation’ branding. Firstly, the national team often undergoes overtly Buddhist rituals, like the *Pirith* ceremonies before departing for foreign tours (Dias 2016). Some minority cricketers, including former captain Angelo Mathews (a Tamil/Burgher catholic), have been admonished in popular and social media for not complying with such rituals appropriately (Hildred 2017). Secondly, other minority players, especially more successful ones like Muralitharan, are widely celebrated, but have in the process been ‘co-opted into the defence’ of the Sri Lankan state, paraded as evidence of ‘Sinhalese benevolence’ (Fernando 2020).¹⁰ Thirdly, the packaging of the Sri Lankan national team as ‘One Team, One Nation’ is only unifying if one has the means to buy into it. It reinforces a particularly inclusive view about unity while doing little to change things for individuals who suffer discrimination. If one feels the team doesn’t represent them already, this rhetoric is unlikely to change their opinion. So, although cricket presents a unified ‘Sri Lanka’ by virtue of representing the entire island, this feeling quickly breaks down once cricket is over.

⁹ While several commitments have been made to hold a more rigorous and balanced Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the interim (Reuters 2015, Salter 2019), this TRC has not yet materialised, adding further fuel to this perspective. Although an Office for Missing Persons *has* been established since 2016, this currently operates on a limited remit.

¹⁰ Making matters more difficult, some of Muralitharan’s comments on the war have been unpalatable for some Tamils in the north (*ibid*).

The ‘One Team, One Nation’ branding appears as an overly simplistic approach to the national question that relies on a basic sense of cricket’s unifying capacity. It also clearly promotes the interests of the dominant group above others. As cricket has been part of the political realm for some time (Roberts 2005), and due to the dominance of Sinhala Buddhist nationalism in politics (Spencer 1990, 2007), making claims about cricket and reconciliation can be seen as a politically motivated move in a tense post-war period. ‘One Team, One Nation’ is simply a neat, easy way for the now dominantly Sinhala Buddhist SLC to package unity for wider consumption. The idea of fostering a ‘Sri Lankan identity’ through cricket is problematic when one considers that cricket may simply play out an apparently pan-ethnic, yet overtly Sinhala Buddhist identity. This shows how problematic the claims for cricket can be, as through promoting inclusivity, this branding works towards an elision of difference.

Diversity and Reconciliation

This context demonstrates that addressing the national question will be more complicated than simply establishing unity through a form of ‘Sri Lankan Identity’. Indeed, the literature indicates different kinds of reconciliation are desired within and across various groups, indicating a diversity of what ‘reconciliation’ can mean in Sri Lanka. For example, northern Tamils may desire information about missing kin and reparations following the war, whereas Tamil Muslims may simply want to return to their homes and co-exist again with their neighbours (Thiranagama 2013). Hayner’s assertion is that reconciliation requires a reconciling of the past, achievable only through ‘official recognition’ by the state (Hayner 2011:189), and this suggests the state will play an integral role in any reconciliation processes in Sri Lanka. The majority of Tamils and Muslims who spoke to the LLRC did not want improved inter-ethnic relations per se, but desired greater accountability from the state, suggesting that the negotiation of relationship with the state was of greater importance for those most affected by war (Thiranagama 2013). Clearly in any particular context, there are always several concepts of reconciliation at play.

The ideas that contribute to these varied understandings of reconciliation come from an equally diverse set of influences. As Scheid argues, the ethics of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRC) are always contextual and culturally specific, underpinned by local concepts of personhood and morality, ‘born in communities working to address specific

problems' (Scheid 2012:46). Similarly, Scheper-Hughes notes that the South African TRC was shaped by local concepts of 'popular justice' prevalent at the time (1998:135). Conversely, the notion of global human rights is often implicated in the local work of TRCs (Wilson 2003) and certainly becomes part of the agenda in SDP contexts (Coalter 2010). Altogether, Thiranagama notes that 'everyday relations cannot be successfully divorced from the larger orders that contour and shape them' (2013:110), echoing that the concepts of the state, of the home, of the community, inflect notions of what reconciliation is. Evidently, reconciliation is not just one 'thing', but a multifaceted endeavour operating at a variety of levels, embedded in a much wider set of ideas including ethics, personhood, ethnicity and memory. Reconciliation therefore needs to be understood holistically, as a set of interrelated practices *and* as a set of intertwined ideas. The entire premise of cricket fostering unity and consequently reconciliation rests on a very thin logic.

Notwithstanding, the literature on apology and forgiveness suggests the notion of creating a 'space' may be useful for reconciliation across these different scales (Mookherjee et al. 2009). In the apology to the 'stolen generations' by the Australian government, Hage notes that 'the apology, while not enough in itself, has offered a space where such a relation is possible' (Mookherjee et al. 2009:354). Similarly, for the South African TRC, Scheper-Hughes suggests that although apologies did not necessarily foster reconciliation directly, it 'opened up new emotional spaces' (1998:138) where conversations about reconciliation could occur. Thus, sports like cricket might provide space for initial reconciliatory steps. This is particularly relevant when considering Scheid's assertion that interpersonal and social reconciliation are interrelated (2012). If instances of personal forgiveness and reconciliation do affect group reconciliation, then analysing these supposedly 'mundane' instances of reconciliation is important as they are part of an intertwined system. Hence, examining the spaces of cricket ought to reflect on the processes by which personal practices of reconciliation might change into the social. In summation, this literature shows why claims have been made for a relationship between cricket and reconciliation, but also suggests such claims are quite thin and require greater scrutiny. Notwithstanding, there remains a lot of faith in cricket as a social enterprise, and it clearly could have real impact within Sri Lanka. It is clear that while reconciliation is a concept that differs widely dependent on context, it is still grounded in the

way persons understand others and their relationships. As such I will provide a robust contextualisation of the practices and ideas that underpin reconciliation.

Sport for Development and Peace

The association of cricket with reconciliation by actors like Sangakkara and organisations like the SLC should also be situated within the broader context of Sport for Development and Peace (SDP). Since the early 2000s, various stakeholders including NGOs, governments and sporting organisations have been increasingly promoting sport as a vehicle for development and peace (Kidd 2008, Darnell 2012, Collison et al. 2019). Following the establishment of a UN office (UNOSDP),¹¹ and the linking of sport into the Sustainable Development Goals (Lindsey & Chapman 2017, Lindsey & Darby 2018), SDP has now become an established global movement, and many development agencies now devote at least some space to SDP. In general, SDP stakeholders portray sport as a panacea, capable of curing any number of social ills (Hayhurst 2009:213). These claims have often been pushed by so-called ‘sports evangelists’ (Sugden 2010). These are usually athletes who have achieved great success in their sport, and/or continue to benefit from sport, and therefore usually have a skewed concept of its power for change (*ibid*:260). As an international sportsman of worldwide renown and with political power beyond the game, Sangakkara is an obvious example of a sports evangelist. In this light, his Cowdrey Lecture neatly tied the inclusive cricketing rhetoric present in Sri Lanka to the broader objectives of the SDP movement. Sangakkara’s words speak to a wider trend in the international community to promote sport for reconciliation in post-conflict zones.

The claim that sport is effective in development contexts rests on an idea of sport as apolitical, neutral and equal (Coalter 2010:296). These claims are largely enabled by the vague and generalised, largely idealistic images and metaphors of sport, what Coalter calls ‘mythopoeic’ discourses (*ibid*). This plethora of idioms, such as ‘level playing field’, a ‘team game’, or ‘it’s not cricket’ underpin the idea that sport is a ‘set of social practices that can deliver a wide range of positive outcomes’ (*ibid*). This leads to the intrinsic value of sport rarely being questioned (Sugden 2010). However, sport – like any collective human endeavour – is a malleable social construct that requires contextualising and must not be essentialised (*ibid*:262). Put simply: ‘in

¹¹ UNOSDP was shut down in 2015. The Division for Inclusive Social Development (DISD) now directs the UN’s activities for SDP.

and of itself, sport is of no intrinsic value: it is neither naturally good nor irrevocably bad' (Kidd paraphrased in Sugden 2010:262). Unsurprisingly, there currently remains little consensus on if and how sport 'works', leading to calls for more critical assessments of SDP from academics (Coalter 2013, Spaaij & Schailée 2021). Within the sector, many look to establish an evidence base that supports the use of sport as a development tool, as currently there is little 'available evidence that supports or refutes the assumption that sport can positively influence development outcomes' (Langer 2015:66).

As the understandings of sport maintained by SDP practitioners are vague and idealistic, this has led to overly simplistic interventions by practitioners. Generally, the SDP movement has employed a functional approach, resulting in some practitioners 'merely offering sport activities' (Spaaij 2012:77), in the vain hope they will "“automatically” deliver...developmental outcomes' (Lindsey et al. 2017:33). While there are examples of more critically integrated uses of sport (see Coalter 2010, Darnell et al. 2018), many SDP activities use an 'individual behaviourist' model which focuses on personal change (Lindsey et al. 2017), therefore ignoring the difficulties of achieving change at a structural level (Huish 2011). Furthermore, the rise of monitoring and evaluation across the development sector means that various SDP stakeholders are increasingly at pains to measure 'impact' to justify their activities (Lindsey et al. 2017:42), often compelled by the need to show accountability to the larger organisations that fund them (Kay 2012). Consequently, many SDP stakeholders measure the implementation of their policies rather than their social effect (Coalter 2010:309). This is evident within the small SDP sector in Sri Lanka, whose stakeholders include a handful of NGOs and government agencies. Of these stakeholders, a few focus overtly on delivering sport-oriented development programmes, while the majority only include sport as part of a wider programme, often as an afterthought. Of the stakeholders identified, all focused overtly on what was provided to beneficiaries (how many cricket bags distributed, coaching camps held, athletes selected) rather than more abstract change. In this sense, many SDP practitioners are more often doing 'Sport Development', than using sport *for* development. Not only do these activities fail to address structural change, the monitoring and evaluation undertaken is not really appropriate for the individual behaviourist model either, as 'the extent to which [individual participation in sport] will lead to changed behaviour... and improved real life chances is very difficult to assess'

(Coalter 2010:309). As such, many SDP activities still ‘fail to capture important elements of personal and social development’ (Lindsey et al. 2017:43).

The rapid expansion of SDP has left both practitioners and academics with the hurried task of understanding SDP and how it can best be implemented (Lindsey et al. 2017). However, the assessment of these interventions within the academic literature has often been lacking (*ibid*). This literature on SDP has usually taken one of two forms: instrumental or critical (Lindsey et al. 2017, Darnell et al. 2018). SDP practitioners have often employed academics to find evidence for SDP’s effectiveness, and such ‘instrumental’ approaches tend to be positivist and quantitative, aiming at metrics that ‘made “the case for sport” that their commissioning agencies sought’ (Lindsey et al. 2017:40). While these instrumental approaches can provide valuable insights about SDP, they often ‘stop short of critically analyzing SDP socially, historically or politically’ (Darnell et al. 2018:90). Conversely, more ‘critical-theoretical’ approaches from outside SDP assess the power relations and hegemony apparent in SDP, but these approaches are largely ‘internationalist in focus’ (Lindsey et al. 2017:45), and have tended to subsume local understandings of SDP ‘within an overall analytic narrative’ (*ibid*). As such, neither of these approaches on their own do ‘justice to the complexity’ of SDP (Mosse 2004:641). So, while instrumental and critical perspectives can beneficially illuminate certain elements of SDP, these need to be fused together in the future (Darnell et al. 2018). This highlights the need for more nuanced analyses of SDP contexts, an effort this work contributes to.

A Fundamental Problem

The claims made for cricket position it as the solution to a fundamental problem. Cricket is perceived as unifying in Sri Lanka, making it ideal for addressing the national question as it is often understood. It is a safe option for the tricky task of defining what Sri Lanka means to Sri Lankans. This promotion of cricket also fits within the wider global trend of using sport in post-conflict states, further legitimising such claims. However, how cricket might ‘work’ for reconciliation is clearly far from simple. The literature suggests that many forms of reconciliation exist, while the evidence sport can incite social change is rather thin. In both spheres, many interventions have been overly simplistic and ignore the complexity of the situation. This context highlights that while cricket could feasibly be linked to reconciliation,

assuming a direct, causal relationship between the two is problematic. Notwithstanding, faith is still placed in cricket as a social enterprise. Being present in Colombo during the Easter Sunday attacks was a chastening and eye-opening experience, that revealed a deeper emotional connection to Sri Lanka and the people I was closely associated with. It was evident in how people talked to one another, expressed solidarity, organised in WhatsApp groups and offered protection that cricket was a source of solace. It was also evident that change was needed. The issues of the national question remain very prevalent today, indicating that studying any association between cricket and reconciliation is both timely and necessary.¹² I assert reconciliation in Sri Lanka is more about solving ostensibly *older* concerns. This indicates one should consider how cricket plays a role in answering a more fundamental problem. One must assess how cricket reflects fundamental social ideas, concerns about individuals and groups, who they are and can be within the nation of Sri Lanka. This kind of study can only be done with the kind of nuanced understanding that ethnographic fieldwork provides. In the rest of this chapter, I bring in theory to help make sense of these claims, and to sharpen the questions I will assess in this thesis.

What Kind of Sport is Cricket?

In the second half of this chapter, I explore theory that illuminates these claims more fully. This provides ways to assess the merit of such claims, and indicates how to make sense of them anthropologically. If sport is understood in vague and idealistic terms by SDP practitioners, and reconciliation is a diversely understood concept, then it is impossible to draw a causal relationship between the two. Notwithstanding, some relationship is clearly present. Because of the inherent difficulty in trying to ascertain any relationship between two complex social phenomena, I suggest that placing this relationship in ethnographic context is crucial. The multiple, diverse ideas of reconciliation mean that work must be done to understand how people relate to one another more generally, the broader ideas that make up what reconciliation could be. While it may be impossible to pin down if cricket *effects* reconciliation, it is definitely possible to access and examine how it *affects* the concepts that make up what

¹² In 2022, Sri Lanka slipped into economic crisis and political instability, on the back of mismanagement by the Rajapaksa government. That the Sri Lankan public engaged in concerted protests against the government – and incited real change – is an unprecedented development. Yet the #gohomegota campaign (which sought to depose the Gotabaya Rajapaksa presidency) merely reinforces the need for clarity of vision about Sri Lanka into the future.

reconciliation might be. As such, this thesis examines cricket in the *context of* reconciliation, and deals more broadly with the idea that sports can induce positive change in society. This is a more nuanced way of examining SDP than the examples given above, and generates deeper insights. First, I provide a brief history of sport and a review of the anthropology of sport, before introducing elements of my epistemological approach.

Sport, Modernism, and Discourses

Cricket has a distinctive history which is crucial to take note of here. Like other global sports that emerged during the nineteenth century, cricket is a modernist sport, characterised by the values of progress, rationality and individualism (Coalter 2007, Malcolm et al. 2009). While not all sports are modernist (Besnier et al. 2018), the identification of certain sports with modernity affects how sport is broadly understood today (Besnier & Brownell 2012). Developing concurrently with the consolidation of nation states, modern sports were important in cementing the idea of the citizen (Coalter 2007:8). Part of a broader drive to create a civic culture, sport expressed and affirmed citizenship, framing the ‘responsible’ citizen as one who ‘participates’ in the greater whole (*ibid*). This notion was reinforced by the idea sport constituted a ‘neutral social space’ (Coalter 2007:9), where people met as not just as citizens, but as *equals*. Sport is therefore very potent as a vehicle for promoting particular views of society. For Walker, sport can be ‘instrumental in the transformation of what may be termed “political ontology”’ (Walker 2013:384). As such, sports can actively change the political consciousness of those who participate in it, because sports enshrine a particular ‘moral and political order’ which is then legitimated by the persuasive power of play (*ibid*). In his analysis of football in Peruvian Amazonia, Walker notes that football changed the political ideals held by *Urarina* people, from a strong sense of individualism to a sense of collectivity under the Peruvian state (*ibid*). Thus, modernist sports encourage a certain idea of society and social norms, which persist into the present.

These ideas of society are sustained and legitimated by the persuasive discourses that exist regarding sport. As a particularly modernist sport, cricket remains replete with such modernist discourses, including in Sri Lanka. Not only is the idea of equality and fairness of the modernist system broadly appealing, the idea of personal growth through sport is incredibly widespread. Many modernist sports are seen to promote the development of moral values, yet an overt

focus on the ‘spirit of the game’ leant cricket an air of moral superiority, which ensured it was transported around the British Empire as part of a broader civilising mission (Mangan 1998). This idea of sport as an unequivocal social good has been promoted in a range of contexts, from football (Collison 2016) to rugby (Foster 2006) and not least the Olympic movement (MacAloon 1981, 2019). Indeed, the values of Olympism have been sponsored by the UN itself and have largely merged together, leading Carter to assert that sport has been used to make claims about humanity itself (Carter 2018). This has problematic consequences for sport in the current era, as it helps to obscure injustices that occur as a consequence of sporting influence (*ibid*). Hence, the idea of positive change remains largely implicit within sporting contexts, which is why sport has been promoted so strongly by civil society (Coalter 2013). That these sporting values and their ‘positive’ effects go largely unquestioned shows the powerful effect of Coalter’s ‘mythopoeic’ discourses (2007), despite the common consensus among the anthropology of sport literature that such claims remain unsubstantiated.

Muscular Christianity

This implicit idea of change can be explained in part by the influence of an ideology termed ‘Muscular Christianity’ on modernist sports. Muscular Christianity is a form of Protestantism that arose in the 19th century (Mangan 1998, MacAloon 2006). Mangan describes how the development of young male bodies through athletic pursuits was deemed a tribute to God, developing strength and stamina to aid the needy in society (Mangan 1998). Many public-school headmasters were advocates, using their sports grounds as centres for honing these athletic skills (*ibid*). This hyper-masculine approach to Christianity was not solely physical, as games – particularly team games – were seen as an opportunity to develop moral character too. Games became ‘the pre-eminent instrument for the training of a boy's character’ (*ibid*:18), and cricket, seen as particularly ‘chivalrous’ (*ibid*:35) was felt to be very suitable in this regard. Many recognised that the highs and lows of sport provide the means to demonstrate resourcefulness, fairness, and honour, while also fostering virtues like ‘pluck’, resolve, self-control and discipline (*ibid*:35). The particular focus in cricket on the ‘spirit of the game’ and associated idioms like ‘to play a straight bat’ and ‘it’s not cricket’ enshrined a concept of fair play and ‘gentlemanly’ values that continue to be promoted into the present day. Individual character was thought to be nurtured and developed simply by participating in the game of cricket.

Though cricket was used to develop moral character by centring fairness and equality, it was also nefariously used to further imperial aims. In the context of colonialism, the ‘needy’ of society suddenly became ‘inferior’ colonial subjects, and the ‘righteous cause’ of Christianity became to develop their moral worth (Mangan 1998:27). Team games essentially became a proxy to discover who wanted to fight for Britain. Cricket developed athletic, ‘morally virtuous’ schoolboys who were akin to Christian soldiers, and with the resolve to spread out over the Empire and do their duty (*ibid*). Though cricket taught schoolboys how to be resourceful, strong individuals, it also taught them a sense of deference to the greater whole, that is how to be part of a team and how to do their duty for their teammates. In doing so, they learned how to be part of the Empire. As Mangan puts it, schoolboys were expected to be dominant in character yet essentially deferent to the Empire, to have ‘the confidence to lead and the compulsion to follow’ (Mangan 1998:18). Appadurai notes that Cricket promoted a ‘thorough control over the expression of strong sentiments by players on the field, subordination of personal sentiments and interests to those of the group, [and] unquestioned loyalty to the team’ (Appadurai 1996:92). The larger whole always took precedence over individual brilliance. The idea of the cricket team became that of a group of ostensibly good people, all leaders who knew how to go it alone, but also play for their teammates too.

These nineteenth-century cricketing discourses continue to linger in Sri Lanka, and the values of fair play, sportsmanship and a deference to the wider whole remain well observed, as I will show in Chapter 2. The spirit of the game is often discussed in the Sri Lankan media, while I was struck by how often ‘gentlemanly values’ were mentioned in my discussions about cricket. Particularly in coaching, there remains an ostensibly ‘traditional’ ethos, and the fabled ‘MCC Coaching Manual’ is often invoked, as I will detail in Section IV. Local coaching legends like Nelson Mendis continue to promote the importance of being a gentleman, being a good sportsman, and playing for your team (see picture opposite). The values of control, of discipline, fairness and honour are all apparent in how coaches go about their work. As I will show in Sections III and IV, my informants maintained a constant awareness of the needs of the team, of the greater whole. The Muscular Christian values of cricket retain – at least in my experience – important rhetorical sway in Sri Lanka.

*Nelson Mendis challenge Trophy
2013*

CRICKET – THE NOBLE GAME

Cricket is a wonderful and a Nobel game which is well known for sportsmanship and good behaviour. By conscientiously following the rules, practices and the traditions of this Nobel game, a player, whether young or old, learns and secures for himself a good code of conduct to follow in life. This code of conduct will ensure the player, that he enjoys the game in its true spirit and also make the others involved in the game very satisfied and happy that they chose Cricket as their favourite game.

Cricket – the finest team game in the world, teaches many good qualities for the development of one's character. Cricket teaches us self – discipline, courage, unselfishness, resolution, restraint, friendship, sportsmanship, patience, fortitude and above all honestly and fair mindedness. It also teaches us to be humble in victory and to be determination in defeat.

Worlds' most outstanding and respected cricketers are those who have strictly followed the gentleman's code of conduct in playing the game, both on and off the field. They are respected not only for their immense talent and successful achievements but also for their attitude, conduct, ideals, virtues and their well mannered behaviour. They are the mostly admired role- models for the young.

I have no hesitation in naming some of the best cricketers in the world who have inspired us as the best role models during the last half a century- who has all the virtues of a true 'gentleman Cricketers' 'Sir Donald Bradman of Australia, Sir Colin Cowdrey of England, Sir Frank Worrel and Sir Garfield Sobers of West Indies, Sir Richard Hadlee of New Zealand, Imran Khan of Pakistan, Sunil Gavaskar and Sachin Tendulkar of India and our own, Arjuna Ranatunga, Ranjan Madugalla, Roshan Mahanama, Muttiah Muralidaran, Kumar Sangakkara, and Mahela Jayawardena of Sri Lanka.



CCC School of Cricket - Colombo.

Figure 4. One of several essays about cricket in a CCC academy programme.

Anthropology of Sport & Change

Sport has been relegated to the periphery of anthropology until very recently. Not only has interest in sport previously been perceived as ‘trivial’ and ‘frivolous’ by other anthropologists (MacClancy 1996, King 2004), the anthropology of sport has been continually mired in debates over definitions of sport (Besnier and Brownell 2012). This problem, largely caused by the issue of trying to isolate ‘sport’ (when sport is a contingent social phenomenon), has not been helped by the persuasive mythopoeic discourses just described. Most scholars now agree that examining why certain definitions of sport are employed within local contexts is more important than reaching any unifying idea (Dyck 2000:19). So, despite the insistence that the study of sport supports a critical anthropology that addresses fundamental questions in the discipline (King 2004), a lack of theoretical coherence within the sub-discipline up to the recent past has led to some weakness in analytical terms (Moore 2004:39). What limited coherence has developed formed an ‘interpretive paradigm’ (Besnier & Brownell 2012), largely informed by Clifford Geertz’s seminal paper *Deep Play: Notes on the Balinese Cockfight* (1972). However, it has been argued this now limits theoretical insights (Besnier & Brownell 2012). In the last two decades theoretical insights have begun to coalesce, and these suggest ways of moving forward with studying cricket and reconciliation.

Firstly, it is important to state that sport is both reflective of and constitutive of society (Lithman 2004). While sports reflect socio-cultural norms, they also contribute to establishing new norms. As such, sports can contribute to the fashioning of both selves and collectivities (Dyck 2004:6). This is most apparent when assessing sport through the lens of ritual. Leaving debates about whether sport *is* ritual aside, it is apparent that sport events occur in distinct spaces framed outside of regular social space, and are often defined by a set of ‘fixed and public rules that separate them from everyday life,’ and ‘are rich in symbolism’ (Besnier et al 2018:170).¹³ Many sporting events also incorporate elements that follow van Gennep’s three phases, spending the majority of their time in the *liminal* phase (*ibid*:161). Thus, sport can arguably be characterised as ‘a “liminal” activity, one that is both part of and removed from normative everyday life, in a “betwixt and between” state.’ (Besnier et al 2018:34, cf. Turner 1967). These qualities suggest that sports, like ritual, invite (or coerce) the participant to ‘reflect’ on their own

¹³ See Chapter 6 of Besnier et al. 2018 for a full analysis of the debates about sport and ritual.

social norms (Turner 1967:103). It is this creative agency that enables various actors to ascribe to themselves certain identities, thereby contesting overarching discourses (MacClancy 1996), a contestation which is particularly important in the post-colonial context (Bale & Cronin 2003). This agency essentially enables individual participants to ‘transcend’ their current understanding of life, whether questioning and forming new ideas about the nation (Foster 2006) or society itself (Archetti 1999). Sport entails a capacity to reflect but also to change.

However, while sport often appears ‘outside society’ it is also ‘of society’ and therefore one should not see sport as wholly separate (Lithman 2004). For example, Kummels argues that while modern sport is grounded in modernist discourses, the idea that sport is a purely western phenomenon that ‘spread’ to Asia is erroneous (Kummels 2013). Sport is instead merely another form of globalized flow that has no direct origins, and therefore sport is a panoply of global influences that is hard to capture (*ibid*). Notwithstanding, in most sports modernist values have now been supplanted by neoliberal ones (Carter 2011, 2018, Besnier et al. 2020). As Carter argues, the primacy of the free market under neoliberalism led to the foundation of ‘global sport’ as a commodity, further engraining neoliberal capitalist agendas (Carter 2011). This was done in part by deploying the same modernist idea that sport is a universal good (Carter 2018). The potency of ‘global sport’ as a commodity means that sports have become increasingly hegemonic powers, and as such there is greater need to examine the local contexts in which sports are embedded and to trace power relations (*ibid*). Walker’s *Urarina* footballers reflect this hegemonic power. As football reinforces a certain, modern idea of the citizen and society, this has affected the structure of *Urarina* society itself, limiting the modes of agency available to each individual (Walker 2013). I return to this ethnographic theory after examining the power relations present in my own fieldwork.

'The Pleasure of Agency in an Imagined Community'

A brief example from cricket illustrates the pitfalls of essentialising sport, and the need for a contextualised view of cricket that focuses on agency. In assessing cricket’s appeal in India, Ashis Nandy’s oft-quoted maxim is: ‘cricket is an Indian game accidentally discovered by the English’ (1989:1). In Nandy’s opinion, cricket reflects fundamental social concerns already present in South Asia, of hierarchy, moral purity, respect for tradition and a notion of fate, and is a unique form for expressing those concerns (*ibid*). Appadurai meanwhile notes that cricket

was ‘an elite sport whose code of fair play dictated an openness to talent and vocation in those of humble origins’ (Appadurai 1996:92), suggesting this inclusive and essentially meritocratic ideology was key to cricket’s appeal and consequent uptake in the subcontinent. Appadurai then consciously rejects Ashis Nandy’s claim that cricket appeals to some sort of primordial Indian nature, suggesting the pleasure of cricket in India rests in the ‘bodily pleasure of playing, or imagining playing, cricket’ (1996:111). This invokes in the cricket fan ‘the *pleasure of agency* in an imagined community’ (*ibid* - original emphasis), which ‘in many other arenas is violently contested’ (*ibid*). For Appadurai, cricket enables experimentation with ‘the means of modernity’, and can provoke an excitement of Indianness ‘without its many divisive scars’ (*ibid*:112). Thus, he argues that cricket offers people a chance to ‘transcend’ the everyday, to take up a place within a greater whole and imagine potentially better futures.

While this creative agency may exist, the idea that cricket is not divisive in India is clearly illogical, and unfounded in practice, especially when one considers – amongst other things – the treatment of players who are not Hindu (Wisden 2021, Kesavan 2021). When Appadurai calls cricket a ‘hard’ cultural form, he rightly alludes to the fact that cricket promotes strong moral discourses, and indoctrinates persons into its worldview more than it is itself changed by them (Appadurai 1996:90). However, in my fieldwork in India (Hildred 2014) and in Sri Lanka (Hildred 2017), everyone had different perspectives and drew different things from the game. Though there were similarities amongst these perspectives that aligned, it is erroneous to think that these were a) homogenous and b) might not shift in the future. When Appadurai says cricket ‘ought to resist indigenization’, he is repeating a common yet illogical argument that considers sport somehow ‘outside’ of everyday life. I therefore argue that the real answer to cricket’s appeal in South Asia lies somewhere in between Appadurai’s and Nandy’s positions. I agree with Appadurai that cricket as a cultural form allows for imagination and experimentation, but I also agree with Nandy that there is something about cricket’s ethos that appeals to South Asian cultural ideas. Both perspectives together reflect that one must trace how people use and mobilise these ideas in their lives, reflecting their social concerns while they also constitute new ones.

Examining Sport, SDP & Change

A firm commitment to ethnographic ways of knowing the world is therefore a must for the Anthropology of Sport (Moore 2004:39). Ethnography is ‘a powerful medium for taking account of both the structural arrangements and personal experiences so central to sport’ (Dyck 2004:5), making it the ideal tool for assessing sport more sensitively and placing it within local context. As persons are bodies *engaged* in the world, one must have an ‘interest in unpacking the ways in which people experience embodied life daily’ (Gibson & Atkinson 2017:15). It is this embodiment that centres ‘a sense of creative agency’ (*ibid*), and therefore examination of this embodiment and creativity is crucial for understanding how people negotiate cultural meaning. However, there cannot be too much emphasis placed on analysing meaning, for ‘this version of the interpretive approach also magnifies its deficiencies—its lack of attention to the power structures that silence some stories in favor of others, eliding the fact that stories arise out of the interplay between interested actors’ (Besnier & Brownell 2012:445). As such, while it is important to examine how people use ‘sport to organise comprehensible lives out of the increasingly fragmented and contradictory elements of contemporary existence’ (Dyck 2000:32), it is also important to examine this creative agency in relation to others. Focusing on meaning alone ignores the materiality of sport and means scholars ‘are not asking the right questions’ (Carter et al. 2018:10). It is therefore essential to tie personal experience to structure and examine the connections between the various dynamics of body, identity, play and narrative, in order to recognise that ‘sport creates connections between peoples at the same time that it strengthens local and national identities’ (Besnier and Brownell 2012:454). It is important not just to ascertain the ‘story [people] tell themselves about themselves’ in Geertz’s terms (1974:26), but to understand what they do as a consequence of that understanding.

The importance of situating sport in context and locating individual agency is very apparent when looking at the assessment of SDP and change. The SDP literature has recently focused on itself, with multiple review articles published since 2015 (Schulenkorf & Spaaij 2015, Schulenkorf et al. 2016, Darnell et al. 2018, Welty Peachy et al. 2019). All agree that the concept of change remains largely under theorised, and that without ‘a robust theory of change’ (Schulenkorf & Spaaij 2015:72), scholars will remain unable to understand the mechanisms by which SDP achieves particular outcomes (Spaaij and Schailée 2021:152). Recent attempts to theorise change have been made by some, but with limited theoretical

innovation (Welty Peachey et al. 2019). Sugden admits his own ‘ripple effect’ model cannot capture complexity (2010), while others have assessed systems theory in an attempt to move past linear models of change (Massey et al. 2015). Lindsey & Wiltshire have recently taken the prospect of change seriously and draw from Margaret Archer’s morphogenetic approach to propose a model of temporal phases (2021). The need to investigate change properly is pressing. Lindsey et al. argue the reason why many stakeholders focus on implementation with individuals rather than attempt to evaluate structural social change is because it is methodologically much harder (2017). Furthermore, even when SDP causes social change, it may ‘strengthen hegemonic relations by reinforcing dominant social and economic hierarchies’ (Darnell & Black 2011:369). This suggests that change must be understood appropriately as a priority before blindly delivering SDP.

In response to this problem of change, many scholars have advocated for a granular approach to SDP. Lindsey et al. advocate contextualising the perspectives of those engaged in SDP, to understand the social space where various understandings are (co-)produced and in doing so ‘de-reify’ concepts of both sport and development (Lindsey et al. 2017:48). In a similar vein Darnell et al. suggest that studies of SDP should focus on the body and/or be located in ‘the everyday’ (2018), while Spaaij and Schailée invoke a ‘micro-sociology’ to look at these sorts of face-to-face interactions (2021). However, both sets of authors agree the challenge is how to link these micro level analyses to broader scales in order to better understand change (Darnell et al. 2018:143, Spaaij and Schailée 2021:166). As Coalter puts it, researchers must focus ‘on understanding the social processes and mechanisms that might lead to desired outcomes’ (2010:311). If those interested in SDP have much to learn from their parent disciplines (Schulenkorf and Spaaij 2015:72), then anthropology has much to say about scale and tying the micro to the macro. As Collison notes, anthropology is well suited to assessing the mechanisms and processes that inform and shape social phenomena (Whitley et al. 2022:4), and through an ethnographically grounded approach can establish deeper understandings which better contextualise SDP practices (Collison 2019:226). In Collison’s monograph on football and SDP (2016), she situates the practices she observed within the local post-war context of Liberia, thereby revealing the capacities and limits of SDP that is informed by external ideals. By tying persons to structure and contextualising more fundamental ideas, ethnography fulfils this aim of appreciating scale.

While de-reifying sport and reconciliation through ethnographic contextualising is a positive goal, it is clear a focus on understandings rather than action is limited. If scholars are actually committed to *transform* sport, to examine the knowledge production of sport and challenge sport's hegemonic power (Carter et al. 2018), then it is necessary to examine what people *do* with these understandings. In this thesis I therefore move a step beyond de-reifying, and argue that assessing the relationship between sport and social change requires ethnographically informed knowledge which is sensitive to broader social structures and ideas. For example, as the rhetoric of the SDP movement in Sri Lanka is arguably more prevalent in mainstream cricket, I suggest that it will be necessary to understand the practices and ideas of cricket before understanding the association of cricket with reconciliation.¹⁴ Ethnographic knowledge about cricket in Sri Lanka more broadly is a necessary foundation on which to base understandings of SDP practices and to properly theorise change. As it is not sports themselves that create values but social organisations (Coalter 2010:311), I focus on the various spaces that shape what cricket means for people, and provide an arena to act on this meaning. As such, I explore the way people engage with cricket, draw from certain cricketing discourses, and deploy them to achieve certain goals. In sum, I look at how meaning begets action, at how the links between these various dynamics affects what people take away from sport *and* how they try to do things with it. Next, I explain how my epistemological approach will grasp these links, dynamics and processes.

Epistemological Approach

While ethnography is essential for appropriately contextualising sport and de-reifying concepts, a more nuanced theoretical approach is required to understand how individual agency gleaned through sport impacts social structure and induces change. Various theories provide avenues for approaching sport and SDP in this manner, illuminating how to situate individuals and interpret their agency, while also accounting for the various scales at which ideas operate. Ultimately this approach focuses more on examining social processes than on individual variables, in a nod towards a 'multi-modal' approach or a 'negative methodology' (Dattatreyan & Marrero-Guillamón 2019, Navaro 2020).¹⁵ This approach is more attuned to

¹⁴ See Lindsey & Darby 2018 for the link between the SDGs and mainstream sport.

¹⁵ It is important to state that I conceive of knowledge gleaned through ethnography as emergent and contingent, and therefore use terms like expressing, illustrating, and conveying, over 'revealing'.

the ways in which persons navigate their ever-changing lifeworlds, and should show how change happens without reducing it to merely an exploration of causality.

Phenomenology and ‘Body Culture’

Anthropologists have tended to assess sporting practice through the lenses of embodiment and phenomenology. Downey contends common anthropological frameworks delimit embodied action in a manner that largely obscures it (2005). For him, phenomenology is a better approach, as perception itself is shaped by physical training (*ibid*:18), conveying that modes of experience themselves differ. This leads him to examine: ‘how the world looks after one has spent enough time in the *roda* [the playing area]’ (*ibid*:20). This focus on individual experience is important, as it reflects that lived experience can be radically different to subsequent narration. The process of remembering a sport points to a division between embodied practice and the narration of that practice, whether through self-reflection or explanation to others (Dyck & Archetti 2003, Dyck 2010). However, this narration involves a ‘retroactive rationalization’ (Dreyfus 2005 in Sutton 2007:769), a re-ordering of the partially remembered events in a logical manner (Sutton 2007:770). Because embodied experience is difficult to articulate, an over-reliance on common tropes and idioms is often employed in narration, and Downey et al. found ‘explicit questions provoked formulaic recitation of accepted orthodox thinking’ in their interviews (2015:193). To combat this, Gore et al. highlight Merleau-Ponty’s notion of ‘pre-reflective’ and reflective knowledge, and argue one must attempt to draw as closely as possible to pre-reflective experience in order to access experience in its purest form (2012). Rix’s related work using video cameras alongside Vermersch’s ‘explicitation’ technique examines decision making to reflect the messiness of embodied experience and move away from rational narration (2008, 2011). Not only does the tendency to neatly narrate sport elide embodied action, Dyck suggests sport is a confluence of narrative *and* embodied memory (2010), contending that not all embodied actions become narrated. As such, embodied experience may therefore be either poorly explained or not even verbalised, and therefore a phenomenological approach aids in accessing this experience.

Although phenomenology does not constrain expressions of what bodies do, this focus on the individual still sees embodied notions of sport removed from the social context of which they are part (see Downey 2005). Few, like Brownell with her notion of ‘body culture’ (1995), have

attempted to join individual experiences of sport with the social. Brownell's 'body culture' builds on Bourdieu's concept of *habitus*, but sees habituation as a continual *process* (ibid). Body culture refers not just to the practices that define what habits are, but also the potential embodied responses individuals can make. Thus, "body culture" is a better tool than habitus, because it draws on the anthropological concept of culture to contextualize the body within the local meanings that are significant to the people whose bodies are in question' (Besnier and Brownell 2012:450). Both the body and forms of embodiment are therefore culturally mediated. If as Dyck and Archetti suggest, sport is 'individually experienced but socially mediated' (2003:10), then for Brownell, this social mediation forms part of the various processes incorporated in a body culture. This is important regarding the above problems with reflective knowledge. While it is not possible to fully grasp the embodied experience of others, it may be possible to examine the processes by which embodiment is constrained, for example during coaching. More broadly, both of these concepts complicate the notion that ideas move from practice to narrative. Teaching or learning a sport is not a simple process of transmission (Downey et al. 2015), as it is impossible to simply give a skill or ability to another. Coaches often merely construct a framework within which the disciple can act (*ibid*). Learning a sport is therefore a process of enculturation like any other, and while it is impossible to fully access individual experiences, it is crucial to examine the processes by which these individuals undergo this enculturation.

Sport and Virtue Ethics

While phenomenology is useful for accessing individual experience, 'body culture' only goes a short way towards tying this experience to wider processes. If reflection and creative agency often involve a process of 'transcending', then a model taken from Alasdair MacIntyre's notion of virtue ethics (2007[1981]) is a potential framework for an interpretation of sport that illustrates scale in action. Firstly, for MacIntyre 'practice' is strictly a '*socially* established co-operative activity' (Gibson 2017:767). Here, 'internal goods' are unlimited rewards that are *integral* to the practice itself, such as physical fitness, enjoying an aesthetic quality, or mental wellbeing. Virtues meanwhile are the socially constructed notions that make achievement of these internal goods possible, such as resilience, determination, or confidence. The process by which each virtue is constructed has three stages: practice, narration, and moral tradition. Practices, for MacIntyre, are understood through personal narration, which are themselves

created as part of a moral tradition, a wider set of ideas about the world built up from these narrative forms (Gibson 2017:768). Thus, persons explain their concepts of a virtue through reference ‘down’ to the practice itself (their experience of virtue), and ‘up’ to the moral tradition of which they are part (their knowledge of what virtues can be). Thus, an example for cricket might be: ‘I play cricket because I want to be physically fit, because being fit is good in my society. The internal good I pursue is physical well-being and the virtues that allow this are resilience, hard work, and dedication.’

This framework provides a more socially inclined interpretation of sport, as the prioritisation of which internal goods are pursued and the understanding of the virtues themselves are at all times culturally constructed. Examining individual experiences provides a sense of the internal goods people pursue, and the virtues that enable this pursuit (and indeed if they are successful), but more importantly illuminates their construction in the wider social space. This framework places the individual in society and sees the individual response to society as being socially inflected *and* socially responsive. It is this that incorporates the influence of ideas from elsewhere, so for example acknowledging that the human rights agenda (part of the wider moral tradition of human rights) affects practices of reconciliation, or that local notions of cricket build upon underpinning notions of personhood and social structures. This framework effectively sees concepts not as independently generated but as constantly interrelated and constantly evolving. It moves a step beyond ‘body culture’ by incorporating a greater sense of scale, by tying individual embodied responses directly to their narration at the individual level, *and* wider social level. This allowed me to examine the processes by which practices and ideas change. In essence, this framework allows me to see cricket as something that may *affect* reconciliation, without prior assumption that it *effects* reconciliation. During my time in Sri Lanka, I consciously examined the practices of cricket, the narration of these practices, and the wider moral traditions of which this is all part. I explored which internal goods are pursued in cricket, the virtues that are considered necessary for this, and reflected on how these things suggest a moral tradition that extends beyond cricket.

Rhetoric

The idea of rhetoric is very useful for exploring both the strong discourses at play in cricket and tying these dynamics together. In this ethnography I deploy an understanding of rhetoric derived from Carrithers, wherein rhetoric is not political in the ‘classical’ sense, but a common feature of social life that encompasses commonplace acts of persuasion invoked for everyday purposes (Carrithers 2005, 2009, 2012). In this understanding of rhetoric, people are concerned with convincing others of a certain view of the world, a tendency so engrained that we even convince ourselves through rhetorical means (Carrithers 2009:7). Importantly, this is not just verbal but includes the physical (*ibid*). This notion of rhetoric also reflects the ‘interactive character of life’ (*ibid*:8), where at any one time ‘some work, [while] others are worked upon’ (Carrithers 2005:578). To do this work, people draw from and mobilise certain ‘cultural schema’, culturally understood modes of being that can be grafted together in negotiating the social world (Carrithers 2005). If culture is what is learned, then rhetoric is the ‘moving force’ where such understanding is applied (Carrithers 2009:6). This is a far more sophisticated understanding of social life as it does not see culture as stable or immutable; Carrithers’s use of rhetoric rejects ‘structure’ as an overarching anthropological metaphor and accepts the changing nature of human social life (*ibid*:8). Most pertinently, ‘rhetoric culture’ characterises social life as a mode of constant adaptation to new situations (*ibid*). Finally then, it is important to note that these ‘schemas of culture are not in themselves determining, but are tools used by people to determine themselves and others’ (Carrithers 2005:581). Rhetoric can help illuminate how people in Sri Lanka deploy certain cultural schema such as cricketing discourses for their own ends.

Simply put, I argue that cricket is merely one of many ‘cultural schema’ present in Sri Lanka. People draw from this corpus of knowledge in everyday life when attempting to understand their own actions and the actions of others. They also deploy this knowledge when trying to move socially through the world. As Carrithers puts it, ‘a rhetorical perspective requires the ethnographer to attend not just to the structures of culture, but also to the flow of events’ (Carrithers 2005:582), and as such I have examined the deployment of cricketing discourses by my interlocutors. I have not only detailed the ‘characteristic organizations and schemas of a society’, but also looked at ‘their skilled use in one situation or another’ (Carrithers 2005:582). In doing this, I looked for what Carrithers terms ‘*the rhetorical edge of culture*’ (Carrithers 2009:6),

the moment at which one realises that actions or words are addressed to others and thereby carry some kind of rhetorical load. As I show in Chapter 8, my interlocutors drew from the cultural schema of cricket when framing their decision-making process or justifying certain actions. Most importantly, I contend that this everyday negotiation affects the wider cultural schema of cricket. If sport generates and sustains a particular global discourse that interacts with similar local concepts (e.g., fairness, equality), then the way people graft together these cultural schema should be illuminating. In MacIntyre's terms, rhetorical deployment of cricketing discourses (through practice or narration) affects the moral tradition of cricket. In theory, this should come back down again into practice. Thus, sport is modified. Rhetoric therefore enables one to see the links between various scales of understanding, and examine the processes by which these change.

Answering Fundamental Questions

This overview of the field highlights that by associating cricket with reconciliation in Sri Lanka, people seem to be asking a more fundamental question about the nature of Sri Lankan society. They express elementary concerns about the nature of groups and where persons fit within them. Meanwhile, relevant literature illustrates the difficulties of exploring this association, particularly because of how sport is broadly understood. Cricket is a social phenomenon that has a strong and distinct set of cultural values and discourses attached to it, which tend to emphasise the capacity of sport to change individuals. However, cricket is also a complex social phenomenon like any other, and cannot be considered in isolation from what is around it. What 'cricket' means is constantly in flux. This points towards the importance of ethnographic fieldwork for understanding this problem. Simply put, one must assess what people do during cricket, and how they talk about it. So, although I take seriously this association between cricket and reconciliation, I recognise the importance of situating cricket in its ethnographic context. While it may be impossible to truly pin down whether cricket can effect reconciliation, this remains an important backdrop against which to study cricket and the kinds of effects it has on social lives.

Furthermore, the various literatures I introduced suggest that a more nuanced way of exploring cricket is necessary to ascertain any impact on reconciliatory processes. Together, these disparate strands convey that due attention should be paid to the linkages between social

dynamics, to processes as much as objects. Change itself is an important topic, which I place close attention to throughout this thesis. An ethnographic approach is well suited to ascertaining how change functions, but this requires an awareness of scale and a willingness to bring disparate topics into conversation with one another. Thus, I look not just at what people do and what they say about it, but the various levels and registers in which this occurs. This should show the kinds of change that are made possible through a social phenomenon like cricket, and how participation in cricket causes widespread effects that could cause change elsewhere. In this thesis, I therefore look more at the social issues that cricket speaks to, about the nature of individuals, groups, and relations. Through ethnography, I explore the values that cricket promotes and the kinds of sociality it enables. Broadly speaking, this work deals with a classic sociological problem, that of a conflict between individual ideals and group ideals. This ethnographic approach is suited to the fundamental questions that an association between cricket and reconciliation raises. In the next chapter, I delineate my field and my interlocutors in more detail, and flesh out the complexity of my ethnographic fieldwork.

CHAPTER 2

CRICKET IN COLOMBO

Scenes: Arriving to Bandara

It's 8:30am on a Sunday and I am currently hauling my cricket bag up the lane in Mount Lavinia. In true Sri Lankan spirit, I'm late for training. We're supposed to start now, but I know that despite this, things won't get going till 9. At the top of the lane one of the local trishaw drivers eyes me, waving in typical fashion, a sort of scooping downwards motion, drawing me towards him. We haggle politely in Sinhala, I cram my bag in, the two-stroke motor starts putt-putting in rickety fashion, and we are on our way.

Training will take place at Bandara Park in Wellawatte, a 15-minute journey north from here, closer to the main city. Although the distance is only three miles, the landscape changes dramatically as we progress up Galle Road, one of the city's main arteries. The press of traffic is immediately fierce, and we quickly get stuck. We crawl past the shrines of saints, encased in glass cases, the local cemetery, the glittery department store that has just opened, the dilapidated playground. As we get towards Dehiwala flyover, the bottle neck causing the jam, we suddenly speed upwards over the junction, and the view of Colombo ahead is one of enormous skyscrapers reaching upwards. Below the flyover, to our left, the local YMBA is playing out Buddhist scripture in Pali, while to our right, the local Mosque, hidden away down a side lane issues a call to prayer. 'Tissa's Grinding Store' – one of only a few left in the city – faces out onto the street, its faded yellow signage instantly recognisable to the aunties arriving for their spices.

Now in Dehiwala, food outlets on either side nestle closer to the road, international chains like Dominos and Pizza Hut conspicuously placed between the local bakeries and milk bars. Here, cosmetic stores proliferate, bottles of shampoo and makeup stacked high in the window. As with any shop in Sri Lanka, *all* of the wares are on show. In between, tall stacks of paint tubs spill out of hardware stores onto the street, while the occasional electronic store is set back off the road, tall glass windows filled with TVs. Here, an elderly security guard shyly wielding a shotgun waves a car in to park. In the midst of all this, a sign to my right reads:

‘JESUS CHRIST IS COMING VERY SOON’, while to my left, Sinhala and Tamil movie stars gaze seriously out of billboards above the cinema.

My trishaw driver, ever opportunistic, veers quickly and suddenly off the road into a petrol station, looking around over his shoulder at me in a half apology, a quick shrug of the shoulders and “what to do?” I am not surprised he is running empty, and knowing that petrol stops inevitably occur when I am late, wave him on, resigned to my fate. As he jumps out, pulling up his shorts, thumbing through 100-rupee notes, I gaze at his cab. He is clearly a Christian man, the rosary beads draped carefully around the steering bar, while a picture of Jesus stares back at us from the windscreen. However, he has doubled down on his Sinhalese heritage by including various Buddhist paraphernalia too, one sign saying ‘mema rathayata Budu Saranayi’ (Buddha bless this vehicle). Like many trishaw drivers, it seems the wider variety of trinkets you have, the safer you will be.



Figure 5. Inside the Trishaw.

Filled up, we cross the canal into Wellawatte, and Galle Road is suddenly lined with tall, fluttering flags in various colours. We pass by a giant Hindu shrine on wheels outside a Kovil, its followers cleaning the statue, preparing for the procession which will take place this afternoon. Here, it is tyres stacked high and spilling out into the street, oily mechanics standing

hand on hip puffing at cigarettes, while two men work on a trishaw, pushed over at an angle so a rear wheel can be fixed, welding arcs flashing and crackling. In between the garages, the numerous bakeries bang and clatter as loaves of *kade paan* are thrown around, while streams of creamy chai are tossed from cup to cup to mix in the milk powder. Just before the Wellawatte mosque, we turn right at the venerable Prasanna money exchange, local landmark, and progress inland down a side alley, before being deposited at the foot of a tall apartment block.

Here, between the apartments and a hole-in-the-wall shop, I walk down a dark, narrow lane which leads seemingly into nowhere. Suddenly, the vivid green of Bandara park hits me, and the noise of the city is momentarily muffled. I walk across the concrete path which bisects the ground towards the pavilion, an austere concrete building completed in the 80s, providing the only shade in the entire ground. To my right, two teams of Tamil boys are playing a football match, while baying crowds shout and cheer. They throw themselves around with ferocity, their studs flashing in the bright morning sun. To my left, on the red strip of hardened mud, a group of local boys are playing softball cricket, presumably preparing for the day's tournament. In front of the stands, the Sinhalese organisers carefully arrange plastic trophies on a wooden table, each topped with tiny batsmen and bowlers. Another plays with an enormous set of speakers, flipping a switch that activates an endless playlist of *Baila*, the Portuguese influenced musical style popular across the country.

In the midst of all this I find my friends sat leisurely on the bleachers. It is 8:50 and I am happy to see we have not yet started. Their conversation currently centres on the new smartphone one of the boys has just bought, the others gathering round to look. Gradually those present for training get up, stretch out, then move together as a group: a handful of Muslims, a Sinhalese, a Tamil, a Malay, and me, the only white man or '*suddha*'. We joke as we jog, laughing at each other, pulling comic faces, the mood is light. We arrange ourselves in a circle, ready to start our stretching, led by a single individual in the middle. I am stretching my arms, one pulled tight across the other when the *Baila* music stops, and the first strained peals of the national anthem blare out.

"Sri Lanka mata..."

I look around, bemused, realising I am the only one moving. All others are now stood motionless, heads bowed, hands by their sides, caps clenched in one, the other on their heart. Everyone in the entire ground, no matter where they are have stopped to observe the anthem. The football match, the softball practice, the men in the stands. The polyphony of voices suddenly hushed, the movements in this shared space suddenly halted. Bashfully, I peel the cricket cap off my head and put my hands behind my back. The Sri Lankan national anthem is almost three minutes long. Under the hot sun it feels like a lifetime, and yet a lifetime doesn't feel long enough to understand what it all means...

Colombo & Sri Lanka

In order to understand cricket and reconciliation in Sri Lanka, it is also important to understand Colombo. It is a city of vibrant diversity, of juxtaposition, of manifold perspectives. For some it is a sacred place, for many others, profane, a place of business, of play, of pleasure. For some it is intensely modern, rising from the red dust, for others, it is shambolic and cracked, a worn-down version of a colonial heyday long gone. Others may see it as a Muslim town, a Christian city, a Buddhist village. This city of separate yet intersecting worlds is the site of contestations and negotiations that highlight the complexities of employing cricket for social good. Colombo is central to the historical development of cricket on the island, and remains the natural hub for cricket in the present day. Furthermore, Colombo defines Sri Lankan nationalist discourses (Perera 1998, 2016, Jazeel 2013, 2017, 2018, Thiranagama 2011), suggesting that the capital is important for thinking about reconciliation and the national question. In this chapter, I introduce the context of my ethnographic fieldwork, teasing out the threads of these contestations and setting the scene for subsequent sections. First, I explore the importance of Colombo as ethnographic field-site. I briefly cover the history and contemporary context of cricket on the island, before outlining the positionality I take in response. I then frame the fieldwork site and introduce my interlocutors, before providing an indication of my method.

Colombo & The Nation

Perera, Jazeel and Thiranagama all suggest that Colombo has had central place in the national imaginary. The idea of a bounded, island wide nation did not exist until British unification of the island as 'Ceylon' in 1815 (Jazeel 2017:417), and was thus only then 'imagined and

governed as one for the first time’ (Thiranagama 2011:232). Colombo was placed at the heart of this new state, ‘reconstructing’ the island around this central point (Perera 1998:72). New infrastructure connected other parts of the island to Colombo, reinforcing ‘a unified island space’ (Jazeel 2018:412) – a more concrete idea of ‘Ceylon’ – while the port itself established Colombo as an important node in a much wider network of trade across the British Empire. Thus, Colombo established an idea of Ceylon as an island, but this idea of Ceylon was always framed as a segment within a wider system. Crucially, Colombo itself ‘was constructed as an element of the British Empire from “outside,”’ (Perera 1998:53). Colombo has therefore tended to always be defined by *what is outside of it* rather than by any intrinsic quality. So as Perera succinctly puts it: ‘Ceylon did not produce modern Colombo, but Colombo produced Ceylon’ (Perera 2016:38).

This idea of an island nation with Colombo at the heart was inherited at independence in 1948 and has been negotiated by the authorities ever since (Perera 1998:199). Although successive Sinhala Buddhist governments have attempted to downgrade Colombo’s importance to the national imaginary, these have largely failed (Perera 1998:203). More recently, LTTE attacks on Colombo reaffirmed that the city remains central to the idea of the nation (Thiranagama 2011:242). Altogether, Colombo remains the ‘prime organiser’ of Sri Lanka’s national geography (Perera 2016:38), continuing to produce notions of Sri Lanka today. Colonial legacies have dominated the ideas of Colombo and of Ceylon/Sri Lanka, and this history continues to have ramifications today. By examining the history of communities within Colombo – particularly those who took up cricket – it is possible to understand the character of Colombo, and the ideas of Sri Lanka that this produced.

A Distinctly ‘Ceylonese’ Community

Colombo has always been an ethnically and religiously diverse city. With its natural harbour, Colombo was a popular trading site in Sri Lanka before colonisation by the Portuguese (Perera 2016:32), while successive Dutch and British regimes developed the port as an integral node in their empires. Colombo has therefore been home to numerous communities, including ‘Sinhalese, Moors, Tamils, Parsees, Dutch, Portuguese, Malays and Afghans’ (Cave 1908 in Perera 2016:35). Some of these communities were brought to Colombo by the colonial powers, while others came from within Ceylon to work (Perera 1998). Others like the ‘Burghers’ are

descended from colonists, and are considered a distinct ethnic group who remain predominantly Christian.¹⁶ Today, Colombo is the de facto capital city of Sri Lanka,¹⁷ with a floating population of at least 1 million.¹⁸ There are distinct Tamil and Muslim majorities in various districts throughout the city,¹⁹ while Burgher and Malay groups are more prevalent in Colombo than anywhere else on the Island (*ibid*). As of 2001, 59% of people in the Colombo Metropolitan Council area were from ethnic minorities, with 55% of the total being Tamil speaking (Thiranagama 2011:231). This proportion of Tamil speaking minorities in Colombo has led Thiranagama to argue that Colombo is in many ways a Tamil city (2011:231).²⁰ Either way, ‘Colombo has been historically a trilingual (English, Sinhala, Tamil) city’ (Thiranagama 2011:234), a city of many minorities (*Ibid*:228).

The presence of these diverse communities reinforces the perception that Colombo was a ‘Ceylonese city’ (Perera 1998:33). Importantly several of these minorities became established as elite groups who played a role in ‘indigenizing’ the city (Perera 2002, 2016), both pre- and post- independence. Advancing their ‘anglophile leanings’ as useful to the empire (Perera 2002:1715), these minorities played the colonial system for their own gain, learning how to manipulate and then resist it (*ibid*).²¹ This was always done in a reciprocal fashion, in British terms as much as indigenous ones, ‘as indigenes could only adapt daily practices within their own perception of colonial society.’ (Perera 2002:1704). Thus, it was through a process of colonialisation that they came to resist ‘indigenously’. Together, these minority groups developed a ‘camaraderie’ in opposition to the British which brought them together as ‘a distinctly Ceylonese community’ (Perera 2002:1715), an ideal of cosmopolitanism that still exists in some form to this day.

¹⁶ Burghers are typically descendants of Dutch or Portuguese colonists who married into the local population.

¹⁷ The smaller legal capital, Sri Jayawardenepura Kotte is within Colombo city limits.

¹⁸ Pinning down the exact population of Colombo is hard, given that many sources focus on different data sets and present them variously. Most agree that the urban population is around 700k as per census data (2012), with between 500k-1million people migrating in each day.

¹⁹ Tamil districts include Wellawatte and Dehiwala to the south, and Pettah and Kotahena to the north, with Muslim majorities in diverse areas like Slave Island, Maligawatte and Galwala (See Senaratna 2019 for visualisations)

²⁰ Muslims tend to be ethnically Tamil and speak Tamil as a first language.

²¹ Particularly after the Matale rebellion was crushed in 1848, these elite minorities focused more on strengthening their positions within the colonial system (Perera 2016).

The mobilisation of space by this ‘Ceylonese community’ is perhaps most obvious in Cinnamon Gardens, crucially the location of many of Sri Lanka’s premier cricket clubs today. Originally a cinnamon plantation, Cinnamon Gardens was developed by the British into a cultural retreat, including a church, art galleries, cricket pitch, racecourse, golf course, and private members’ clubs (Perera 2016:25). This area was then also populated by the local elites. They constructed ‘colonial-style mansions’ that also took architectural cues from local styles (Thiranagama 2011:236), and established their own clubs in the vicinity (Perera 2002:1710).²² Existing in the liminal space between colonial community and indigenous city, the Cinnamon Garden elites were therefore ‘engaged simultaneously both in expanding the colonial landscape and in indigenising its meaning’ (Perera 2002:1712). This was not an organised movement as such, nor was it radical or overt. For example, ‘the spaces the Burghers shared with the British became contested. In cricket fields, the Burghers were the first to represent Ceylon against the English’ (Perera 2016:33). These small contestations, when accumulated, entailed a radical transformation of space, ‘producing a different city than what the authorities had conceived’ (Perera 2016:39). Thus, Colombo was *produced* by resistance, not in any drastic or concerted way, but in a ‘multidirectional’ (Perera 2002:1715) process. While this established a defined, cosmopolitan sense of Ceylonese identity, this defining process also opened up Ceylonese identity to more problematic reconfigurations around the time of independence.

Post-Independence Colombo & Sri Lanka

Having won independence and formed their first administration in 1948, the initial Ceylonese leaders sought to re-model these various colonial spaces into their own nationalist vision (Perera 1998:130). In an explicitly anti-colonial move, state leaders sought to ‘re-signify Colombo’ to distance it from its colonial history, with the hope it might become ‘less important economically and symbolically in this new proto-national schema’ (Jazeel 2018:413). Those remodelling Colombo sought to locate ‘the national’ outside of the city, in the precolonial, rural and agrarian landscape of Sri Lanka (Jazeel 2018:414), or in other words the Sinhala village, ‘with its idealized temple, dagoba and tank [irrigation lake]’ (Thiranagama 2011:231). Consequently, many buildings in Colombo – especially homes of the Tropical Modernist style – became ‘peppered with referents to the wider Sri Lankan landscape’ (Jazeel 2018:414).

²² Locals were not allowed membership to British clubs (*ibid*).

Homes by modernist architect Minette de Silva particularly hinted at ‘a desire that her structures extend out into the time-space of the nation state beyond [the city]’ (Jazeel 2017:144), where this ‘national essence’ was thought to reside (Jazeel 2018:415). Nowhere is this re-signifying clearer than with the move of the legal capital outside the city limits in 1982 to Sri Jayawardenepura Kotte, the home of an ancient Sinhalese king (Jazeel 2013, 2018).²³ There, the new parliament building designed by Tropical Modernist Geoffrey Bawa contains multiple referents to the perceived Sinhala heartland (Jazeel 2013:119). This paradoxical process, of pointing outside to ‘the national’ while bringing the rural in, conveys how Colombo’s architecture continues to define nationalist discourses. It also reveals that efforts to limit the city’s importance have largely failed. Colombo remains central to the national imaginary.

Thus, configuring the national is often a dialectical process that requires some form of opposition. If Colombo is in ‘an extractive relationship with its constitutive outside’ (Jazeel 2018:412), then ideas and symbols continue to be ingested by the capital in order to define it. Only these ideas and symbols are then reflected back out again to ‘the national’, in order to define that. This relationship is always an exercise in negative thinking: pointing out what is not there in an effort to reveal what remains. This resonates with the majoritarian form of nationalism I described earlier, with Sinhala Buddhists enshrined as the dominant group, and others accommodated so long as they conform to the status quo. As Jazeel suggests, Minette de Silva’s Sinhala Buddhist aesthetics ‘serve (unwittingly) to position non-Sinhala others... as guests, to be tolerated by sovereign Sinhala hosts’ (Jazeel 2017:410). De Silva’s architectural legacy came at a difficult time, when Ceylon was trying to work out an anti-colonial nationalist legacy. Yet, the ethnic plurality of Sri Lanka, and therefore this complexity, remains. The centrality of Colombo in the national imaginary and these ongoing contestations about Colombo’s identity conveys the continued nature of this extractive relationship into the present. If Colombo is tied to Sri Lanka and cricket is centred on Colombo, then it stands that cricket may form an integral part of the formation of this national imaginary.

²³ Sri Jayawardenepura Kotte was initially outside the city but is now very much a suburb of Colombo.

A Brief History of Sri Lankan Cricket

Just as Sri Lanka is oriented towards Colombo, so too has cricket in Sri Lanka remained Colombo-centric (Roberts 2005:132). Cricket was part of British colonial life by the 1830s, but took a few decades to become established in the capital city (Brookes 2022). Colonial soldiers played the first game involving Europeans and Asians, as a combined British/Malay side took on Colombo Cricket Club (all European) in 1860 (Brookes 2022:21). The soldiers also played the first recorded fixture *between* Europeans and Asians, as the British took on their Malay colleagues at the parade ground on Slave Island in 1872 (*ibid*). The Malay Cricket Club was founded later that year, while a number of Burgher clubs combined to form the ‘Colts’ Cricket Club in 1873 (*ibid*). Cricket was then institutionalised with the advent of other clubs in the Colombo area (Roberts 2011:22). Arguably the Malays set the trend of establishing clubs along ethnic lines, with the Burgher Recreation Club, Tamil Union, Sinhalese Sports Club, and the antithetically named ‘Nondescripts’ Cricket Club all established by 1900. That the ethnic minorities of Ceylon were the first to take up cricket shows that participation in cricket has always been ethnically diverse, and this might explain the underlying sense that cricket is unifying. However, these minorities were the same urban elites who played the colonial system for their own gain, suggesting that this uptake was realistically unequal. Burghers and Tamils in particular held higher positions than other ethnicities vis-a-vis the British, and established shared networks through cricket (Brookes 2022). The development of Colombo as epicentre of cricket in Sri Lanka by the late 19th Century was driven by these elite ethnic minorities.

It was not the clubs but the schools that cemented cricket as a preserve of these elites, contributing to the association of the game with an upper-class character (Roberts 2011). Cricket has been central to the school system since the first ‘Big Match’ in 1879, between two of Sri Lanka’s oldest and most prestigious schools: Royal College and St Thomas’ College. Here, the predominantly Burgher students, ‘the top rungs of the social hierarchy below the British’ (Roberts 2011:22) were first to be taught cricket, though Buddhist missionary schools like Ananda and Nalanda quickly followed suit. With a foothold in the elite – and particularly Burgher – communities, the nature of cricket in Ceylon was essentially ‘anglophile’ (Roberts 2011). The incorporation of cricket in elite schools was not only a Colombo trend. Jaffna had a longstanding cricket scene established by their own Anglican schools, contributing men to

the national team as late as 1969,²⁴ while Kandy and Galle have an equally established heritage in their own elite colleges. The ‘Big Match’ season that occurs every March involves the playing out of numerous varsity fixtures between these oldest schools, a phenomenon I cover in Chapter 12. Schoolboy matches continue to draw huge crowds and are some of the biggest social events of the year, with ‘The Royal-Thomian’ drawing thousands of spectators. Although adults of the elite minorities were the first locals to play the sport, it was the British schooling system across the country that cemented cricket within a middle-class discourse that survives today.

These elite schools also explain why this assumption that cricket is unifying goes largely unquestioned today. These schools maintain a diverse intake, and while many have a specific religious character,²⁵ all invariably take in pupils of any ethnic or religious background. This may be explained by the tendency to draw pupils from the upper classes (who are themselves more ethnically and religiously diverse).²⁶ My interlocutors claimed that within the close-knit community of school cricket they mix with people of all ethnicities and religions, and suggested this is evidence that cricket is unifying. Likewise, as the majority of national players come from such elite colleges, most of their discourse also promotes inclusivity. Furthermore, the top handful of these elite colleges supplied an overwhelming number of prime ministers and presidents in Sri Lanka’s early years. This suggests that cricket and its modernist values of fairness and equality may have been part of rhetoric in government and have had disproportionate spread. However, while many middle-class people may indeed mix in these elite schools, this does not reflect the extent to which their lower-class counterparts do not. I was told by one NGO that around 100 schools in all of Sri Lanka have more than one language medium. The vast majority are either wholly Sinhala or Tamil. Any cricketing discourse of equality that might circulate in the elite colleges elides the fact that cricket elsewhere remains far less hybrid. Furthermore, until the world cup win in 1996, far fewer people outside of these elite schools played the game. While cricket has historically been portrayed as diverse and unifying, it has rarely been so in practice.

²⁴ C. Balakrishnan is the last Jaffna Tamil to play for the men’s national team. More recently, V. Viyaskanth has played a handful of under 19s games for Sri Lanka.

²⁵ Anglican at St Thomas’s, Catholic at St Joseph’s, Buddhist at Ananda & Nalanda, etc.

²⁶ This is now changing somewhat with the introduction of scholarships for students from poorer backgrounds.



Figure 6. The Ceylon squad on tour in South India, February 1947. This team includes several legends of Sri Lankan cricket and is very diverse: 6 Burghers, 3 Sinhalese, 2 Tamils and 1 Muslim. Photo courtesy David Heyn & Nicholas Brookes.

Understanding that this discourse is illusory is crucial, given the long-standing ties of cricket to Ceylonese and Sri Lankan nationalism. Cricket has been implicated in the project of nationalism since the first game between Europeans and Ceylonese in 1881 (Brookes 2022:31). The initial team picked to play the Europeans was made up entirely of Burghers, yet they chose to play under the name ‘Young Ceylon’, framing themselves in overtly nationalist terms (*ibid*).²⁷ The idea of a Ceylonese team was given even greater chance to cohere in the ensuing years. Due to Colombo’s position as a coaling station for travelling steamers, Ceylon was a popular stopping point, with cricket matches a common part of such layovers (*ibid*:33). These ‘whistlestops’ were initially informal affairs between passengers and locals, but as Colombo was a common stop for cricket teams on the way to Australia, this eventually developed into fully fledged tours between national teams, a practice that continued well into the 20th century.

²⁷ This name was styled after a Sri Lankan nationalist magazine, set up in 1850 following Mazzini’s ‘Young Italy’ movement (Brookes 2022:31)

Despite that first homogenous team, the following decades saw a very multi-ethnic group of players compete for Ceylon (Brookes 2022). With their greater capacity for participation in recreational sports, Ceylonese teams were dominated by these elite minorities, and hence until around 1970, cricket remained an ethnically and religiously diverse sport.

The second half of the 20th century saw Ceylon and then Sri Lanka play various visiting teams more often, establishing themselves as a cricketing nation on the world stage. The country put out increasingly stronger teams from the 1970s onwards, attending the first cricket world cups. In the 1980s, politician Gamini Dissanayake convinced the International Cricket Council to admit Sri Lanka to full test status in 1981, gaining Sri Lanka recognition as a world power in cricket. Concurrently, more Sinhalese cricketers came through the cricket system during this period, ensuring the national team took on a more majoritarian character, and increasing the appeal of cricket beyond the elite minorities. The present make-up of the national squad reflects this trend, being predominantly Sinhalese and predominantly Buddhist. Moulded by Sinhalese captain Arjuna Ranatunga, the Sri Lankan team grew together from the late 1980s until they won the country's first ever world cup in 1996. The game was suddenly a source of immense national pride, cementing the island's love affair with cricket (Roberts 2005). Almost overnight the Sri Lankan administration changed from an underfunded, mostly amateurish outfit into an organisation flush with cash, transforming cricket into something with real political power (*ibid*).²⁸ All this occurred despite the impact of the civil war on cricket in the north and east, suggesting this fervour for cricket followed a majoritarian idea of nationalism. However, stories abound of people in the war-torn areas of the *Vanni* going to great lengths to watch the game on television. Following the end of the war, at least in Colombo and the south, the dominant perception remains that the national team is multi-cultural, even though the demographic make-up strongly favours Sinhala Buddhists.

To conclude, the history of cricket is important as it illustrates why cricket is often associated with reconciliation today. Cricket in Sri Lanka began as a game played by ethnic minorities, and became closely implicated in the idea of a unified Ceylon. The assumption of unity became engrained due to the disproportionate influence of the elite schools in cricket (who maintain

²⁸ This has brought its own problems, with corruption and political games marring cricket administration.

an ethnically and religiously diverse intake), and this idea lingers into the present despite the increasingly Sinhalese character of the sport. The game remains something of an elite sport in Sri Lanka, mostly played by middle-class people who went to these elite schools, and as such it is they who continue to perpetuate this unifying ideal. Thus, the unifying ethos of these schools perpetuates a sense of unity that does not exist more broadly. The prominence of these schools in Sri Lankan cricket reveals why this idea of unity is readily accepted and rarely critiqued.

Sri Lankan Cricket Today

Despite the enduring popularity of cricket in Sri Lanka, there are many inequalities in participation. The most obvious is that there is surprisingly little ‘hardball’ cricket played in the country today. ‘Softball’ cricket is a huge part of recreational cricket, with regular tournaments played in parks across the country, yet this is seen as distinct from hardball and is often looked down upon.²⁹ I was frequently told that hardball players are advised not to play softball because it hinders the development of proper technique. While softball cricket is the version most people play across the island, it is hardball cricket that the national team competes in, where most reconciliatory power is imagined. Hardball is certainly seen as the ‘true’ form of cricket, even if many people lack the means to play it. While softball cricket is available to all, hardball remains largely the preserve of urban elites, usually centred on the schools and major Colombo clubs.

Though hardball cricket is seen as a career option by talented young players and some will achieve their goals, widespread participation is not really supported by the cricket board. The common ‘rags to riches’ trope that exists in Sri Lanka is rarely realised. As the professional cricket structure in Sri Lanka remains focused on Colombo, young cricketers pursuing a career find that all roads lead to Colombo (Roberts 2005:132). Colombo in effect harvests cricketers from the outstations, only reinforcing its importance to the cricketing structure. Many national players develop from infancy at the elite schools in Colombo, receiving excellent training and becoming professional cricketers before they reach adulthood. Other national players hailed as ‘finds from the outstation’ or ‘from humble beginnings’ actually finished their schooling on

²⁹ ‘Hardball’ is the original game played with a leather ball, while ‘softball’ is played with a tennis/rubber ball. Softball is usually a much shorter game.

scholarships at these same elite colleges.³⁰ The schools therefore retain excessive influence over the cricket structure. Even among these privileged few who can partake, the structure remains difficult to navigate.

Many boys attend cricket academies and work hard on their skills from a young age. However, there are increasingly varied demands put on a child's time by their parents, including numerous other extra-curricular activities and excessive levels of personal tutoring on top of regular schooling. Furthermore, with only an under 23's tournament below first team cricket, those aged 19-22 who do join a professional club may struggle to gain selection. As former cricketer Aravinda de Silva put it: 'with there being very little money in the game, many young men on the fringes...just couldn't sit and hope to be selected' (de Silva 1999:38). This effect is far worse for those whose home is not Colombo. Sri Lanka's corporate sector previously filled this gap, employing outstation cricketers and providing them with funding and capacity to train. As my informants told me, unfortunately this support has now fallen away. These factors mean boys are dissuaded from pursuing cricket by their parents, and encouraged to focus on more traditionally lucrative careers. The professional portion of a cricket structure in any country is necessarily narrow, but even so there are very limited opportunities in Sri Lanka and the path to the top is far from even.

How amateur hardball cricket is structured in Sri Lanka further reinforces inequalities in participation. In league cricket there are only three 'divisions'. While the first and second divisions are an appropriate size for the cricketing population, the third division – which covers the whole island – is enormous. Hundreds of teams are spread unevenly across the island, making organisation difficult. Beneath the professional Division 1 should exist Division 2, but instead there are myriad leagues which make up the second tier of cricket, including the Donovan Andree Tournament. Division 2 remained a mystery to me as few could tell me with any certainty how many teams or leagues it had, or how these progressed up to Division 1. I was instead told that Division 2 was semi-professional, incorporating a mix of former international players as much as complete beginners. Below Division 2 existed the 'All-Island

³⁰ A surprising number of current national players moved to Colombo around 16-17. Kusal Perera, Dimuth Karunaratne and Pathum Nissanka all began at small schools and moved to elite institutions in their late teens.

Division 3', the bottom rung of the league system and Sri Lanka's primary amateur league. This is the standard I played at. Division 3 ran in a tournament system each year, with the winner of a small local group of six teams progressing through many consecutive rounds until only two teams remained. This tournament system can drastically limit amateur cricket. If teams do not progress to the next round, their cricket is finished for the year. Getting knocked out in the first round means many amateur teams only play four or five games of official cricket, all clustered in the spring months. This tournament was also unfair as it tended to favour Colombo and the western province. In the quarter finals, four teams from the Western Province and four teams from the outstations compete for the trophy. This means that teams from the outstations have to progress through many more rounds to progress through the tournament. Essentially, teams from the outstations find it nearly impossible to play at a higher level. This severely limits the chances for true representation of minorities at professional and international level.

In summary, most people who play organised hard ball cricket are from the south-western regions and are well educated, or have been successful in outstation schools and made the trip to Colombo. Cricket remains difficult to participate in at a formal level, with the majority of cricketing talent locked into these areas. Of those who played at their schools, fewer still keep playing into adulthood. It is an expensive hobby, and participation seems affordable for only a few. The majority of people I played alongside were comparatively well off, and while there were some complaints about money, many of my teammates were capable of paying their fees without issue. Yet not only is hardball expensive, it is also remarkably limited for those who do play. Because of the tournament structure, most of the fixtures I played were friendlies, organised between teams of a similar standard, but very much on an ad-hoc basis. The lack of grounds to play on is also problematic. No amateur team owns their own ground, so teams have to rent somewhere for the day, which is expensive. Furthermore, the number of clubs in Colombo means we often rented grounds outside the capital, with both teams travelling from the city. Even if we wanted to play each weekend, we rarely did so. The expense of cricket, combined with the difficulty of staging matches and the lack of competition means that cricket is often an idea rather than an actual activity. For many cricket exists predominantly in memory, from school or their younger days before they had to give up or play far less.

This lack of physical engagement with hardball cricket in Sri Lanka highlights another flaw in the unifying claims that are often made for cricket. As ‘real’ hard ball cricket remains out of reach for many due to cost, it cannot be said that hardball cricket is a universal sport in Sri Lanka at present. This indicates why SDP efforts so often focus on widening access, especially in the outstations, as I describe in Chapter 11. Yet despite this lack of participation, cricket retains cultural resonance in Sri Lanka. For most of my informants, cricket is largely relegated to their childhood, to memories of school cricket, to the realm of rhetoric and discourse. This is especially true for those within the Tamil and Muslim minorities, for whom parental pressure to establish a career in an uncertain world is even greater. For many people in Sri Lanka, their engagement with hardball cricket is solely in watching the national team. Although the practice of cricket itself might not preclude unity, ideas about cricket and how these are deployed appear more important. Cricket as a social phenomenon can provide a medium through which people come to understand themselves and others.

The Cricketer as Ethnographer

My literature review makes it clear that to understand how reconciliation might relate to cricket, it is important to assess how people *engage* in cricket. The anthropology of sport advocates actively partaking in the sport under study (Sands 2002, Besnier et al. 2018) often through apprenticeship (Alter 1992, Downey et al. 2015), in order to access and understand the embodied knowledge that sports generate. Broader participant observation enables the ethnographer to place these practices within a wider context, while specific modes of interviewing expand understandings of this embodied knowledge and express how these understandings tie to wider social structures. Thus, anthropologists of sport engage in the fundamental tenets of ethnographic method, albeit heavily oriented towards participation, and usually with a specific focus on understanding the social meanings that sports produce in participants (Lithman 2004). To this end, I undertook ethnographic research in Colombo to understand the practices of cricket that occur today, and establish the place of cricket in Sri Lankan society.

As a cricketer from a young age, I already had a corpus of knowledge and bodily skills to draw from in the field. This experience has consequences for knowledge production that are worth detailing before I describe my methods in Sri Lanka. Having prior knowledge of a sport can

be both beneficial and problematic for ethnographers (Dyck 2010). My capacity to ‘talk’ the sport enabled me to access sites within the field more easily (Dyck 2000:29), while my skills meant I could participate at a certain level automatically.³¹ Overall my interlocutors enjoyed speaking to a fellow cricketer, and this meant establishing rapport with them was relatively easy. As I understand common idioms and shared many reference points, I could deploy these to access certain topics or fall back on them when interviews were tricky. However, Dyck suggests anthropologists who have participated in sport elsewhere carry vivid memories of their own into the field, which can reduce their capacity to notice idiosyncrasies during participant observation (Dyck 2010). Thus, doing ethnography of sport often requires an element of forgetting in order to objectify practice (*ibid*). As an amateur cricketer with limited experience of coaching, I felt the best way of doing this was to make a distinct effort to improve my game during my time in the field. I could not learn the game from scratch, but I could improve myself enough to understand the process. I entered into the apprenticeship mode, enabling me to effectively (re-)learn embodied knowledge in culturally sensitive ways (Downey et al. 2015). In fact, I found that my own memories and experiences could be fruitfully juxtaposed during participant observation, revealing differences that might not otherwise be apparent. If sport involves processes by which embodied meanings are shared and negotiated to become ‘reflective’ meaning (See Lithman 2004, Gore et al. 2012), then I contend that my prior knowledge of cricket allowed me to comparatively analyse these processes.

A Cross Section of Sri Lankan Cricket

In Sri Lanka, engagement with cricket takes many diverse forms. To explore cricket ethnographically is to pursue the social dimensions of this varied participation, be that playing, spectating or learning. To that end, Robert Sands’ suggested method for ethnography of sport is to focus on ‘cultural scenes’, that is social situations that include sport (2002:28). As a cricket fan, I entered the field with an idea of where I could seek out such cultural scenes. However, I quickly realised that as cricket is a leisure activity on which people spend a small proportion of their time, to study a single group or field site alone would be insufficient. I therefore undertook ethnographic fieldwork with numerous different actors in different sites around the city, all of whom engage with cricket in different ways. This multiplicity of engagement raises questions

³¹ My skills were comparable to those of my teammates and hence I was not working uphill to win selection for matches.

about how best to present a phenomenon like cricket. The idea of studying ‘people who enjoy cricket’ or the ‘cricket community’ – equally nebulous concepts – makes defining a field ‘site’ problematic. As I got to know more people, the sense of ‘a field’ did emerge, but the edges remained fuzzy. Furthermore, information gleaned from my time spent playing, spectating, and learning informed one other, without appearing explicitly connected. Depending on perspective, my fieldwork is arguably sited, multi-sited, or both. Following Candea (2007) I attempted to bound things by arbitrarily framing a field. But rather than be limited to the concept of a ‘site’, I preferred to conceive of cricket by way of a ‘cross-section’. One cannot capture the totality of engagements that make up a phenomenon like cricket, yet these disparate elements are in relation to one another, and must be presented together. By presenting a ‘cross-section’, I give a sense of the multiplicity of cricket in Colombo and highlight how varying elements interact. My field site therefore emerged from a number of potential framings. In this thesis, I focus on a predominantly Muslim amateur cricket team in Colombo.

From March 2018 to March 2020, I had two major stints in Colombo at two different locations in the city, totalling 19 months. In my first stint I spent 12 months in Mount Lavinia, a suburb a few miles south of central Colombo. While Mount Lavinia is thought of as outside ‘central’ Colombo, it remains part of the metropolitan area and is connected to the city by the main artery of Galle Road. My stay in the country was broken up due to the Easter Sunday bomb attacks. Without opportunity to participate in cricket, I returned home for the summer of 2019. In my second, seven-month stint I lived at the southern tip of Kollupitiya, a very centrally located district. Each neighbourhood had a distinctive atmosphere, both providing a sense of home and of being part of a community. However, I spent more of my time travelling around the city than I did in either location. Living in separate districts only reinforced that while Colombo has many diverse and distinctive districts, most people’s daily experience is of travelling between them. I was extremely fortunate that my personal networks spread organically. I played cricket, I watched cricket, I worked with coaches, I worked with NGOs. While my network grew mostly serendipitously, I remained aware that I was seeing a cross-section, and so I tried to ensure I was covering this as evenly as possible. Beginning with people I already knew from previous visits, I employed a purposive, snowball sampling strategy to access various cultural scenes, seeking out people I felt might best provide insights into cricket.

I rarely found this difficult, as people were mostly happy and even excited to help with a project on cricket.³²

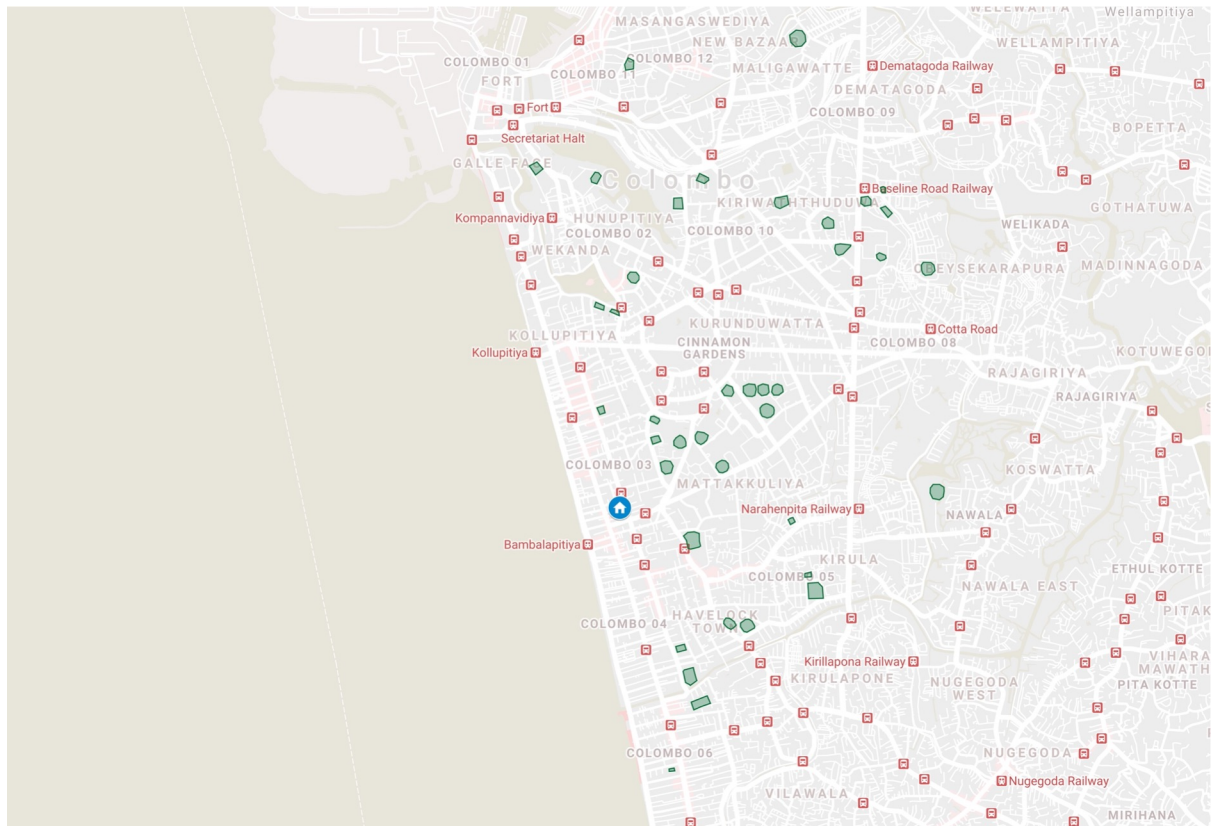


Figure 7. Map of central Colombo indicating cricket grounds (in green). Though many of these grounds are for softball, the majority are for hardball cricket.

In terms of playing, I limited myself to hardball cricket, primarily because it is understood to be the ‘true’ version of the game, and the one I play myself. Initially, I played a few games for a team called ‘Broncos’, but for most of my stay I had the privilege of working with ‘Titans Cricket Club’, a cricket team based in the suburb of Wellawatte, conveniently positioned between Kollupitiya and Mount Lavinia.³³ An amateur team who played in Division 3, their diverse membership was formed mostly of Muslims (75%), but included Tamil Hindus, Tamil Christians, and Sinhalese Buddhists. They were a relatively new team, founded in 2014, whom

³² One limitation of my research is a lack of information on women’s cricket. Due to the nature of organised men’s cricket, there was little scope to participate in women’s cricket in the same way. As the cricket scene is slowly but surely emerging in Sri Lanka, there is an excellent future project on women’s cricket awaiting someone.

³³ My time with Broncos amounted to less than a handful of games and did not involve any training.

I stumbled upon in typically serendipitous fashion.³⁴ During the early stages of fieldwork I needed to buy a cricket bat, as mine had broken only a few weeks before getting the plane. I soon found Fakhir – a Muslim who had lived in the UK for several years – through an ad posted on Facebook, and I went to meet him at one of the premier clubs, where his boys went to the academy. After the sale, we had a brief chat about my project, and he invited me to come along and play with them. I first attended training not long after, and in the end became firm friends with many at the club. During my stay I attended the regular Sunday training sessions, played in friendly matches and the Division 3 tournament for 2019. TCC were always a very friendly and fun group, who were passionate about cricket and took the game seriously. I describe TCC further in Chapters 3, 6, 7 and 8.

Much of my time studying coaching was spent with one man, Mohammed Arief.³⁵ I initially attended Arief's cricket academy at the local municipal ground every Saturday, for boys aged 5-15, where I occasionally helped if one of Arief's regular assistants was missing. I knew Arief had coached adults one-to-one, so I eventually asked him to coach me personally. I had individual training sessions at the same ground once a week. Arief's fortunes fluctuated throughout my fieldwork. His goal was to be a professional, full-time coach and he regularly applied for coaching jobs without success. I was very happy when he finally secured a position as the head coach of one of Colombo's premier division teams. I also assessed coaching at two of Sri Lanka's biggest professional clubs in Cinnamon Gardens, Colombo Cricket Club (CCC) and Nondescripts Cricket Club (NCC). Both have reputable private academies for boys. Here I watched the sessions and interviewed the staff, asking them about coaching techniques and approach. At CCC, I was extremely fortunate to watch one of the 'founding fathers of cricket coaching' in Sri Lanka still working well into his 80s. NCC is also essentially a private member's club, but I was fortunate to know two members who could help me gain membership. As the club was often very quiet during the day it was not a natural 'hanging out' spot for fieldwork, but it provided a means to meet new contacts who had some connection to the club. The NCC provided something of an entryway into middle-class Colombo life.

³⁴ *Serendib* was the Arabic name for Sri Lanka, and is the basis for the word serendipity. In my experience, the name is particularly fitting.

³⁵ I did not realise at first meeting, but Arief was the coach who had guided The Titans to some success years earlier. He was known to many of my interlocutors, cropping up as a reference point in multiple conversations.

Beyond these two primary settings, I did ethnographic fieldwork in numerous other places in order to understand the place of cricket in Sri Lankan society. In assessing SDP activities specifically, I worked with an NGO called the 'Foundation of Goodness' (FoG), which works towards the 'upliftment of rural people' across the country, providing opportunities usually only afforded to those in urban areas. The FoG brings sport into its rural development programmes, and has trained many athletes who now represent Sri Lanka. They run an academy in Seenigama in the south of the island, which promotes the development of talented youngsters in a variety of sports. The FoG are one of the few NGOs in Sri Lanka who actively use cricket and other sports for reconciliation. I also spent time at St Thomas's College, one of Sri Lanka's oldest and most prestigious private schools. In the run up to 'The Big Match' I watched the school's first XI play matches and undergo training. I was also extremely fortunate that the school's principal connected me with their 'old boys' network.

In order to get a perspective on the historical and cultural significance of cricket, I interviewed several respected journalists from the local media. I also delved into historical archives in Colombo, and collected a large amount of relevant social media content. Finally, I attended a variety of cricket matches. International matches provided an opportunity to consider Sri Lankan nationalism, while domestic games showed the lack of interest in professional cricket below the national level. Conversely, schools' games and softball tournaments illustrated the more carnivalesque elements of Sri Lankan cricket. Watching academy matches provided some insight into coaching and the teaching of cricket and its accompanying values, while observing and participating in friendly hardball matches reflected a certain group ethos. Often, watching international cricket at the bar with my friends was just as informative as attending cricket games in person.

Lastly, I also spent more than six weeks in Jaffna, spread across three visits.³⁶ Here, I tried to capture a similar cross section, but focused on understanding what the future of cricket means for people in the north. To this end, I worked at St John's college, interviewing teachers there and observing schools' cricket, spent time at a cricket academy for youth, interviewed workers at local NGOs and also did further archival work. Despite the lack of organised amateur

³⁶ I would have liked to spend longer in Jaffna, but my initial trip was cut short after being hospitalised for Dengue.

hardball cricket, Jaffna was essentially a microcosm of my Colombo site. This revealed perceptions in the north, and formed an exceptionally useful comparison.

Watching, Playing, Talking Cricket

By participating in cricket in Sri Lanka, I was able to assess the practices of cricket from both an individual and communal perspective. While I enjoyed attending training, playing in matches, and being coached, participant observation was not without its difficulties. Although participant observation is a logistical fallacy in all ethnography, I found that the distinction between participating and observing was more acute in sport. Particularly during physical activity, I struggled to both participate and observe. Sri Lanka is a tough environment for anyone to play cricket, and I found my mental resources were often drained. When playing or training I therefore made very conscious decisions about what to concentrate on, either focusing on the game itself when my own performance was critical, or observing the events unfolding during down times. While this means I missed certain things during game time, it meant I could play my part and contribute to the team. This distinction also manifested when keeping notes. I quickly stopped physically writing notes during training sessions and matches, because writing while running is impossible, and I found myself struggling to catch up during breaks. Instead, I kept scratch-notes on my phone, which was also less conspicuous as many of my teammates looked at their phones during breaks. In general, the physicality of the field was one of the biggest hurdles as an ethnographer of sport. I quickly recognised maintaining my own fitness was crucial to participating fully. This was most apparent in my recovery from dengue, which left me comparatively weak for many months after hospitalisation. I found I had even less energy during training sessions and had to manage my own effort carefully. My coach saw this change immediately and we adjusted my training plan accordingly.

This issue with choice of focus also manifested more generally during fieldwork. Because cricket is a leisure activity, many potential activities were clustered together on the weekend, and I had to make tough choices about what to attend. For example, I missed several Saturday matches for TCC because I was working with the FoG at an event down south. At other times during the week, I had comparatively little to attend, making the issue starker. So, although the cross section I had developed allowed me to grasp a wider range of cricketing activity, the overall *lack* of activity from any one group meant that there was rarely a sense of momentum.

This feeling was compounded by the nature of urban ethnography; I lived alone in Colombo and therefore felt quite isolated at times. Having to always venture out impacted the sense of being ‘in’ the field, with participants rarely coming to me or (helpfully!) intruding. Overall, the rhythm of fieldwork was tricky to maintain, and I often found it hard to maintain my motivation. To combat this, I thought of the cross-section as a series of mini projects, which helped me to see progress and tie activities together despite their separation in time or space.

Compared with participant observation, my interviews were a welcome opportunity to explore cricket in a more relaxed setting. My interlocutors invariably enjoyed talking about cricket, and were usually very glad to be asked to participate. These interviews ran the spectrum from casual chats through to formally structured elicitation interviews. Most were semi-structured interviews, designed to explore the discourses that surround cricket and assess how people take meanings from cricket into their wider lives. I conducted around 70 in total with people from across the cross section, and each lasted around 1-3 hours. As I focused on narration and discourses, most interviews began with a ‘life history with cricket’, wherein I asked each interlocutor to explain their own involvement with the game. This was then followed by questions drawn from a set of wider themes, which I tailored to each interlocutor based on their position in the project. I primarily followed the interviewee’s interests, but returned to specific questions as needed. These interviews were of varying success. I found that most people were very happy and eager to dig into the ideas I presented them with, but some simply weren’t used to thinking about cricket in an abstract manner. I did repeat interviews with interlocutors who were particularly knowledgeable and more adept at this kind of thinking as appropriate, while I also found that joint interviews – particularly with teammates – were a great way to generate discussion around cricketing discourses in more difficult settings.

Beyond exploring the ideas of cricket, I focused on the narration of cricketing practice itself during interviews. I was particularly interested in how practice might link directly to narration, which reveals how persons manage discourses in the act of doing. Yet as Downey et al. note, interviewing people about sport can be difficult, as often a researcher’s ‘explicit questions provoked formulaic recitation of accepted orthodox thinking,’ (Downey et al. 2015:193). To avoid this, I did occasionally employ the explicitation technique popularised by Vermersch (1994,1999, see also Maurel 2009), which promotes introspection in the interlocutor by making

them relive a memory of practice. More often, I followed a similar mode of questioning when discussing practice, focusing on feeling or knowing, like ‘how does it feel when?’ or ‘how do you know when [x has happened]?’ (See Gore et al. 2012:136). In general, I employed a phenomenological approach in all my interviews (c.f. Jackson 1996), wherein I focused on each individual’s lived experience of cricket. To access embodied practice more overtly, I also undertook several ‘self-confrontation’ interviews, where a body-mounted camera is used to film practice and access decision making (See Gore et al. 2012). I strapped a GoPro to a cricket helmet – which my interlocutors wore while batting – before meeting to watch and discuss the footage a few days later. This enabled some access to the verbalisation process and revealed insights on the management of discourse that inform Section IV. In all instances of discussing practice in interviews, knowledge was certainly overtly co-produced, and here my capacity as a cricketer was helpful as it allowed me to understand my interlocutor’s framing of their practice.



Figure 8. Tariq and I review his SCT footage.

Visual media were integral for my work and aided both participant observation and the interviews on practice. I took thousands of photographs and hundreds of videos in the field, both for purely recording purposes and for evoking a particular sense of the field. Due to the difficulties with note taking I often used a GoPro to film training sessions, which were used

later to go over practice. This was particularly important for coaching one-to-one with Arief, where breaks were limited, and I had to devote my entire attention to him. Photos were generally used for capturing settings and scenes, yet in the spirit of multi-modality (Dattatreyan & Marrero-Guillamón 2019), I believe these photos are integral contributions to my ethnographic writing. These photos are therefore presented as ethnographic objects in their own right. Some of these materials – particularly videos of practice – were requested by my interlocutors and I carefully assessed the ethical impact this could have before releasing them.³⁷



Figure 9. Arief offers me advice during one of our one-to-one coaching sessions.

In carrying out this ethnography I have not only remained cognisant that acting ethically in the field is a constant process which requires a certain approach to problems and sense of reflexivity. I have largely followed the ASA ethical guidelines (2011) in the field, and sought advice from the ESRC guidelines on visual research (2008). Ethical quandaries were thankfully limited, largely due to the nature of the topic, but any problematic situations were handled

³⁷ I write about this more in Hildred & Neuhaus (*forthcoming*).

with appreciation of local contexts. I always tried to anticipate potential harms ahead of time. I employed verbal consent throughout this fieldwork due to a local distrust of written documents. If anything, I struggled sometimes to get interlocutors to understand the gravity of this consent, as many were very willing to participate in my research without much thought. I therefore often reviewed this consent with my interlocutors, as I wanted to ensure they were aware of the potential ramifications of publication. The interlocutors that appear named in this text have all been anonymised, save for a few who requested their real names be used. Those who appear in photos have given their consent specifically for this, while efforts have been made not to use photos which show full faces. Lastly, in writing this text I have tried to anticipate issues of friction between teammates by using pseudonyms, and sought to present any contentious issues within the club in a balanced and straightforward fashion.

SECTION I CONCLUSION

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF CRICKET IN SRI LANKA

In setting the scene for this thesis, I have begun to unravel the complexities of cricket in Sri Lanka. I have highlighted that the basic claims made for cricket are flawed and worthy of greater study. Furthermore, I have shown these claims raise more fundamental questions in Sri Lanka that are important to address. This delineation of Sri Lankan cricket and my Colombo field site raises some of the themes and nuances that run throughout my findings. Now, I turn towards my ethnographic material proper. First, I provide an assessment of the various cricketing spaces that exist in Sri Lanka, and explore local understandings of what happens in such spaces. I contend that the kinds of social experimentation these liminal spaces enable deal with fundamental social concerns, and are often at the level of the ‘Sri Lankan’. I argue that global ideas about sport and local ideas of ritual merge to suggest that cricketing spaces are a place for the *safe enactments of difference* in Sri Lanka. This idea has ramifications for how social interaction is mediated within cricketing activity, which I explore in the rest of the thesis.

In subsequent chapters, I map out the various tensions that emerge when individual and collective interests come into conflict. My ethnographic work within one particular cricket club – TCC – suggests that in the supposedly egalitarian and meritocratic realm of an amateur cricket club, persons experience the same constraints as they do in the ‘real’ world. People must learn how to manage themselves and their relationships to diverse others. In that regard I deal with a classic sociological problem, that of understanding how persons navigate the social structures that surround them. What is particularly illuminating when examining this navigation is how people move back and forth between the two modes of thinking – individual and collective – when managing these tensions. Within the broader context of cricket for reconciliation, this ethnography details the potential and limits of the relations that sport can produce. I argue that the very social structures sport promotes tend to constrain individuals into certain modes of action. In the final third of the thesis, I examine the ideas of change that are present in cricket, and the ramifications that this constraint has for individuals. By exploring this oscillation between individual and collective, the stories that people tell about

themselves and others, I show that while people believe sport is something that changes people, it effectively promotes social regulation. As such, although cricket appears to offer a vehicle for change, this is one that is largely constrained to the individual level, and doesn't invite introspection on the nature of the system itself.

SECTION II
CRICKETING SPACES

INTRODUCTION

CRICKETING SPACES

In Section II I begin to deploy my ethnographic material, describing the kinds of places where cricket occurs. Drawing from my observation and participation in various realms of cricket, I show that there are common features among these places that evoke a generalised idea of *the* cricketing space. Then, I look at the use and management of this cricketing space to illustrate what is understood to happen there. The contrast I raised earlier between Nandy and Appadurai is helpful for thinking about this use of space. In arguing that cricket appeals to underlying South Asian social preoccupations, Nandy might suggest the use of space at the cricket ground reflects specifically Sri Lankan concerns (1989). Conversely Appadurai might frame the cricket ground as a liminal space of pure ‘experimentation’ outside of society, where participants join together in imagining new, better futures (Appadurai 1996:90). Just as I have suggested sport reflects *and* constitutes social norms (Lithman 2004:23, Besnier et al 2018), I will show here that it is both. There are ideas at play in the cricketing space that suggest the expression of fundamental social concepts, yet the cricketing space is also understood to be an arena of experimentation with such social values. With this ethnographic material I begin to illustrate more concretely what kinds of ideas are experimented with in cricket. This also indicates further reasons regarding why people think cricket could be reconciliatory. At the end of the chapters that comprise this section, I will argue these various dynamics suggest that the cricket ground is a place for the performance of ‘safe enactments of difference’.

CHAPTER 3

TITANS CRICKET CLUB

Scenes: Sunday Morning

Idris twirls his bat around in front of me, mimes as if to play a shot, once, twice. I stand and take the bat from him, feel its weight, wave it around, also imitate a shot or two. I grab a ball, bouncing it off the willow, imagining how it must feel to strike the ball more powerfully. We both nod in appreciation: Idris's new bat looks lovely.

It is early on a Sunday morning, and we are gathered in the shade beneath the corrugated iron roof of Bandara Park's pavilion, waiting for more people to arrive so our session can begin. As ever, people are late, turning up slowly but surely.

We joke with Yugan, a Tamil Hindu – who can see the ground from his apartment window – for not being the first here. He raises his palm to the sky in frustration, and pithily responds that there is no point if we never start at 8:30 as planned.

We lounge on the beige plastic bleachers, quietly watching another Division 3 team already out on the ground, being put through their paces by a coach. He is drilling them keenly, pushing each player to run through a course of cones before hitting a catch at them with fearsome pace. I can almost feel a hint of envy emanating from my friends as we observe them.

Tariq – or 'Uncle Ankle' as I have affectionately dubbed him, owing to his grand old age of 37 and propensity for complaining about joints below the knee – turns up nursing a hangover. He is a short, solid Malay man, who is Muslim but has a weak spot for arrack. He groggily informs me of his night spent with a current Sri Lankan cricketer in Mount Lavinia, a mate from his days playing in the hotel chain softball league. I offer him my water bottle, and he guzzles down half.

It's almost 9:15 now, but there is real reluctance to start, as though no one is keen to take command. I am itching to go, pulling on my cricket boots and my cap, eager to get things

going if no one else will. Fortunately, the captain turns up, and there is seemingly enough collective impetus to drag us out onto the field.

Without so much as a word, we start to jog together, up and down the side of the ground in unison. The formula is roughly the same each week, so things progress smoothly and without overt direction. There is only the slightest pause at the end of each run, before we decide as though by telepathy to turn around and go for another shuttle.

Once we've done enough warming, we spread out into a circle, and Tariq is invited to lead the stretches, clapping once between each movement. Arfan and I laugh and joke around while we stretch. Ours is a mostly physical humour, and we pretend to be horrendously hungover too, imitating Tariq's stiff, heavy motions. Sat on the ground, Arfan acts out a dirty joke while we stretch our groins, and we all laugh. The atmosphere is relaxed, easy.

We shake off the stretches and meander out onto the field. First, we do fielding: a mixture of ground fielding and high catches, throwing the ball back in to a wicket keeper. Then, we're told to take a high catch before running in to take a low catch hit fast at us. Aqil has taken the keeper's gloves, while Tariq has the bat, and they try to pump up the intensity, forcing us round quicker by shouting and encouraging. I notice that the newer guy, Diyon, is offered easier opportunities, while the better fielders like myself and Idris get the tougher chances. Once we've been going for about 45 minutes, we're told to come in close, take five clean catches, then go and sit down with some water. Again, these chances are moderated, with the ball being fiercely hit at those more capable. Some of us are already tired, and Imran gets stuck on four catches. He is hit an easy opportunity for his last catch to end his mini session.



Figure 10. 'Uncle Ankle' focuses on his batting.

After a little break, a solid ten minutes of shade, water, chatting and more jokes, we head into the nets to go and do some batting and bowling. I'm offered the opportunity to bat first with Aqil and I take it. I do well, hit a few balls very cleanly and get some compliments. Tariq and I chat about batting between my sets of ten balls, commenting on the work I've been doing with my coach, Arief. I go back out and bowl after I'm done, and I joke with Arfan as we stand at the top of our marks, being silly while we wait for our turn.

By 10:45 it's far too hot to carry on, and almost everyone has retreated under the pavilion roof again. In the end there's only time for three or four batsman, something which always takes me by surprise. Though there are around 10 of us today, not even half get an opportunity to do more than field and bowl a few balls. No one seems overly worried however, and everyone's spirits are high. We sit and talk for nearly half an hour, first about the new phone Aqil has bought, while Asad explains his fledgling cosmetic business. Slowly but surely, some of the guys peel away, before the bulk of us walk 100 yards up the road to a small shack, where 'Pol Uncle' gets out the good coconuts he has been saving for us.³⁸ We each have one of these *Thaembili*, refreshing reward for another hard session in the heat.³⁹

³⁸ In Sinhala, 'Pol' means coconut.

³⁹ *Thaembili* (Lit: 'orange') refers to the King-Coconut, a popular coconut for drinking in Sri Lanka.



Figure 11. Enjoying a post-training *Thaambili*.

A Sri Lankan Cricket Team

Each Sunday, Bandara Park was full of different people from different places coming together for a similar purpose: to enjoy cricket. In particular, Titans Cricket Club possessed a wealth of characters, each with their own background, concerns, beliefs and ideals. Like many other training sessions I attended, sociality was regulated through a mixture of cricketing rhetoric, simple practicality, and/or humour. The scene above prompts many questions I explore throughout this thesis, such as how people understand their place in a group, how tensions between members are managed, and how individuals go about improving themselves. In the context of reconciliation, the presence of such diversity raises questions about how this multi-ethnic group operates. For now, I outline some more fundamental details about The Titans as a club, the particular activities they undertake, and how people carry out these activities. In doing so I describe what people seemed to enjoy about cricket, which indicates that my interlocutors treat cricket very seriously, that they enjoy competition, and they often desire to be *tested*.

Foundation and Setup

The Titans were founded in 2015, after a few friends broke away from another hardball club, discontent with the training regime and lack of enthusiasm there. This led them to start their own team, determined to achieve success in the Division 3 tournament. They established themselves quickly, pulling in their friends and recruiting other players via social media. They soon amassed a core of about 40 players and secured a coach, under whom they progressed through to the second stage of the Division 3 tournament in successive seasons. When I met them in mid-2018, the team had regressed slightly, with a membership that had dropped to around 25, and they were without a coach. Fortunately for me, they picked up again in late 2018, determined to do well in the upcoming Division 3 tournament of April 2019.

Like many amateur clubs in Sri Lanka, The Titans was conceived of and run much like a business. As an institution, it was certainly ‘incorporated’ as such. The three men who founded the club pitched in their own capital to pay for the Division 3 entry fees, and they were collectively referred to as the ‘team management’. Unlike in the UK, where an Annual General Meeting would be held to select a committee, the team management remained in place indefinitely. Financially the club was also managed like a business. Fees were charged to

members for entry to the club and for annual subscriptions, while management had also previously offered financial incentives for good performances, and these were paid out in the hope the club would gain success further down the line. It was not always clear where these funds were utilised, and issues arose when other members queried this. There was even talk of selling the ‘rights’ to the club in the 2020 season, as Division 3 had become exorbitantly expensive for new clubs to enter. The managers could feasibly sell the rights to the club for far less than the SLC asked for and still make a profit.⁴⁰ This murky hierarchy made things a little unclear in terms of who was really in charge. Often the lack of transparency about funds was counterbalanced by management suggesting they were often out of pocket. All of the three at some point in time talked about how they had pitched in their personal funds to cover the club. There were often issues about paying on time and several members owed hundreds if not thousands of rupees in dues.

Activities

Involvement with TCC revolved around two main things: training, and playing matches. Throughout my fieldwork, we trained regularly on Sunday mornings for around 2-3 hours at their base in Bandara Park, a local municipal ground in the suburb of Wellawatte. We began around 8:30/9:00am, stopping whenever things got too hot to continue, or when we had simply had enough. These weekly sessions punctuated my time in Sri Lanka and gave my fieldwork much of its rhythm. Over the two years I attended many sessions and saw the club ebb and flow over time. Occasionally indoor sessions were held in another suburb further away from the centre, particularly on weeknights when matches were organised for the weekend. Training was relatively open ended, with indistinct timings. We usually hung around for a while after training, mostly discussing cricket, but also business, family, politics, gossip, someone’s latest phone, etc. We then usually proceeded down the lane to a small shack where we drank *Thaembili* (king coconut), before making our way home. After some rest and writing of field-notes, I often met Tariq and/or Vimal later on a Sunday evening to hang out and have a beer in a local hotel bar, watching whatever sport happened to be on.

⁴⁰ Due to the 2022 economic crisis, TCC made further moves to sell the club. They backed down at the last minute when it became clear they couldn’t sell in time for the new season.



Figure 12. The nets at Bandara Park.

The playing of matches ostensibly revolved around the Division 3 season, the first part of which occurs every April to June. However due to the tournament's short length, many friendlies were arranged throughout the year, and we essentially played more friendlies than league games. Membership and attendance at TCC training and matches generally ebbed and flowed around the Division 3 tournament, and both years I was present, numbers were generally highest in the period after Christmas (which formed the pre-season) and during the main season. Matches took place at weekends, or occasionally on *Poya* days when they occurred mid-week.⁴¹ Unfortunately, I played in only a handful of league matches for TCC, due to being signed for another club (Broncos) earlier in my fieldwork.⁴² I played in the majority of the Division 3 season of 2019, before the Easter Sunday attacks curtailed it, and much of my information on matches and The Titans' approach to cricket comes from these games. Other than division matches, I attended and played in several friendlies. We sought to play friendlies with other local teams, often from the same division and usually through a friendly contact with one player or another.



Figure 13. Arfan cracks a joke at a warmup game.

⁴¹ *Poya* is the Buddhist full moon festival, a monthly day off for everyone.

⁴² Due to the length of the Division 3 season, this meant I actually only missed two or three potential league games for The Titans.

Ethnic Makeup

The Titans were a multi-ethnic team. The predominantly Muslim and Tamil character of Wellawatte is reflected by TCC's mostly Muslim member base (around 75%), yet their membership remained broad, with various denominations of Muslims (Moors, Memons, Malay, Mowlani), Tamil Hindus and Christians, and Sinhalese Buddhists. Despite the ethnic diversity, generally many of these men were of the same economic class, if not 'middle-class' then certainly better off than many of their fellow Sri Lankans.⁴³ Many held skilled tertiary jobs, often in the technology sector like graphic designer or web designer, or had their own businesses selling various products including textiles, cosmetics and clothing.⁴⁴ While they were by no means 'rich', many of these men clearly had disposable income, owned the latest smartphones and laptops, had decent cars or motorcycles. That they played hardball cricket, a game which requires not insubstantial capital indicates their economic status. My informants were generally multi-lingual, highly mobile people. Many spoke English as their first language, and were equally proficient in English, Sinhala and Tamil. Some had travelled abroad for business or pleasure, others had family abroad, a few had attended university in the UK and the US, while some had trained at a UK university campus in Colombo.⁴⁵ Like many Muslims globally, my Muslim teammates were international people who often went on Hajj or Umrah, and interacted with the world in a way consistent with other Islamic communities in South Asia (McGilvray 2011).

The Titans were proud of their diversity. In the wake of the Easter Sunday attacks this was very overtly performed. Several members of the team from non-Muslim backgrounds posted about the club on social media, stating their solidarity with their Muslim friends, and pride at being part of a multi-ethnic group. Several people also offered to go to the mosque with any members of the club who asked, following the trend of 'protecting' the mosques from anti-Muslim backlash. However, for the majority of my fieldwork this pride manifested in more casual ways, such as wishing the other religious groups well on their holy days. My Muslim

⁴³ 'Middle-Class' in Sri Lanka is something of a misnomer. As Michael Roberts puts it, these people are still among the 'top rungs of the social hierarchy' (2011:22)

⁴⁴ Interestingly, many of my informants noted that they were dissuaded from cricket early by their parents (even on a recreational level), and were encouraged to take up jobs instead. I discuss these matters in Chapter 9.

⁴⁵ There are now many UK universities represented in Colombo.

teammates often prayed at the ground, rolling out prayer mats and taking the opportunity to observe their religion in appropriate breaks of play. People seemed aware and supportive of these needs, doing duties when others were indisposed. During Ramadan, most of the team fasted, and often it was only two or three of us on match days who had drinks or took lunch. Training sessions during Ramadan were often taken at a slower pace or scrapped altogether. In general, the religious behaviour of my teammates was nothing other than simply ordinary and tacitly accepted. Altogether, I never encountered any religious based conflict between groups during my time with The Titans, and found that Islam was simply experienced without issue. It did not dictate the social relations at the club any more than the more prominent marker of class did. If anything, cricketing discourses played a far greater role in moderating the behaviour of my interlocutors. I do not wish to minimise out of hand the importance of Islam in this context, but instead stress that my interlocutors often spoke about ‘negotiation’. This highlighted they were aware of how their religion is perceived by others, and go to some efforts to minimise impact where they can.

The Cricketer Among Cricketers

The Titans were an incredibly welcoming and friendly club, and the experience of playing with and for them was mostly one of joy. As an amateur cricketer from the UK, I brought with me a certain understanding of how one trains and plays cricket, an understanding that changed during my time in the field. As I experienced cricket in Sri Lanka, I moved from merely noticing very apparent differences, to incorporating this knowledge into my existing worldview. Playing cricket with The Titans changed how I approach and enjoy cricket. Here, I detail fundamental aspects of this experience, indicating how members of The Titans approached the game, and how the group as a whole carried themselves.

Moderating Intensity

My first sessions with The Titans generally felt like they had a lower intensity when compared to my own training in the UK. Initially, I thought people did not take the game too seriously. We rarely started on time, people came late or left early, and throughout the session people simply stopped participating for a while to go and rest, drink water and sit under the shade of the pavilion roof. Even during fielding drills designed to increase group intensity, I noticed people taking it easy when they could. This approach was often blamed by others on the lack

of a coach, but it felt as though this lower intensity was expected regardless. People were rarely, if ever, reprimanded for sitting by the side-lines. Initially at least, I perceived that there was a very laidback approach to cricket in Sri Lanka.

It was not long before I realised that this was actually a very pragmatic approach to cricket. Sri Lanka is hot all year round, and during the cricket season temperatures regularly reach around 35°C, and there is high humidity. The heat and atmosphere was something my informants remarked upon as much as I did, and they seemed very aware of these difficulties and their risks. People were particularly keen to avoid overexertion and exhaustion. Various practical measures were taken to mitigate against these risks, such as training early in the day, during the coolest hours, and ensuring a good supply of water and shade. But barring this, the only other reasonable measure was to moderate intensity. In my experience in the UK, effort is sustained more evenly over the course of a training session and seen as the marker of a good work out. In Sri Lanka, the heat makes doing any physical exercise difficult and sustained effort at times intolerable. People therefore worked hard in short bursts, with reasonably long breaks in between as appropriate. This is helped by the nature of cricket, which is naturally comprised of discrete chunks of time (bowling a ball for example), so it was often relatively easy to take a break. Especially during down times and before friendly games, energies were conserved, and reserved for when they were really needed.

Generally, what I first saw as a laidback approach to cricket was really a concern about fitness and health. Cricket was seen by my Muslim teammates as an opportunity to fulfil the Islamic prescription for exercise and improve their health, while the benefits of fitness were recognised by all team members. Yet more importantly, channelling this fitness appropriately was also seen as crucial to cricketing success. During interviews, many of my interlocutors – including some coaches – claimed fitness was the foundation of cricketing prowess. This initially took me by surprise, given that cricket is very much a skill-based game. Many of my teammates emphasised to me that I should work on my fitness outside of training, and often blamed their own failures on being unfit rather than being out of practice. This focus on maintaining and improving fitness aligns with how exertion appeared not to be suffered so much as simply dealt with. People drank water as required, and sharing of water was a constant. If a bottle of water was nearby, someone was drinking from it, no matter who brought it. Teammates took it easy

when they could, while I was often encouraged to moderate my effort accordingly so as not to get into trouble.⁴⁶ The requirements of exertion were dealt with pragmatically at all times. Clearly without fitness, one cannot even train, never mind play a game. I found out just how hard training can be early on during my fieldwork, and realised that fitness was indeed the foundation of cricketing prowess, as without it one cannot develop skills. This would explain why fitness is prized, especially when coaching younger players.



Figure 14. Arfan and I clown around as we do our stretching.

These fluctuations in intensity during training were replicated during games, too. In general, for friendlies people were very laidback. They turned up late, didn't warm up, took their time moving the game along, and generally took things easier. I found the relaxed atmosphere almost infectious, as though something about the tropical heat induced a laziness and haze that descended on the act of play itself. Despite the relaxed atmosphere, once play resumed people almost immediately switched back into a very competitive and serious mode. Unlike friendlies in the UK, where players arrive with a laidback attitude but then generally play with laidback attitude, with The Titans it was far more fluctuating, with relaxed attitudes turning to steely resolve almost instantly. My teammates take the game seriously, no matter the level

⁴⁶ Sometimes my teammates had genuine concerns about me getting heatstroke, particularly on really hot days.

of play, and were generally more passionate during a match than my cricketing friends at home. It felt therefore as though the ebbs and flows of the game were exaggerated. It was only with the official Division 3 league matches that effort was sustained over the entirety of the match day. We turned up in unison, long before the start of play, took a full warm up as a squad, were prepped with a team talk by the captain, then got ourselves individually ready for the match. While the players maintained the same high levels of competitiveness they did for a friendly, I noticed that Division 3 matches *felt* very different, no doubt down to the approach and resulting atmosphere. It was only until the end of the day that people began to relax again, once their part in the match was over.

Celebrations and Markers

There seemed to exist discrete times for ‘real’ cricket, when efforts were kept high. These were the times when competitiveness and intensity were maintained to a certain level. I believe much of this is down to the joy of competition. People enjoyed challenging themselves and each other, and were rarely lenient towards others when competing. I fell foul of this during one of my first training sessions. In what I assumed was a trivial knockabout, I was run out, and it was certainly close enough to give me the benefit of the doubt (something I would have done if there was a new person at my own training back home). However, people were adamant I was out, and after the briefest of discussions the decision remained, no second chances given. During matches, this love of competition is shown most clearly by the avid celebrations people make when they succeed, and their efforts to mark the cricketing event out as special.

I’ve noted in the past that Sri Lankan priorities at cricket matches seemed geared towards entertainment (Hildred 2017). There is something similarly extravagant about the way my teammates celebrate success and *what* they choose to celebrate. Individual milestones were to my mind, wildly celebrated. Often at home, all you will get from a batsman upon reaching the score of 50 is a small raise of the bat towards the home team. In Sri Lanka, the 50s I witnessed were accompanied by a lot of running and waving the bat around wildly, taking the helmet off and saluting the team. Similarly, the home team took even greater delight than I was used to, standing and applauding and whooping. Wickets were often equally celebrated, with the bowler usually running around the field, followed by players streaming in his wake. These

styles of celebration reached their apex at the Royal Thomian game, where the thousands-strong crowd made these celebrations seem truly enormous. Such celebrations were also evident for team milestones. Clapping of each individual run was the norm, while celebration of the milestones such as 50, 100, 150 runs etc was carefully announced by members of the team to the rest, including the batsmen out in the middle. This was followed by consistent applause and sometimes cheering. Thus, it seems that milestones are clearly meant to be marked, and there was real enjoyment derived from doing this. The theatrical nature of the celebration further reflected that cricket was an opportunity to revel in success.

Celebrations were not the only markers of success. The idea of ‘treats’ is a relatively new social practice in Sri Lanka, where someone who is celebrating a milestone or some personal success provides others in a group with some kind of snack or beverage. There was often a running joke within the team about this, poking fun at the ritual. Calls for treats were made in the group WhatsApp chat or at training whenever it was someone’s birthday, or whenever someone made runs/took wickets during the previous game. This happened to me after scoring 43 at a match one Wednesday. At training the following Sunday, they said that I should be the one to buy the *Thaembili* (king coconut) for everyone after the session had finished. Although this was a running joke with no expectations of fulfilment, (I made to pay for the *Thaembili* but was told not to) wins were always seemingly celebrated with treats. At our first league match a cake suddenly appeared along with various bottles of soda, and I was invited to have some. When I asked why it was there the response was simply “because we won”. Similarly at other games food seemed to magically appear whenever a win was imminent. Who receives these treats is important, as I will discuss in Chapter 8. Other markers existed too, such as the taking of photographs, usually team selfies. This seemed a requirement of any win with The Titans. Selfies between other members of the squad was equally common, and as a foreigner I seemed to be a favoured option for a photo. As I discuss in Chapter 4, pictures are common markers of an event, and the fact that we take team selfies almost solely after wins is evidence that they serve as important markers of celebrated milestones. The idea of the team, of group relations and coherence was reinforced by the taking of a group photo, and the event was therefore elevated and marked out as special by all participants.

A Serious Endeavour

The Titans are a group of people who are passionate about cricket. The fundamentals detailed here suggest that people at TCC generally took cricket very seriously and celebrated their successes in a similar vein. The management of intensity suggests a desire to funnel this passion appropriately in the hopes for success, while celebrations during games suggests that individuals relished the chance to earn this success. Though it is clear members of TCC enjoyed being together as a team, these factors indicate that perhaps what appealed about cricket most to my interlocutors was the opportunity for competition and individual agency, the chance to measure oneself and receive the appropriate reward. As I now go on to describe this idea of measuring oneself is often discussed through the idiom of *testing*.

A Desire to be Tested

Competition was clearly something that appealed to my interlocutors. Time and again throughout my fieldwork, the idea of ‘testing’ emerged as a way to describe this appeal. Furthermore, many of my interlocutors were clearly concerned with regulating the difficulty of cricketing activity. As I described in the opening scene, our training drills were often tailored for less talented individuals, or when struggling teammates needed help. Later, I will describe how coaching drills with children were modified to foster a sense of equality. Most commonly however, the tendency I saw was to emphasise difficulty. A sense of competition was usually incorporated into the cricket training I participated in and among others I observed. Many of my teammates were concerned with testing themselves, as well as others. Brought together, several disparate examples make clear that competition was an integral element to many people’s enjoyment of cricket.

At a workshop I attended that was designed to train coaches working with young people, several of the warm-up games involved cricket skills. Numerous local coaches were present, foreign coaches from the NGO here to train them, and around 50 willing young participants from various sporting backgrounds. These warm-up games involved very basic cricket skills, ostensibly to allow everyone to participate. What I noticed immediately was that it didn’t take long for the young cricketers in the group to make it harder for themselves. If the skill was throwing the ball to be caught by someone else, instead of throwing the ball gently at their friends, they flung it at speed. These friends replied by taking steps that meant they would need

to then dive to catch the ball. Suddenly, the group was celebrating wildly as the difficulty levels rose. It appeared that if the coaches did not make it difficult for those participating, the participants themselves would soon incorporate competition where they could. Clearly, a desire to test oneself was at play here.

Similarly, whenever I was asked to organise the warmups at Arief's academy, I found that the boys craved competition. We usually began with a little bit of running and other cardio, before getting them to do push ups, crunches, and other basic movements. However, the boys quickly got bored, and begged me to organise a race between two teams. When I agreed to this, everyone got incredibly excited, enjoying running around, competing against one another. This was a far easier way of getting their heart rates up. At another session I was asked to lead fielding drills, specific skills that are important in cricket such as catching and throwing. Once again, the boys got bored, and begged me to do a race. As we were doing fielding practice I refused, but I told them that if they could catch ten balls in a row as a team and throw them back to me, they could have a race. It was apparent just how suddenly everyone focused: they completed the ten catches and throws easily, and I let them have a race. With the adults, competition and the opportunity to test oneself were also clearly important factors in the cricket experience. After Broncos were knocked out of the Division 3 tournament in 2018, they filled the spare weekends with a friendly tournament between five different teams. At the matches, I expected the atmosphere to be friendly and laidback, but there was still a clear emphasis on competition. We retained many of the aspects of league games, like the huddle at the beginning of the match with motivational talk, while many of the players took the game very seriously, focusing hard and maintaining their fighting spirit. Again, it was clear that people were at pains to retain the competitive aspect of the game.

For many, this idea of competition translated into how my interlocutors talk about the game, too, and it was clear from my interviews that competition and testing was not merely skill based. Some suggested that the standard of technique among Sri Lankan cricketers was usually pretty even, and therefore the primary distinguishing factor between good and bad sides was mental capacity. Furthermore, the coconut matting used for Sri Lankan wickets favours the batsmen, and requires the fielding team to think outside the box when trying to get wickets. Consequently, some of my interlocutors described "playing mind games" with their opponents,

and often they referred to ‘thinking’ the batsman out, which meant to lay traps with clever strategy. Many also used words like ‘cunning’ and ‘wily’ to describe good players. For example, Vaz was a particularly skilled spin bowler in our team, yet his success was not just down to his skill, but his capacity to get in the batsman’s mind. Vaz was usually very angry and animated when he took wickets. In one match, he was hit for two sixes in a row, before then getting the batsmen out leg-before-wicket. He quite pointedly and loudly announced “you start it, I finish it”. After the batsmen walked off, Vaz explained how he had varied his bowling to lull the batsmen into a false shot. Other players I interviewed who were batsmen described resisting these traps, and sought to remain focused, retaining control of their emotions and skill. Tariq often referred to the “mental challenge” of cricket being his favourite aspect, while others also reflected that these mind games were precisely what they enjoyed the most. As such, I gradually got the distinct impression that these strategic, competitive elements of the game are what make it so engaging to many Sri Lankans, as I discuss more in Chapters 9 & 10.

Testing was therefore as much a mental contest as it was a physical one. Consequently, people often described to me how they learned lessons about themselves and their character. Some suggested that it allowed them to understand themselves in greater detail, almost as though cricket revealed their purest nature. One former international player, Harry, very pointedly told me that “cricket is the best way to show myself to others”. While I discuss the nature of these life lessons in greater detail in Chapter 9, for here it suffices to say that this aspect of learning about oneself via testing was a major draw for many of my informants. Competition was an aspect of sport that was enjoyable because it had deeper consequences than the mere joy of success. I explain how testing might reveal character to individuals and also regulate social interaction in Chapter 9.

Pleasure of Agency in an Imagined Community

In this chapter I have outlined some fundamental points about TCC, a team populated with many different characters who come together for a similar purpose. These diverse people play cricket for enjoyment, which they often derived from the sense of camaraderie and the chance to celebrate their successes. Yet on a deeper level, this enjoyment also emerged from the thrill of competition and the chance to test oneself. My interlocutors came together to test one another and also *themselves*. So, while my interlocutors enjoyed winning games, personal

successes and the satisfaction that comes with it, they seemed to get greater value from the opportunity for personal development. Individuals were encouraged to work hard and do well, and there was a real sense of individual agency promoted within the team. Thus, the sense that cricket provides the space to improve oneself and the notion of ‘testing’ perhaps explains why my interlocutors generally took the game so seriously. It illustrates why my teammates supported others to achieve as much as they could. All of this suggests it is understood that change can happen within the cricket ground, that it is an arena of experimentation. In the next chapters, I explain how the cricketing space is conceived more generally, before tackling how change is understood to happen there.

CHAPTER 4

CRICKETING SPACES

Scenes: 1st April 2018. Just Outside Negombo.

‘How can they say this is a ground, *machan?*’ One of my teammates wonders aloud to the group.

‘It’s not always like this, Ben’ someone else tells me, as though responding to him.

‘What a debut, no?’ another remarks.

I’m about to play my first game of cricket in Sri Lanka, on what looks more like a desert than a cricket ground. My new teammates, a group of old boys from Royal College and St Thomas’s, seem unimpressed. We left home early and have travelled over an hour north out of the city, back up towards the airport near Negombo, so the disappointment feels a little pointed.

All the same, I gaze with bleary eyes upon the ‘field’, ringed as it is by palm trees, a paddy field peeping through behind them, bright skies above us. I laugh to myself, realising this is as clichéd an image of Sri Lanka as one could hope for. Maybe this will make my opening vignette. I feel glad to be here, ready to begin fieldwork properly. But gazing at the sandy, rocky ground itself fills my ankles with fear, and soon the excitement of playing cricket in a foreign country drains away, to be left only with nervousness and trepidation.

Most of all, I feel disoriented. By the ground, by the ringing sound of nails hammered into coconut matting that forms the wicket, by the Sinhala that flies around interspersed with the odd crumb of English. I try to focus on my surroundings, but cannot seem to focus past the heat. I worry about being ready for the physical toll of the day. I sit down on a sawn-off tree stump, near the rest of the bags, practically inhale half my water bottle, and try to take things in, suddenly noticing that there aren’t many of us.



Figure 15. A groundsman sets out the coconut matting, just outside Negombo.

‘Hurry up *machan*, we need to start by 9:45’ I hear one teammate say to another as they pull on their cricket whites, a flurry of activity beginning.

‘Ben, what are your details mate? Fill this in for me’, the captain tells me, emerging to entrust into my hand a scrap of paper with some rather formal looking print on it. A team sheet.

I scribble down my information, ‘do the needful’ as many Sri Lankans put it, and rush to change into my whites, still confused about the apparent lack of any opposition, but deciding not to question it. I note that we must be fielding, because no one is putting pads on, and one of the bowlers is using a resistance band to warm his shoulders up. In the chaos I must have missed the toss. With the matting, there is hardly any point to meet in the middle and inspect the pitch, I assume. I quickly decide against wearing my spiked shoes, which will just get worn away by the rocky ground, and slap white sun cream over my face and what little of my arms are visible. I pull down a floppy hat tightly over my head to guard against the bright light. Before I know it, we are running onto the pitch, and I notice, at the far end of the ground, emerging from out of a long, low hut with a thatched roof, a string of men who I had hitherto missed: our opposition.

A Pre-Occupation with Space

During my first few games of cricket in Sri Lanka, much of the setting was familiar to me from playing back home. Yet this familiarity made any differences far more apparent. As the field initially left me feeling physically disoriented, it is unsurprising that the use of space struck me as interesting. Though the cricket ground seemed familiar, it *felt* different. Given that cricket was supposed to be a game that is good for reconciliation, it seemed odd that teams were physically distanced from one another. Furthermore, I had previously been told that cricket was good for reconciliation in Sri Lanka because it literally “brought people together”.⁴⁷ From what I saw in these first games, this didn’t seem true. In later games, I only noticed this physical distancing more and more. In fact, people seemed to go to great lengths (physically as well as figuratively) to create and demarcate their own space, sometimes demonstrably separating themselves out from their opposition. People often seemed uncomfortable at being in the space of others, expressing hesitancy, distrust, or even fear. If cricket was supposedly reconciliatory, why did people apparently make an effort *not* to spend time with each other?

Consequently, I spent time considering how the same game was experienced differently by my Sri Lankan interlocutors, to try and understand why this physical distancing was in place. In doing so, I began to understand that my interlocutors were generally very pre-occupied with space, and discerned how the cricket ground is conceived of as ‘a space’. What I found was that the notions of a space and the use of space are interwoven phenomena. Over the next two chapters I unravel these ideas. Here, I detail my observation of diverse scenes around the country: amateur matches, professional domestic games, international games, schoolboy matches and practice sessions.⁴⁸ Like many other sporting events, these diverse cricket scenes are evidently liminal spaces, which suggests they are spaces wherein persons can experiment with social norms ostensibly ‘outside’ of normal life (Besnier et al 2018:161). Yet as I will show, common features of these spaces suggest that the idealised cricket ground is a *particular kind* of liminal space. What I found in paying close attention to the numerous places cricket takes place were many efforts to mark out these spaces as exceptional, further reinforcing their liminal character. However, I also found that these spaces were often remarkably ‘neutral’ or secular,

⁴⁷ This was a common line from the FoG in my visit during 2017.

⁴⁸ Although interviewing individuals about space was sometimes edifying, it became increasingly apparent that the use of space was tacitly understood and hard to describe.

with few symbols of any group other than the Sri Lankan nation. These spaces were very much ‘Sri Lankan’ in character. Furthermore, while people remained ostensibly separate in the cricketing space, an idea of ‘proximity’ reflects a belief that people are in fact together. These points have ramifications for the kinds of experimentation that can take place in cricket, and as I will show in the following chapter, the use of space itself indicates the potential change cricket can bring about.



Figure 16. People play a casual game of softball cricket one Saturday afternoon in Nuwara Eliya.

The Cricketing Space

Cricket takes place in all kinds of spaces around Sri Lanka. While various people told me it is now far less common in Colombo, I often saw children playing games of cricket in the street, some visible from my apartment in Mount Lavinia. Usually armed with little more than a plank of wood, a large rock or a plastic crate for stumps, a tennis ball and a ‘tennis ball bat’,⁴⁹ these games take place down lanes, side streets and in innumerable parks across the country. With a little effort, any patch of bare earth can be made into a suitable place to play. On the odd occasion that games are interrupted by a car, children will disperse, only to take up the game again once traffic has passed. Even if my interlocutors were right that cricket is less

⁴⁹ These bats are slightly longer and wider than regular cricket bats, and have a much more prominent curve. They are also much thinner and lighter - they are designed to be swung hard and fast.

common in the streets of Colombo today, such scenes were often raised in interviews as distinct memories of childhood, which indicates the idea lives on as a trope about what cricket 'is'.

As indicated earlier in Chapter 2, significant areas within central Colombo are given over to hosting cricket. There are softball grounds of all shapes and sizes. Some are simple squares of bare earth, while others are huge ovals with concrete stands, that host weekly softball tournaments attended by hundreds. Hardball grounds, where a proper wicket – either turf or matting – is required are equally diverse. Almost all schools will have an area for cricket. The top tier schools often have huge sports complexes, proper stadia with cricket grounds surrounded by an athletics track, while the lower tier ones squeeze a ground in wherever they can. Likewise, the premier clubs and international venues have enormous grounds with acres of lush green grass, side wickets for team practice, and usually a separate academy space, too. Conversely, the kind of grounds I played at for amateur, Division 3 matches were of varying quality. Sometimes we had great facilities, with decent quality matting, a smooth outfield, and some kind of stands or a dressing room to take cover in. On many other occasions, we played on rocky, uneven ground, sometimes swampy, with only a cramped hut swallowed by encroaching foliage to go back to. Though my interlocutors made the best of these conditions, complaints were often made in private and there is a distinct sense of ranking grounds by the comfort they afford teams. While each cricketing space was different, they all appeared to share commonalities, not just in basic physical attributes, like possessing a wicket, but also in the way they were conceived of and treated by the people who played within them. Though these commonalities mark the cricketing space out as liminal, bracketed 'outside' everyday life, they also render it a *particular kind* of liminal space, an exceptional arena with a specific character.

The Encounter

The liminal status of the cricketing space is reinforced by the very apparent physical separation of these grounds from the people who play in them. For hardball games, it was very common for both teams to stage the match at a neutral location. As I noted in Chapter 2, there is a dearth of grounds in Colombo compared to the demand, and apart from the premier clubs, few own their own ground. As a consequence, the notion of a 'home ground' in Sri Lanka exists almost exclusively on paper. For example, the 'home' team for a division game, is responsible for finding a ground to host 'their' match at. The choice is often between paying

excessive amounts of money for a professional ground that by some luck is available, or more often, play games at poor grounds, sometimes far outside of the capital. This is why I played my first ever division game in Negombo, over an hour's drive north of Colombo. Notwithstanding, while the premier clubs own their own grounds, professional domestic matches are often also played at a neutral venue. As a professional club manager told me, the clubs rent their ground directly to the SLC at a fee, and the board (who run the league) then allocates the grounds as appropriate. As such, although I was a member at one premier club, I very rarely watched the club's side play a match at their own ground.⁵⁰ Thus, no grounds outside the premier clubs or school grounds had markers of specific teams, and therefore both teams at most hard ball matches held no specific allegiance to the ground they were playing at. It was in effect a neutral space, a character which allows for certain ideas of sociality to be constructed.

Because of this neutrality, both teams had to travel to occupy this shared space. The separation from everyday society was thereby reinforced by common expressions of movement, marking out the space as a special place of meeting. Almost all games in Sri Lankan English are referred to as 'encounters', and famous schoolboy matches in particular carry this phrasing on all promotional material. The Royal-Thomian I attended was the '140th encounter'. This kind of language is equally common in the media, who often refer to matches as 'an encounter' in match reports. Supporting language often frames the event as 'a meeting' or 'clash', and clearly indicates that the cricket match takes place in a separate space. The Royal-Thomian is a prime example of the notion of 'encounter' because it takes place at the Sinhala Sports Club, a neutral venue, and the process of moving towards the ground on the first morning of the match is very important. For the St Thomas's team, the team bus leaves from the Mount Lavinia Hotel and is accompanied by fans for the 10km journey up Galle Road and into Cinnamon Gardens where the match is staged.⁵¹ The cricketing space is therefore heavily demarcated – figuratively and literally – as separate from regular sociality, as a particular kind of liminal space.

⁵⁰ Some premier clubs like Ragama and Chilaw Marians are in effect 'homeless', and play many of their matches at Katunayake, many kilometres from either town.

⁵¹ Not only is Cinnamon Gardens home to many of Colombo's premier clubs, it is also where numerous other sporting facilities and institutions are found, like the national museum. This gives it a particularly 'Sri Lankan' character in the same banal nationalist sense.

An Exceptional Event

Games of hardball cricket, particularly league matches, retain many of the same features as games in the UK. All usually have a wicket of decent quality, (either turf or matting), a set of proper stumps and bails, leather ball, a couple of umpires, a scorer & scoreboard. While games of softball cricket are usually informal and spring up anywhere, softball *matches* – formal matches following the normal rules of the sport barring the equipment – are far different. Often held on weekends, grounds will be booked out for huge softball tournaments, where multiple teams play for not insubstantial cash prizes.⁵² Sometimes big companies will put on these tournaments as team-building exercises for their employees, renting out the premier club grounds for this purpose. I was told these businesses can usually pay more to rent the grounds than the SLC.⁵³



Figure 17. My teammates watch on during a friendly match in Colombo. This ground is commonly rented by numerous amateur teams.

⁵² 50,000 LKR (around £250 at the time) was a common prize pot. Given softball teams comprise six players, this can be a decent amount of money for individuals to earn.

⁵³ The manager of my premier club once informed me that one of their league fixtures was moved to another location, because the club ground was booked out for one of these corporate events. He told me this was not uncommon.

In many ways, the softball matches I watched were incredible events with huge fanfare, incorporating lots of things I initially considered superfluous for hosting a match. Such matches took place with only a bare patch of earth for a wicket, with a tennis ball and simple bats. However, they also had brightly painted stumps and bails, umpires in full uniform, coloured boundary ropes and cones. Beyond the boundary, one or two commentators called the match over a PA system, playing music whenever a batsman hit a boundary. Coloured team uniforms, similarly coloured tents for teams to shade under, flags and banners all added to the sense of order, while trophies sat waiting to be given out once the tournament was ended. Here, the incorporation of these elements all seemed to encourage a carnivalesque atmosphere, marking out the cricket space as an uncommon event. Combined with the sense of physical separation and the encounter, the cricketing space was a particularly exceptional liminal space.



Figure 18. Plastic trophies are set out for a softball tournament in central Colombo. These will be given to winning teams and the best players during the day. The Pirith lamp in front was lit during the opening ceremony.

A Sri Lankan Space

The colours, flags, music and carnival is all particularly present at international matches like the one pictured below, lending an atmosphere of festivity and joy. It is easy to see why people consider cricket to be unifying, as it is at the very least universally *fun*. The demarcation of the cricketing space is more obviously present here, and the SLC's 'One Team, One Nation' branding was often plastered everywhere, while Sri Lankan flags and team jerseys seemed omnipresent in the crowd. This was without doubt a particularly Sri Lankan space, where certain ideas of 'Sri Lanka' are performed and mobilised.

But while these international events – like many others globally – are conspicuous signs of national identity, other less formal spaces like the softball tournaments appear to be equally important performances of nationalist identity. At the smaller matches and softball tournaments I saw, there were invariably Sri Lankan flags, and almost every tournament I witnessed was preceded by an opening ceremony that involved the national anthem. In Sri Lanka, people will routinely stop whatever they are doing and stand perfectly still to observe the national anthem. They will always remove any headwear (unless worn for religious purposes), and either stand with arms by their side, or hand over heart. As my club trained at the multi-purpose municipal ground pictured above, this meant that on several occasions we stopped our hardball training sessions because we could hear the anthem, as the vignette in Chapter 2 captured. As it is a large ground, used for multiple sports, it was possible to see upwards of 100 people scattered around observing the anthem for all of its three and a half minutes. What is particularly striking about this example is the identity of the participants. Over on the football pitch, mostly Tamil boys were playing an organised football tournament. I was training with my hardball cricket team, comprised mostly of Muslims, while those taking part in the tournament appeared to be predominantly Sinhala. The sense of unity was palpable, as all stood to observe the national anthem with Sri Lankan flag flying above.⁵⁴

The liminal space of the cricket ground is separate from everyday society because it is carefully demarcated and physically placed in a neutral location. It is also an uncommon event, marked

⁵⁴ Whether this unity was moderated by surveillance is unclear, but many of my Muslim interlocutors proudly sang the anthem. One even shouted at other Sinhalese boys who didn't stop their game to observe the anthem.

out as exceptional, emphasising the disjuncture further. Taking these factors together, it appeared that these were efforts to make the cricketing space not representative of one particular ethnic group or religion. It certainly felt, especially during the moment of the national anthem, as though the sporting arena is conceived of as a certain kind of secular, purely *Sri Lankan* space, for the performance of ‘Sri Lankan’ values. The liminality of the cricketing space therefore enables the possibility of a specifically ‘Sri Lankan’ character, an identity which is hoped might transcend other categories. While not all cricketing spaces were the same, the combination of some if not all of these elements and the efforts to reinforce this liminality suggest that the cricketing space is understood as a place where persons can come together to experiment with these ‘Sri Lankan’ values.



Figure 19. Spectators watch a One Day International match between Sri Lanka and the West Indies. The SLC's 'One Team, One Nation' branding is prominent on the far hoardings.



Figure 20. A Sri Lankan flag is hoisted between two school flags for an athletics meet at the municipal ground. These flag poles were regularly used for flying the Sri Lanka flag at all manner of events, including the many softball tournaments.

Scenes: Sitting down with Suvik

Faint wisps of steam rise up from the thick grass as I arrive one bright Saturday morning. Even at 9:30am, three hours after dawn and with temperatures risen to uncomfortable levels, the sun's rays do little to dry the sodden soil of the cricket ground. Red muddy puddles have emerged in the scrub areas, while the lower, greener parts look positively swampy. We will not be playing for some time.

It's only my second game. As I'm not in the club's WhatsApp group yet, I wasn't informed that my team would be arriving late. As such, I turned up prompt for the match, and not fully knowing my own team members yet, dump my bag with the rest and approach anyone who looks friendly. It turns out the 14 guys practicing out on the field are today's opposition, and they engage me in conversation. One shows me a video of him hitting big sixes. Another shows me photos of him working at the recent West Indies tour of Sri Lanka, his smile beaming as he stands with an international player. Another, the most confident in English, shows me photos of him playing in a 'last man standing' tournament he played in. They're polite, curious, and most of all welcoming. I easily while away time before the rest of my team start to turn up.

I leave the conversation and climb back into the stand, keen to find my bag and write a few notes. Currently, everyone's kit is situated at one end of the huge stand, maybe 50 metres long, which simply comprises a high set of deep concrete bleachers, all shaded under a large, corrugated iron roof.

Around 10:15, as I fumble with my notebook, the first of my teammates – a doctor called Suvik – turns up. I wave at him as he climbs up toward me, before he pauses momentarily. He looks at me, sat amongst the bags, with a slightly perplexed look on his face.

“What side are we on?” He asks me, clearly uncomfortable.

“I'm not sure. I got here first, and we've all sort of grouped together.” I reply, fairly non-committal and unconcerned, half concentrating on taking notes. ‘Come and sit’ I add, beckoning him.

Suvik seems to snap out of his trance, comes up and dumps his bag beside mine, before we get lost in our own conversation about the greatest batsmen of all time (he is arguing for Kohli). Over the next 20 minutes, the rest of my term emerge in drips and drabs, congregating naturally on the bleachers above and below me.

By 10:30, everyone is here, and the opposition finish their light practice, sensing that things may happen soon. They come towards us, extending friendly greetings. But then to my surprise, they grab their equipment and haul it to the other side of the stands, far away from us. Despite there being no ostensible need to do so, despite turning up first, the opposition move far away from us. I notice that for some reason, my teammates appear visibly calmer about this, too.

Being Separate, Being Together

While the cricketing space was understood as neutral and secular, a place to experiment with ideas of a ‘Sri Lankan’ identity, people were often separate from one another and made efforts to remain separate, taking up distinct areas within the cricket space. As I initially perceived it, cricket seemed instead to reinforce division, not reach across boundaries. However, the various ways people talk about space through metaphor or as an idiom suggested a certain way of perceiving the world, which was borne out in what I observed at matches. In exploring the seeming contradiction between togetherness and separation, I reflect here on dynamics that influence the understanding of space. In particular, ideas about *proximity* seemed incredibly important, and these suggested that while people in the ground are physically apart, they are in fact together in another sense. Varying instances of this idea of proximity support this interpretation.

Space

Space as a structuring principle is prevalent in various ways within the Sinhalese language.⁵⁵ Firstly, Sinhala does not have two positions, as in English (this and that), but four: ‘this near me’, ‘this near you’; ‘that over there’, and ‘that (thing we know to exist but is not visible)’

⁵⁵ I am indebted to Achinthya Bandara for discussing the finer points of Sinhala ethnolinguistics with me.

(Disanayaka 2017). It is important in Sinhala to use the correct position, because for example ‘ara pota’ (that book over there) and ‘e: pota’ (that book we both know about) are two distinctly different things. Another obvious example of the importance of space and movement is when expressing an emotion. While in English, one might say ‘I am happy’, in Sinhala, one says ‘mata satutuyi’, which means in a literal sense ‘the feeling of happiness comes to me’. Emotions ‘do not last forever’ (Disanayaka 2012:68), and as such are seen as things that *come and go* (*ibid*).

A few of the Sinhala cases indicate this movement in space. In the above example the ‘-ta’ in ‘mata’ is the dative case, indicating this movement towards the speaker. The opposite (ablative) case is ‘-gen’, which indicates movement away. As my tutor put it, when speaking it is important ‘both natural and polite’ to include more information above this movement, a measurement and/or location. So, while you can say ‘I went to the cricket match’, the best thing to say would be ‘from (the previous location) I went to the cricket match’. Likewise, saying ‘it’s over there’ is not so good as saying ‘it’s over there by the chair’. As my tutor described it, adding locations or measurements ‘puts Sinhala speakers at ease’. Although this analysis might seem superfluous, Sinhala has been described more as a ‘language of becoming’ than a ‘language of existence’ (Kalupahana 1999:i), due to influences from Pali and Buddhism. This means that the way of speaking reflects a certain ontological orientation towards the world. As a friend put it, ‘Sinhala culture is intricately linked with Buddhism; and there it’s about moving through different planes of existence; time is cyclic and is not the most important aspect. It’s where you came from and where you are headed.’ I do not claim that Sinhalese language structures the overall usage of space in Sri Lanka, but instead suggest it highlights a general pre-occupation with space.

Proximity

Again, looking briefly at language, in Sinhala the ‘ඉ’ (-va) case ending is often used to indicate a strong relationship with someone. For example, ‘[name]-va’ means a particular person, and indicates a relationship to that person, so my mother or a good friend might refer to me as ‘Ben-va’. Additionally, I was taught that by using this case ending to describe a strong relationship with someone, one is really specifying a kind of *proximity in space*, and as such ‘-va’ indicates the *close* bond between peoples. When this was taught to me, my tutor gave the example of a coach, who might mention the ‘lamayo-va’ (children) - which means *his* students.

The addition of ‘-va’ means these (specific) children, but also indicates a closer bond and a sense of responsibility. Proximity is therefore the sense by which one indicates the strength of relations. This kind of logic was noticeable in the way many coaches talked about appropriately teaching their students (in English). When referring to younger players from his academy, Arief often said “in order to motivate him I must be close to him”, and explained how he developed this bond through being close and understanding the pupil intimately: “I should put my arm [around him], reassure him”. He was often at pains to draw the children physically close to him to deliver his coaching, particularly the verbal roundups at the end of sessions. He described how in order to teach a pupil properly, “he must *come and receive* my message”. I have experienced this in some ways myself. I have had players of various ages come very close to me when I have given them advice, and had parents encourage their children to come close to me in order to receive this advice.

A pre-occupation with proximity is evident in another sphere, with Sri Lankan politicians. Often pictured next to former international cricketers and usually exchanging items of some kind, politicians appear to hope the positive image these cricketers possess may confer benefits on their own cause. If proximity denotes association, then being physically close denotes the strength of that association. A similar logic is directly manifested on the cricket field too. Flag bearers are often present during cricket games, particularly at school matches and international fixtures. These flag bearers wander around and wave their team’s flag, moving out into the field during breaks in play. In doing so, they draw close to successful players and offer them support, but more importantly make an association between them. Here, the link between the character of the team (the Sri Lankan national team or a school) and the player is reinforced by the flag, logo or colours next to them. This strengthens the bond between them, but also by proxy confers some kind of relationship on the flag bearer. Percy Abeysekera, professional ‘cheerleader’ of the Sri Lankan team, takes pride in his association with the players and his personal relationship with them (pictured below). Equally, I was told that at particularly rowdy school matches, flag bearers often entered the field at inappropriate times. This was apparently because they were overcome by joy or some other emotion, and therefore they “wanted to go out and *be with* the players”. The official school flag bearers exhibit real glee in running onto the pitch with their symbols, escorting a batsman off the pitch after a good innings, or being

with the fielding team when they leave at the end of a session. The link between flag and player shows the power of proximity to visually express a relationship.



Figure 21. Young men from St Thomas's go out with flags to meet their fielding team, while another from Royal accompanies his batsmen off the field.

Finally, physical proximity seems to be an important consideration for maintaining good relations within groups, too. I noticed this in particular with The Titans when teammates would sometimes come at the end of a late-night net session in the outskirts of Colombo just to chat and see people. I was confused to see them there, as it was a long way to come and not practice. All the same, they hung out for a few minutes and seemed to enjoy their time with us. I reasoned that perhaps proximity and merely being together is a way that people believe connections are forged. Thus, there seems to exist an idea that being in a similar space enables some kind of relationship to emerge. Together, these various examples suggest that the idea of proximity is deemed important, even though people actually remain physically separate. While people at a cricket ground are often separated out, by occupying the same total space (the entire ground) they are considered in fact to be 'together'. Furthermore, it cannot be denied cricket has 'brought people together' into the same, shared space, corroborating with the common unifying discourse. If proximity is considered to entail relations, even by virtue of simply being together in the same place, then this notion of proximity and relationship by association could indicate why cricket is seen as reconciliatory.



Figure 22. Famous Sri Lankan ‘cheerleader’ Percy Abeyssekera walks off with Kumar Sangakkara after his final innings. Photo: Percyabeysekera.com

‘Sri Lankan’ Liminality

These ideas about the cricketing space and proximity clarify some aspects about why cricket is seen as reconciliatory. Yet more fundamentally, they show that the cricketing space is a place where experimentation and change can occur. As cricket is ‘a “liminal” activity, that is both part of and removed from normative everyday life, in a “betwixt and between” state.’ (Besnier et al 2018:34, cf. Turner 1967), then cricketing spaces, like ritual, invites (or coerces) the participant to ‘reflect’ on their own social norms (Turner 1967:103). As cricket takes place in a very distinct kind of space – a *Sri Lankan* space – I suggest that the primary object of this reflection is therefore Sri Lanka and defining what the ‘Sri Lankan’ means. In the liminal realm, cricket enables the performance of and experimentation with a particular kind of ‘Sri Lankan’ sociality. The cricket space is a liminal space, wherein social norms are negotiated and can be changed, but that negotiation often operates at a particular level.

If the cricketing space engages directly in experimentation with ideas of the nation, it may also be a performance of ‘banal nationalism’ (Billig 1995). The framing of cricketing space into a specific kind of ‘Sri Lankan’ space should be seen in light of a wider trend amongst religious

sites in Sri Lanka. Premakumara de Silva's work on ancient Sri Lankan pilgrimage sites, particularly *Sri Pāda*,⁵⁶ shows that previously hybrid and heterogenous religious sites are increasingly controlled by one religion or another (de Silva 2013, 2018). Some sites are now 'more' Buddhist, Hindu, or Islamic, with particular religious groups asserting more direct control of decoration, organisation and administration. At *Sri Pāda*, the increasing control of the Buddhist clergy does not prevent visiting pilgrims from other religions, but has now framed it 'as a predominantly Buddhist site' (de Silva 2018:80). Thus, previously complex religious (and ritual) sites around Sri Lanka have become places of a more singular character. Importantly, such sites are not returning to some old state, but have been 'transformed, or rather constructed' (*ibid*:81) into their current, singular form. As de Silva puts it, the most recent Buddhist version of *Sri Pāda* is 'a new creation' (*ibid*: 85), distinct from any previous one. I argue here that cricketing space may have undergone a similar '(re)ordering' (*ibid*: 81). The proliferation of nationalist symbols and iconography at cricket matches, particularly tournaments, suggests that the cricket ground may increasingly be a space for the expression of the new, supposedly unifying 'Sri Lankan identity' that the LLRC recommended in 2011 (LLRC 2011, cf. Thiranagama 2013). Thus, cricketing space takes on a more overtly 'Sri Lankan' nature, but of a specific and potentially problematic kind.

However, if in Turner's formula, these increasingly singular religious sites invite reflection more explicitly on Buddhist identity, Hindu identity, and so on, then the cricketing space may indeed invite reflection on 'Sri Lankan' identity more explicitly, to thinking about the nation. The cricket ground may thereby act as a kind of 'scaling up' point, where the participant is able to more easily imagine themselves a member of their wider community (Anderson 2006 [1983], cf. Appadurai 1996). By participating in an activity that can be engaged in by all Sri Lankans, including those who represent the country itself on the international stage, and surrounded by nationalist paraphernalia, the individual can more easily imagine themselves within the nation. Furthermore, given that proximity within the cricketing space is deemed to promote relations despite ostensible separation, then the idea of simply 'being together' would appear to be reconciliatory. Thus, participating in cricket is a compelling way of seeing oneself

⁵⁶ Also known as 'Adam's Peak', *Sri Pāda*'s chief relic is a sacred footprint, left by Buddha, Vishnu or Adam, depending on your religious persuasion. It has been a sacred site for many religions for centuries, and is increasingly become specifically Buddhist.

as a 'Sri Lankan', and invites broader reflection on the Sri Lankan nation. Because of the visibility of cricket in Sri Lankan life, the cricket ground is potentially *the space* to think about a new Sri Lankan identity. In the next chapter, I examine the use of space within the cricket ground, to explain how the cricket event plays out and consequently how such experimentations might happen.

CHAPTER 5

SPACE IN ACTION

Scenes: An Event Marked

The brilliant blue of the cloudless sky contrasts with a backdrop of palms that sway in the breeze. Here at the Foundation of Goodness sports centre, I take in my surroundings on yet another visit. Deep in southern Sri Lanka lies one of the best-kept cricket facilities on the island, maintained through mostly foreign donations and tended by skilled local workers. The ground itself is small but clean, forming a smooth dome for drainage; the lush, green grass is thick yet cropped. There is a scoreboard in one corner, a small stand on the opposite side, and a couple of miniature dugouts – plastic seats with a roof overhead – dotted around too. The largest building – the sports office – lies to the south, complete with balcony overlooking the ground. The lot is enclosed by green wire fences, all covered by the advertising hoardings of various benefactors. Most are from a local cement company. At the centre, on a pristine AstroTurf wicket, a softball match is being played between the Foundation office employees and a big Colombo advertising firm.

I was told the firm are “going into partnership” with the Foundation on various projects. They have come for a tour of the Foundation’s main facilities down the road, before visiting the sporting facility here. The firm have also come for three very relaxed softball matches against the Foundation’s staff. This is ostensibly a team building exercise, but from what I observe, it seems little is being done to integrate the two sides. As I sit and watch this third and final match, I remain confused that the firm occupy the small stand some 50 metres away from us, while I sit with the Foundation staff under some palms nearer the office. Throughout the day, we have barely been sharing the same space at all. Even when we broke for lunch, up on the sports office roof, the separation was obvious. The teams sat at tables on their own, with the umpires and scorer again at their own table. A couple of people interacted, but generally the firm rarely chatted to the Foundation staff.

The cricket itself also seemed a little odd to me. Despite being the “advertising softball champions”, with matching team kit and a few decent looking players, they were roundly

beaten by the Foundation. Every one of the three games was one-sided, the Foundation's players crushing huge hits to all parts of the ground or ripping out wickets. It appeared a fun day in the sun, especially for the Foundation staff, who enjoyed the opportunity to play cricket for once, rather than just organise it. All the usual accoutrements were present, with umpires provided by the SLC, bright stumps and nice equipment, a proper scorer to maintain the board, all set to the beat of western dance music and *Baila* pumped out of a PA system. But it did not seem particularly well served to act as a team building exercise. There seemed remarkably little... socialising.

I also noticed a pre-occupation with marking the event, rather than being present in it. It seemed like people were trying to carve it out as a memory before the event was even over. Anthony was on camera duty, and he told me "the guys will kill me if I don't get the photos". I was amused to see them walk off after one game. A slow, exaggerated walk towards the boundary rope, they occasionally looked deep into the camera. Anthony was just like the professional cameramen at any sporting event, taking photos as the players leave the pitch. The only difference was they slowed down enough to ensure he could get the shot. The comic nature of this scene only emphasised the importance of photographic markers of the event.

It was not until the end of the day during the post-match presentation that the teams finally came together. It felt generally awkward, at least to me as an outsider, but this could be the result of mixing between people from Colombo and the rural south. One of the Foundation staff addressed the advertising firm, saying "I hope y'all had fun and learned something about the Foundation". This struck me as odd given they spent most of the day separated. It was awkward too when he made a few platitudes about the advertising firm's skill, saying the Foundation staff "were very impressed by the standard of you guys". Given they were soundly beaten there was some laughter in response to this, and someone ironically remarked "thank you for those kind words!", which prompted the more awkward rejoinder "no really, you can ask them!"

This awkwardness was exacerbated when the Foundation staff member invited one of the umpires to present the trophy – "a small token" – to the winning captain. One of the Foundation guys came forward while everyone applauded. Comprising a set of wickets topped

with a ball signed by Murali, this small trophy was made specially for the event and carried a small commemorative plaque. Clearly, it was intended the advertising firm would be awarded it all along, the Foundation leveraging Murali's name to cement their partnership. It would be a nice keepsake. As the outsider, I offered to take the team photos at the end, one of the whole group plus the umpires, and another of the victorious FoG team. Once the team photos were done, and people started to disperse, the trophy was quietly offered to the advertising firm, their chairman taking it a little reluctantly.

In all this, I wondered how this was supposed to work as team building. How was this unifying? It seemed for most of the day the photos, the trophy, the ritualistic aspects of coming together at the end were more important than the event itself. It seemed somewhat artificial, formulaic, and robotic. It was almost as though the softball tournament was an exercise in creating memories, marking down a period in time where a union begins, rather than focusing on the nature of that union. The participants already had half a mind ahead in time, creating things explicitly to look back on. It was not the content of the match then that seemed to matter, so much as adherence to the form.

The Use of Space

This team building day between the Foundation of Goodness and a Colombo advertising firm indicates that ritualistic markers of cricketing events are deemed to be important. The palpable awkwardness during these attempts to mark the event highlight a real commitment to ritual form. Although exploring ideas of *the* space indicates that the cricketing space is somewhere for the experimentation with 'Sri Lankan' values, this does not explain *how* this might happen. Equally, although the idea of proximity illustrates it is considered fine for people to be separate, this does not satisfactorily explain *why* people separate. In this chapter, I therefore explore the ways space is used and managed at cricketing events. Analysis of Sri Lankan rituals and social dynamics can illuminate what is understood to happen during cricket. I found that the cricketing space, initially made neutral and given a 'Sri Lankan' identity, was then broken down into discrete 'containers', which allows for particular new, largely arbitrary identities to be constructed. The liminal cricket space begins equal in nature, but is then segmented once again. At the cricket event the boundaries between these arbitrary identities – both visible and

invisible – are rarely crossed, except for specific purposes.⁵⁷ Following a reading of older Sri Lankan folk rituals, particularly *ankeliya* ('horn game'), it appears these identities are intentionally maintained in some kind of opposition for the duration of the event, only to be resolved at the end. There is therefore a sense of fission but then of fusion. These dynamics highlight how cricket expresses more general social concerns about managing difference and the maintenance of social relations. Thus, the use of space at cricket highlights a desire to also experiment with more fundamental social ideas. This has ramifications for the kinds of change that cricket can potentially bring about.

Scenes: 10 Points to Gryffindor

A grey haze lingers ominously over the municipal ground. This mid-afternoon in early April – the hottest time of the year – is a particularly dusky one. Surrounded by tall apartment blocks on all sides, overshadowed by cranes, this public space feels hemmed in, choked by the pollution. It is stiflingly hot and almost claustrophobic.

Yet, it is also New Year for Sinhala and Tamil peoples, a time of great joy and celebration. This ground is as packed as I will ever see it during fieldwork; there must be two, even three hundred people in this small area. Behind me, on the football pitch, half these people are taking part in the quasi-traditional Sri Lankan New Year folk games, reminiscent of a village fête in the UK. A coconut toss and a tug of war, but also a three-legged race and a lime and spoon race.

In front of me, around a hundred people are taking part in a softball cricket tournament. A strip of bare red earth, punctuated at each end by brightly painted blue stumps and bails lies at the centre of the green ground. Umpires in full black uniform signal dramatically whenever the yellow tennis ball crosses a blue boundary rope, while a man commentates loudly over the PA system in rapid, percussive Sinhala, his beat matched by the *Baila* music that plays between deliveries. A stack of trophies is piled up on a table below him, one large winner's cup, and others with little plastic batsmen or bowlers on them.

⁵⁷ These boundaries are sometimes physically erected, as in the case of the Big Match tents (Chapter 12).

Both events are awash with colour on tents, team uniforms, banners and flags. At the New Year games, four teams have been created, and each seek shade under bright gazebos – purple, red, blue and green – while they await their next events. I'm amused to note that before me, the cricket tournament teams have been stylised after the Hogwarts houses from Harry Potter. Each team has banners, flags, placards and seem to have their own chants. Currently, Gryffindor play Hufflepuff, and while the blue of Ravenclaw sit under the stands, the men and women of the Slytherin team – all dressed in black and green – move around the boundary rope in a kind of conga line. I'm not sure why they chose Harry Potter, but it seems to add some kind of context to what are otherwise arbitrary teams.

Carrying green flags and placards, including one with the Slytherin logo artfully drawn, as well as signs with amusing quips at the other houses, they snake around the ground, chanting and hollering. At the head, a man with a selfie-stick films the group as they go, everyone looking forward intently at the camera. Around them swarm a couple of photographers, men with huge cameras and protruding lenses who record the event. Small groups from the line occasionally oblige the photographers by moving towards them, waving and chanting, as though to be seen as part of a group is the entire point.

Behind me, the trophies for the New Year Games are being given out, a host of men, women and children coming up shyly to collect the little plastic markers of their victory this year. An announcer tries to compete with the cricket commentator, but cannot quite make himself heard. Back on the pitch, the Gryffindor team seem to be going well as their batsmen launch the ball to all parts of the ground, cheered on by the group of red teammates in the far end of the ground. At intervals, primarily whenever the ball sails out the ground for six, a few men run onto the pitch, waving a flag wildly around their successful man, only to run off again before play resumes. It appears the Gryffindor team won the lot, as upon hitting a huge six, the entire team streams onto the pitch and hold a mass celebration, running around and shouting, chanting and going wild. The yellow of Hufflepuff console one another, but soon, the *Baila* music is turned up, and a party ensues, multiple teams joining together and celebrating as one.

Containers and Arbitrary Identities

At events such as this softball tournament, it was apparent that the separation of people was organised. Other ideas about the nature of space and the ensuing dynamics help to explain this intentional separation, and shed light on the kinds of performance of sociality and experimentation that are expected to occur within the ground. The separation of people into groups at the ground can be illustrated through the notion of *containers*, which I suggest then support the formation of various arbitrary identities.

Containers

While Sinhala often indicates movement, such subjects must also move between locations, and this is indicated in an interesting way. The case ending to denote location (ඉ/e:) indicates where one is, so you might say ‘mama pansalae: inneva’ (I am at the temple). However, when the ‘ඉ/e:’ locative case is properly described in Sinhala it literally means ‘that which is *held by*’, and therefore refers to the place as a kind of container. Thus, ‘mama pansalae: inneva’ fully transliterated means something closer to ‘I am held within the temple’. Likewise, ‘-ge:’ indicates possession, so ‘Ben-ge: pota’ means ‘Ben’s book’, but the ‘ge:’ in this expression is a live locative marker. So essentially it means something similar to ‘the book is held by/within Ben’. There is an intense boundedness here then, a sense of being held within a container, the idea of a *discrete* space.

I saw that space was managed and used to create discrete groupings in a similar manner during cricket. At softball tournaments, tents often stand far apart, and teams do not often mix between them. When tents are not provided, teams which start close to one another soon spread out, finding their own parcels of land to congregate on. At hardball matches, teams seem to gather as far apart as they feasibly can. Below corrugated iron roofing, teams will often sit on opposite ends of the concrete bleachers that make up the only available ‘cool’ space. This is in complete contrast to games of cricket in the UK where the changing area (either in a building or outside) is in the same place, and teams take tea with each other in the same room. It was very odd for me to not go and hang out with the opposition during the tea interval.

I argue this notion of the container is important for understanding this use of space at cricket matches. It goes some way to explaining Suvik's earlier discomfort at being caught in a space that contained both his teammates and the opposition. It indicates that when one is at the cricket ground, one feels obliged to occupy discrete spaces (this is my space, that is your space). It also perhaps suggests why such distance is put between these groupings when possible, as it maintains a sense of separation and distinctness. Where this is not possible, the careful demarcation of space via erection of barriers may help to confer the sense of a discrete container.⁵⁸ While great effort goes into ensuring the cricketing space remains neutral and has a 'Sri Lankan' character, this whole is immediately broken down once more into smaller units. Next, I will show how this process of demarcating and delimiting space into containers serves a distinct purpose during the event.

Identities Contained

Once the cricket ground is broken down into smaller containers, these are then filled with discrete identities. The character of those identities often seemed primarily arbitrary. Sometimes teams – both softball and hardball – were named after locations or peoples, businesses, places of worship or schools, but equally regularly the names of these teams were wholly invented. For example, TCC was named precisely because the founders wanted a name that had few connotations. Yasir told me that they “didn't want an Arabic name” so people didn't think “Muslims Muslims”, and “wanted a sport name” instead. One day, they were watching Australian domestic cricket on TV, and decided to take the first word of the team batting, then simply change a single letter. The rise of franchise cricket globally has certainly influenced this trend towards arbitrary names, and various clubs including ones I played against were regularly called things like *Renegades*, *Strikers*, *Stallions*, etc, either alongside another word or sometimes on their own. This phenomenon exists not only among cricket clubs in Sri Lanka; I once watched a football match that involved 'Sunrisers Kandy', an ode to the IPL team from Hyderabad. Despite the apparent arbitrariness of these identities, huge effort goes into marking them out and delineating them further. Many hardball teams create their own distinctive kit, including branded training gear, caps and playing wear, often with sponsors. Even the most basic of teams seemed to spend time and resources producing

⁵⁸ This is particularly relevant in the Big Match, which I describe in Chapter 12.

consistently designed clothing to mark themselves apart from others. At softball tournaments things go further, as teams in coloured kit are usually provided shade by similarly coloured tents of varying states of sophistication, sometimes even accompanied by logos, figures or mascots. The use of the Hogwarts houses from Harry Potter at the softball tournament above is an extreme example of this in action, borrowing directly from rich source material to create distinct identities and incorporate oppositions.



Figure 23. Coloured tents are set up in preparation for a tournament.

It appears that as the cricketing space is understood to be neutral, normal social identities are removed, to be replaced by other, more arbitrary ones. While the cricketing space begins as a liminal social space, this is quickly demarcated and segmented again. If the notion of containers suggests the importance of there being discrete spaces or units, then the efforts to create and adhere to specific yet largely arbitrary identities only reinforces the idea that these units should exist separately. Indeed, the arbitrariness of these identities seemed to exacerbate the physical space and/or barrier between groups, thereby existing primarily to highlight difference. Yet, borrowing the houses from a novel about wizards set in England also indicates that what mattered was not the character or identity of each group, but the very fact of grouping itself. Just as the Sri Lankan schools mobilise certain kinds of iconography to justify their separation in various kinds of competition, we see that cricket builds upon a deeper logic of grouping. In

essence, it is not the content but the model that is more important here. That the space is consciously stripped of social values and replaced with nondescript difference indicates that the cricketing encounter can be conceived of as a model for society, where a certain abstract notion of togetherness and difference is being expressed.

Fission & Fusion

How this model of society might play out can be illuminated by looking at other rituals in Sri Lanka. Ritual theorists have long suggested that spatial positioning itself might convey some understanding of society, and as Bell argues, ‘the fundamental efficacy of ritual activity lies in its ability to have people embody assumptions about their place in a larger order of things’ (Bell 2009:XI). Clearly, the separation of participants at the Sri Lankan cricket match into discrete groupings indicates some form of understanding about the world. As Mitchell notes, often ‘during liminality, the status of the participant is deliberately made ambiguous’ (Mitchell 2010:740), yet in this cricketing context, this is rarely so. While it is not possible to assign the status of victor until the end, throughout the match each participant holds a distinct membership to one of these arbitrary containers, often as the member [and/or supporter] of a team, or occasionally an umpire. Initially this seems problematic, as it does not fit with a Turnerian understanding of liminality and *communitas*, which sees liminality flattening or removing status and hierarchy (Turner 1969).

However, this idea of arbitrary containers and identities has precedent in ethnography of other liminal spaces in Sri Lanka. Returning to de Silva’s work on *Sri Pāda*, and specifically the groups of Buddhist pilgrims who travel there (2016), one sees how the pilgrim groups, far from being egalitarian, are organised into a distinct structure and hierarchy. Liminal status does not confer equality here, as groups are led by designated leaders, and the pilgrims who follow are separated based on their level of experience in travelling to the summit (*ibid*). Importantly for my notion of *arbitrary* containers, de Silva notes that these divisions are maintained ‘in *rather different forms* from the mundane structures of society’ (de Silva 2016:29, *my emphasis*), and ‘are not necessarily a repetition of the divisions and ranks that are found in their everyday world such as caste and class’ (*ibid*). Rather like at the cricket ground, the liminal, egalitarian space of the pilgrimage group is quickly broken down again into new categories, which apparently run contra to Turner’s notion of ‘*communitas*’ (*ibid*).

Another, more conscious (re-)structuring of liminal space not unlike in cricket is apparent in the ritualistic games detailed extensively by Obeyesekere (1984, cf. Bastin 2001). These games are played in worship of the goddess Pattini, one of the most popular deities in Sri Lanka, worshipped by Buddhists and Hindus alike (*ibid*). While many rituals undertaken for her worship have declined in recent years, these were previously prominent across the island. Two primary rituals are held for worshipping Pattini: *gammaduwa* and *ankeliya* (*ibid*). While the former is a kind of annual post-harvest festival, led predominantly by priests, *ankeliya* (literally ‘horn game’) is a ritualistic game participated in by most of the men in a village. In *ankeliya*, one can see how these logics of structuring liminal space operate. Obeyesekere notes that *ankeliya* had all but died out when he was writing (1984), although it continues to recur in state sponsored games and events, particularly around the Sinhala/Tamil new year in March.⁵⁹ The previous prominence of *ankeliya* across Sri Lanka, and its continued presence in cultural heritage activities suggests one can assume these logics have a reasonably wide spread. *Ankeliya* refers to both the ritualised game and longer festival these games are played within. Each festival occurs in a single village for the period of around two weeks.⁶⁰ In the game itself, two teams each prepare a curved ‘horn’⁶¹, which they carefully interlock, before pulling on either side of a rope to see which one breaks first. The team whose horn survives intact is deemed the winner. This entire process is repeated multiple times throughout each day for the period of a week (towards the latter half of the longer *ankeliya* festival). Obeyesekere notes that this festival was originally annual, but after falling out of regular use, was often carried out to placate the goddess during times of drought or plague (Obeyesekere 1984). Features of the use of space and the allocations of teams during *ankeliya* support my interpretation of cricketing space.

Most pertinently, during *ankeliya* rituals villages are divided into two largely arbitrary teams in a similarly arbitrary fashion. *Ankeliya* rituals were contested by *udupila* and *yatipila* (literally upper team and lower team), which Obeyesekere notes bear no hierarchical or symbolic meaning (1984:383). Although splitting of the village into these teams usually went along patrilineal lines, in the sense that members of one team normally came from the same family, Obeyesekere notes that individuals and families swapped teams often, or might even be

⁵⁹ My research suggests that these rituals are still being carried out, but in the mode of performing ‘cultural heritage’. Many of these events are sponsored by the government heritage ministry.

⁶⁰ Smaller surrounding villages send participants to the larger village as appropriate.

⁶¹ This can be a real horn, but other examples include tree branches, roots, or carved wood.

assigned to the opposite side by the ritual's organisers if village numbers weren't quite right for even teams (*ibid*). The presence of ritual specialists, organisers and leaders within each team – selected especially for the games – also suggests a new hierarchy is forged in the supposedly liminal space, which supports de Silva's interpretation of the Buddhist pilgrim groups. The arrangement of the space itself also echoes what I have seen within cricket grounds. Markers of the event, such as statues, shrines and banners are erected to mark out the space as liminal and exceptional. Participants are not allowed to leave the defined boundaries of the ritual area, being required to stay within the space for the entire week of the *ankeliya* games (*ibid*). Most importantly, Obeyesekere notes that the teams took up opposing sides of the ritual space, each team having their own well-defined area, with corresponding shrine and horn preparation area (*ibid*: 385). Furthermore, participants were not allowed to cross to the opposition's side without permission (*ibid*). This shows a similar logic to those I have witnessed at cricket grounds.

In both *ankeliya* and cricket, the barriers between teams, their arrangement and their selection suggest a kind of segmentary style system is present, with a logic not unlike that put forward by Evans-Pritchard when characterising the lineage organisation of *The Nuer* (1940). While I do not refer to political groupings in the way that Evans-Pritchard does, I think the logic is one that involves a similar process of scaling up into a larger whole. It is apparent in Obeyesekere's account of *ankeliya* that in allocating both upper and lower teams each year, certain castes generally join to form one team or another (Obeyesekere 1984:410). In his examples, if there were four major caste groups in a village, two would generally form each team (*ibid*). This does not preclude swapping, but indicates that there is some level of preference when forming the team. He continues to note that often if someone moves to another village, they take their allegiance with them, joining the appropriate team at their new home (*ibid*). As such, it is possible to see a kind of segmentary system at work in the way that these groups combine together into teams, i.e., smaller groups joining against other, larger groups. There is a sense of cohesion created within each smaller groups, that can then be extrapolated up the system as groups band together.

The importance of the division this segmentary system confers for unifying purposes becomes clearer when looking at the *ankeliya* rituals themselves. Obeyesekere notes that competition can be fierce during the days of the *ankeliya* games, and he describes the ritualistic shaming

and requesting of forgiveness by the victors of each bout. These people run the risk of real social fracture with their actions and must carry themselves carefully (Obeyesekere:390). Where competition is especially fierce or fractious, an arbitrator is assigned to decide the winner for each bout. Obeyesekere notes that in areas which have had violent clashes previously, the winner of each bout is pre-determined, and an appropriate horn used to fix the match (*ibid*:411). Either way in most, if not all *ankeliya* rituals he observed, the victor of the total event (decided at the end of the seven days) is often arbitrarily assigned to the team representing Pattini. Once the games are over, the horns and the statues are paraded in further ritualistic fashion, and then the villages come back together again with a great ceremony. We can see here an example of van Gennep's *rites de passage* in action, with clearly defined elements of separation, liminality, and aggregation (van Gennep 2001 [1960]). Most interestingly, during the liminal period the participants are separated, not together, and it is actually in aggregation that the entire group comes back together as one. While there is separation during the ritual, there is also coming back together again. Fission is followed by fusion.

From looking at older Sri Lankan rituals, with distinct *rites de passage*, precedent emerges for the need to establish new structures in the liminal, supposedly egalitarian space. Yet after the groups have been split into two competing groups (potentially formed of smaller segments), these groups are joined back together again in unity. This is not without some risk of conflict, and as Obeyesekere notes the *ankeliya* rituals employ an arbitrator where necessary, or remove competition entirely, while of course cricket uses umpires.⁶² So long as it is ritually marked and arbitrated where necessary, this model shows it is possible to engage different groups in periods of opposition without full blown conflict. It suggests that ritual models in Sri Lanka use the liminal space not for strict equality, but to put opposing forces against one another, in full knowledge that they would return to the whole once again at the end.

Exploring Fundamental Ideas

While *the* cricketing space is understood as somewhere that change can happen, the use of space indicates that certain ideas underpin how this change can happen. The notion of containers illustrates how groups are intentionally split up into discrete areas, which is

⁶² I discuss arbitration in full later.

beneficial as it enables the expression of distinct identities. The cricketing space becomes one when arbitrary units are pitted against one another, in a ritual display of difference. Meanwhile, Sri Lankan rituals indicate this separation is acceptable as groups are assumed to return together at the end. Though there is fission in the beginning of the event and people are split, this is done in the knowledge that there will be fusion at the end. Thus, change and experimentation can occur within the ritual space of the cricketing event in a safe manner. In summary, the cricket space is not just a place where experimentation and change are assumed to occur; the modes of change suggest the space can also be understood as a model of society. This indicates that while the cricketing space speaks directly to the level of the 'Sri Lankan', it also hints at an experimentation with more fundamental ideas about groups and managing difference. Next, I draw these various threads together to explore what this says about cricketing spaces in the conclusion to this section.

SECTION II CONCLUSION

SAFE ENACTMENTS OF DIFFERENCE

In this section I have outlined features of cricket spaces across Sri Lanka. In Chapter 3, I described how diverse people come together at cricket to test one another and themselves. My interlocutors treated cricket as a serious endeavour, because much of their enjoyment was derived from the thrill of competition, the opportunity for testing and the potential for personal development. In the liminal space of the cricket ground, this form of ‘testing’ carries with it a sense of increased personal agency, and may actually be the ideal outcome of cricket participation for most cricketers. In summary, it is broadly understood that change of some kind happens within the cricketing space. This interpretation is supported by my description of the cricketing spaces themselves, which illustrates why all sorts of potential is assumed to reside there. In Chapter 4 I have shown that the commonalities across these spaces evoke a generalised notion of *the* cricket space. Such spaces are designated as uncommon, exceptional events, and are imbued with a ‘Sri Lankan’ character. As it is framed as a ‘Sri Lankan’ space, it is understood change is also occurring at a higher level than the individual, regarding ideas of the nation and what it means to exist within it. I therefore contend cricket could be used to process one of the biggest issues I highlighted in Section I: the national question. In Chapter 5, I analysed the use of space itself at cricket events, and suggested that there are other fundamental social concerns at play during cricket. The ritual division and then union of people implies an understanding of broader society being experimented with. If diverse peoples come together to negotiate fundamental social ideas, in the knowledge that change will happen, then my analysis conveys that the cricket space in Sri Lanka is at the very least an *arena of experimentation* with social values. This ethnographic material shows that cricketing spaces are deemed to be important, and also further explains why people think cricket ought to be reconciliatory beyond being simply unifying. In this conclusion, I draw together these threads to characterise the cricketing space, and offer suggestions about how to make sense of the activity within it.

‘Sri Lankan’ Imagination

While the cricketing space can be construed as ‘Sri Lankan’ in character, it would be erroneous to suggest this fosters a homogeneous idea of what ‘Sri Lankan’ means. Anthropologists have increasingly moved away from Turner’s framing of liminal space as ‘anti-structure’, where ritual inverts social norms (Kelly and Kaplan 1990). Such a structuralist dialectic sees ‘anti-structure’ as a distinct thing, erroneously presenting it as something singular which can be captured (*ibid*:139). Instead, following Bakhtin, anthropologists now focus more on the ‘polyphony’ of voices and symbols the liminal space contains (*ibid*:138). In other words, the liminal space is one of diverse possibility, and it is this power to generate new meaning that makes it a space with the potential to engender distinct social change (Kapferer 2019, Stoller 2019). The role of imagination is crucial here, as the intense possibility of liminal space invites the participant to consider multiple perspectives simultaneously, in a compelling way which transforms their social world (Stoller 2019). The multiple narratives that play out in liminal spaces prompt the participant to (re-)consider as they participate, in an endless modification of their understanding (*ibid*).

The role of play in sport lends itself to this re-consideration. As Bateson suggests, play is a form of meta-communication about social norms, between reflexive parties who are conscious that their actions lay ‘outside’ of normal social behaviour (Bateson 1987[1955]). For Roger Caillois, sport ‘involves make-believe that confirms for players the existence of imagined realities that may be set against “real life”’ (Besnier et al 2018:29). Through play, and in particular the repetition of specific modes of play, sport raises distinct meta-narratives about the activity at hand, the participants, and the wider society around it. Although these narratives are often well-worn and filled with cliché, with play there is always the potential of invention and innovation. Sport, like play, is therefore ‘not so much an activity separate from the world but a disposition toward the world’ (Besnier et al 2018:28), a space of imagined possibilities, a way of reflecting on something while being still within it, a space literally ‘to play with’ ideas. In this sense, sport does not invert social norms as Turner’s anti-structure might have it, but is instead an arena for playing out a series of *alternative narratives* about those social norms.

I suggest that the Sri Lankan cricket ground is a clearly defined space for the working out of various *alternative narratives* about Sri Lanka, ‘Sri Lankanness’ and the individual’s place within

this entity. Cricket is an arena wherein participants seem to join together to perform certain kinds of sociality, and imagine better futures. If for Geertz, Balinese cockfighting is ‘a story the Balinese tell themselves about themselves’ (1977:448), then cricket might be the *many stories* that Sri Lankans tell about themselves. If cricket is a kind of ‘scaling up’ point, where the individual can imagine themselves as part of a wider Sri Lankan community (I.e., Appadurai 1996), then this is not merely a simple matter of one Sri Lankan identity, but many multiple ones. Where the liminal space involves imagination, the imagined possibilities seem to be at the level of the ‘Sri Lankan’. If cricket is seen as something which might be reconciliatory, then I believe it is the power of this imaginary capacity, and the promise of these alternative realities that makes it so. Yet as I will go on to show in the rest of this thesis, these performances within the cricketing arena and the experimentations with social norms are structured in a specific way. In particular, the prevalence of certain sporting tropes constrain such alternative realities to a narrow range of options.

A Safe Place to Experiment

These various imaginings also suggest the experimentation with other values beyond the ‘Sri Lankan’. My analysis of the use of space and ritual illuminates this further. The notions of ‘a space’ and the use of space are interwoven phenomena. So, thinking with Nandy and Appadurai, although the use of space in cricket may express particularly Sri Lankan social concerns, the idea of the cricket ground as ‘a space’ allows for experimentation with those social concerns. At cricket, people ostensibly move into the space to encounter one another, while the notion of proximity suggests that some kind of relationship occurs in the space, even if persons are not necessarily physically close. Furthermore, the supposedly unified Sri Lankan space is split into discrete containers, which support the expression of specific – often arbitrary – identities. This conveys that cricket involves the segmentation of a whole rather than the separation of distinct groups. The ritualistic concept of fission and fusion supports this idea, as people are intentionally split into groups only to be brought back together again. Thus, the liminal cricketing space involves an intricate expression of ideas relating to the management of groups, of their identities, and of relations themselves. Cricketing spaces allow for the experimentation with fundamental social ideas, while ritual understandings form a safety net, enabling these experimentations to take place. Altogether, this suggests the cricket event is a space for experimenting with existing social norms in a controlled way. As I see it, cricket

speaks directly to ideas about managing difference safely, how to interact with people that appear other to us, and how to come together and ultimately stay together. This suggests that in terms of a performance of sociality, cricket spaces are therefore a place for the *safe enactments of difference*.

In summary, it is understood that cricket provides the means to safely experiment with ideas about the self and others. Due to its popularity in the post-conflict period, I assert that cricket may be an important vehicle for this kind of experimentation with social values. Importantly in the context of reconciliation, while the idea of the cricketing space as ‘Sri Lankan’ hints at a kind of unifying ‘we are all the same’ logic, it also evokes a pluralistic notion of society predicated on difference. The cricketing space, composed of discrete groupings of people, indicates a potential model for society, for how people might come together, how to facilitate larger groupings. It promotes the construction of discrete identities, units that are opposed to each other at the cricket game. The way these containers are characterised, the notion of proximity, and the ritualistic aspects of the game all point towards cricket as a vehicle for safe experimentation. What is being experimented with in the post-conflict period are ideas of what Sri Lankan society is and might become. Considered together, these various factors indicate why the cricketing space is understood as reconciliatory. Furthermore, these safe enactments of difference imply a local notion of reconciliation which is quite different from the high-level rhetorical usage often associated with SDP. The idea of safe enactments of difference is indeed a far more nuanced idea, akin to conciliation rather than reconciliation. This depiction paints cricket in an extremely positive light, but as the immanent possibilities of the ‘Sri Lankan’ imagination suggests, these safe enactments are not ‘unified’ in the sense I raised in Section I. It is important to examine how these various enactments are carried out, the broader social concerns that emerge from these enactments, and how they might be produced, constrained, and navigated. Although sport can enable safe enactments of difference, what does this actually mean for participants? In Section III, I begin to answer this question by examining what social ideas are being experimented with, and how these experimentations occur.

SECTION III
CRICKETING IDEAS

INTRODUCTION

CRICKETING IDEAS

In this section, I explore the ideas being experimented with in cricketing spaces, and look in more detail at how these experimentations occur. I suggest experimentation primarily addresses two fundamental sets of ideas: ideas of the group, and ideas of the individual. In cricket, people can define and refine a sense of who they are and where they belong. As such, in this section I focus primarily on my experiences playing cricket with The Titans. In Chapter 6, I deal with conceptions of groups by examining the ideas people hold about the cricket team, while in Chapter 7 I explore ideas about individuals by considering the concepts of role and talent. While cricket provides space to negotiate these elementary social ideas, I found that tensions emerged during these experimentations that were not easily resolved. This highlighted a fundamental friction between individual and group concerns. As sport is a particular modernist phenomenon, it is important to assess how sporting ideas interact with other fundamental concepts. If cricket enables a space for the safe enactments of difference, then it is important to note what might prevent or constrain these enactments. As such, I also illustrate how these experimentations are mediated by sporting ideas, examining how cricketing discourses inform and constrain the potential responses players have to situations. I will then explore how players attempt to manage these tensions in Section IV. As I will show there, while sport enables experimentation with fundamental ideas, it simultaneously limits this experimentation.

CHAPTER 6

THE IDEA OF 'THE TEAM'

Scenes: Kandungama

We laugh as Sulaiman's tiny Suzuki Wagon R bounces up and down on the dirt track, the four of us struggling to remain in our seats. It's The Titans' first Division 3 match of the year and yet it feels like we've come on safari. We're now firmly in the countryside, having travelled almost two hours out of Colombo to get here. Finally, we pass through the woods and are rewarded with the sight of Kandungama Cricket Ground. Cut into the hill on one side of a valley, bordered on three sides by steep banks topped with woodland, the ground is a lush green expanse that opens out before us, marked in the middle by a single dark strip of coconut matting. Across the valley high on the hill, a Buddhist stupa looks down on us. I remark to Idris that this is the sort of thing I expected when I imagined playing cricket in Sri Lanka. The ground looked a little rocky in places, but far better than the sandpit we played our warm-up match on.

Now parked, us early arrivals laugh as we watch the minivan which carries the rest of our teammates struggle along the dirt path. Imran is clearly cursing as he tries to ride over the enormous bumps in the road. Eventually, 4 or 5 people pile out of the van, giving it the clearance to get over the remaining track. Fortunately, this less-than-ideal preparation is mitigated by the fact we will start late. As we get to the changing rooms, the umpires inform us the outfield is still wet from the overnight rains, and will push the start time back almost an hour.

We leisurely file into the changing rooms, teammates who travelled separately greeting one another, snacking on fish buns, sipping iced coffee out of little plastic cups. We number 18 in total and there is a real buzz. I've never seen so many Titans together. Comparatively, the opposition are new to Division 3 and disorderly, and the umpires aren't happy with them. We sit around and chat while we wait for things to gear up.

I am not feeling too well, a combination of stomach upset and the heat, and ask Hadee, the captain, to drop out of consideration for the match. He asks if I am sure, saying it would help balance the side to have me in, but I reply that if I'm not 100% fit I don't want to take another player's place. He seems to understand this perfectly and nods with a smile.



Figure 24. A view of the ground at Kandungama.

While the captains and umpires fill out team sheets and organise things, the rest of the squad progress out onto the field to take their warmups. It is obvious that there is that mix of nervousness and excitement that marks the start of a sporting season. They go for a light jog, before throwing a few balls around, in no strict fashion. Some of the guys are giddy, others look anxious. Vaz, usually the joker of the group, takes on a new form for me, now looking focused and steely. He strides around, arms ending in clenched fists, his short form looking stiff and solid.

Watching, I consider how it must feel for some of these players who have trained all year to suddenly be replaced. Fakhir, whose only training session this year was last week, makes the starting XI. In the car Vaz told me The Titans has always relied too heavily on "big game players". Fakhir was talented, no doubt, but hadn't really been present of late. Vaz told me that one thing The Titans needed to progress into the tournament is to realise it's a team game.

When the umpires deem the ground to be acceptably dry, the toss is made at 10:57, with the match to start exactly 15 minutes later, at 11:12. The opposition win the toss and elect to bat, so our guys get themselves ready to field. The players warm up a little more, before the entire squad – the playing XI and the remaining 7 of us – are beckoned to join together in a huddle. I link arms with Arfan and Sulaiman and lean in, prepared to listen.

I'm surprised to see Fakhir speak first. He also speaks for a long time.

"Well boys, first game of Division 3, we don't need any more motivation for that." He begins. He tells us how we need to take one match at a time, and therefore the season starts here. He says we should be "bowling line and length", "giving your 100% effort", and "working really hard" for 45 overs. His speech is full of talk about trying your best, and emphasises the amount of effort it would take to win.

Then Hadee, the captain, has to essentially cut Fakhir off in order to be heard. Unlike Fakhir, Hadee emphasises that we need to enjoy the match, like the recent warm up games. He suggests that we will play our best if we are relaxed and happy.

Hadee is himself cut short by the umpires walking out onto the ground. Vaz quickly pipes up, saying that cricket is a team game with 11 players, that all of us are playing at once, that we should support each other. Like Fakhir he emphasises hard work, but states we have to do that hard work together, for one another. Others quickly chime in too with varying advice, and someone says that those who weren't playing need to be running out with water, and supporting the fast bowlers as much as they can.

Urgently, as the batsmen walk out too, Hadee tells us to get our hands in the middle, and everyone leans in and down, 18 hands pressing down on top of one another. "Ready?" he asks.

"TITANS!" we respond in unison, our hands flying up as one.

Talking about Cricket

In our huddle before matches, during casual conversations at training, drinking with friends in the bar, it became apparent that numerous competing discourses concerning cricket were being raised: about individual effort, playing for the team, and enjoying the game. In this chapter I examine these team discourses in detail, to assess how people imagine the cricket team itself and the members within it, and mobilise such discourses to influence group relations. The idea of the cricket team in Sri Lanka is heavily influenced by the older cricketing discourses I outlined in Chapter 1. These sporting discourses promote a sense of fair play, an ideal of equality and the unified team, which altogether encourages deference to the wider whole and the ‘right way’ of playing cricket. As a group, TCC presented a strong team ethic that suggests their notion of the team is heavily influenced by these discourses. Individually, I found my informants repeated back to me classic cricket tropes and aphorisms without prompt, showing similar concern for the traditional values of fair play, team spirit, and gentlemanly conduct (Mangan 1998). However, as I grew to understand individuals more and the cliques the club fostered, the veneer of the cohesive team became less tenable. Apparent in discussions about what the team stands for and who makes it up was a struggle to maintain team unity. Yet despite these struggles, there was still this overwhelming tendency to describe and refer to the team in terms of a cohesive whole.

The ideas of *equality* and *meritocracy* that lie at the heart of these sporting tropes clash with already established social hierarchies, evoking a more fundamental tension between individual and group concerns. Though the opportunity cricket affords for meritocracy and the increased agency this entails seemed particularly enticing to my informants, various efforts are made to manage this agency within the team by appealing to a greater good, thereby minimising individuals, and maintaining the status quo for the benefit of all. Furthermore, while much effort is put into ensuring equality, maintaining the pretence of an ideal team is complicated by a desire for success. This tension often emerges as oppositions: the desire for equality among teammates must be balanced against the desire to win; the need to protect an exclusive team identity is balanced against the need for new players; the greater good of the team is pitted against the desires of individuals. In these oppositions usually emerges a recognition that group concerns might in fact be best served by certain individuals. This complicates the idea of the unified team and pursuing the ‘greater good’ even further. Individual effort was sanctioned if

the team could prosper.⁶³ This is felt acutely when considering leaders, who are recognised as necessary yet antithetical to the egalitarian ethos. By presenting these negotiations about what the team means and who the individuals are within it, I reflect on the broader impact of sporting discourse, and emphasise that 'the team' is not a simple community of practice, and that cricketing discourse is not simply unifying.

Managing the Team Ethic

Sustained effort in difficult conditions during matches was enabled by a strong sense of team support. The Titans were not in the habit of picking only 11 players for a match. At the first game of the season, we took 18 players to an away game, while anywhere around 15 was common. It was expected that all who could attend should, and a final playing 11 would be finalised right before the match. This was initially strange to me, as team selection in the UK is often finalised days before the match, but the logic of it became apparent with time. All the members of the team are seen as integral, and winning the match was considered a team effort, a combination of those on and off the field. Providing support from the side-lines was taken especially seriously, and was deemed to be an important factor in wins. Often when we had a huddle at the end of a game to debrief, someone who had played would mention the support that was received and praise it, suggesting that the win was not possible without them. The players applauded those who didn't play in the game.

The types of support included motivation, but extended to practical things like fetching water for those on the field, and also "giving ideas" to the team when it was deemed necessary (someone might suggest they had seen a batsman's weakness for example). When motivating, the key seems to be constant noise. Those off the pitch talked endlessly, shouting things like "neyamayi!" (superb) and cajoling, "come on come on" and "keep going". The major emphasis was on not giving up. When I was batting, I found this noise incredibly motivating during long periods in the heat. I think my own determination was often appreciated, and when my teammates came out with water during breaks, they always told me not to give up and to keep

⁶³ Much of this conflict may rest on the odd position cricket holds as being a team sport imbued with an intensely individual element. It is possible for the team to rest on one or two pairs of shoulders. The cricketing discourses that consequently emerge reflect this complicated social relationship between ideas of the individual and the group more than individual sports.

going. Conversely, those who played a risky shot or did something wrong when batting apologised openly to the team for their poor play. At all times, effort was valued, and people made their own effort to bring others up with them.

As team support is not just motivating, but practical and tactical, and given how much emphasis is put on the importance of this support, it seems clear that a strong team ethic is reinforced by The Titans. Though individual milestones are celebrated, almost all efforts are framed towards group success, and all team members become subservient to the goals of the group. Some team members might be disappointed not to play a game, but they take up their support role with enthusiasm and seek to help out in any way they can. This sense of the collective was often reinforced in group discourses, such as during the huddle, and a strong sense of what it means to be part of the team was established throughout. While the difficulties of playing cricket I introduced in Chapter 3 are mitigated by a focus on fitness, a moderation of effort, and an indulgence in the joys of competition, this focus on group support and building a sense of the greater good suggests a recognition in the power of collective effort. The sense of camaraderie often seemed paramount. There was a strong team ethic at TCC; a sense of group cohesion and a general understanding that individual needs are broadly subservient to the goals of the group.

Managing an idea of ‘The Team’

Casual discussions among my teammates – at training, at matches, in the club WhatsApp group – often featured a subtext about the identity of TCC as a team, and consequently who the members of that team were. Furthermore, the management of TCC by senior members conveyed efforts to present the club as a cohesive group, in an apparent attempt to ensure its existence into the future. Perhaps the most conspicuous example of this revolved around team selection for matches. The Titans has a wide member base, numbering many more than the 11 men needed for one match, and so they have a policy to guide selection decisions. Ostensibly, this policy privileges equality over all else. I was told by several people in the team’s management that up-to-date membership of the club was a pre-requisite for selection in any match. The criteria for making the team were then based first on attendance, then recent performances, and finally on skill. Those who attended training regularly were to be prioritised, then those who had done well in matches recently, before finally those who had not attended

or done well recently, but were known performers in the past. It was clear from conversations with other members of the club that this policy was understood as a crucial part of fostering a happy club environment, and was considered to be fair to all. Team selection was therefore managed in an effort to foster a sense of equality within the club.

Similar efforts to promote an ideal of the unified team are evident in the minutiae of club politics, including discussions about club membership. Neither of the clubs I played for liked the idea of bringing in players for matches who hadn't played for the club before. On the odd occasion that Broncos were short for a match, "outside" players were brought in via friends to make up the numbers. Once, four "outside" players were in the squad, and a couple of Broncos members complained that the team was therefore "no longer Broncos". They reprimanded the other club members for not being available. The Titans also showed resistance to bringing in outsiders for matches, though they were rarely short of players in the same way. As their selection policy shows, there was a similar desire to focus on present members of the club, rather than those whose attendance was not guaranteed. For both teams, it was clear that one way of presenting a unified team is to suggest you exclude outsiders.

I found this policing of boundaries curious, as remaining hostile to incorporating persons from outside of the group seems a problematic way to approach sustaining a social institution. Furthermore, I was initially confused by a continuing discourse of entropy at the club, an idea that The Titans might not survive into the next season. For example, when we played a newly formed team during a pre-season friendly, I remarked to a teammate that they looked a serious bunch, as they were being guided through an extensive warm up by a coach. He quickly replied that The Titans were the same when they were founded, that people were incredibly keen and did everything "properly" at first, but were now far less enthusiastic and lazy. Many at the club seemed to suggest that TCC would fall apart without support. Indeed, the club management were often anxious about recruiting more members, and spoke about their desires to ensure things continued into the future. In my opinion TCC clearly possessed a good core of players, and we never struggled to field a team. Neither remaining hostile to outsiders or portraying entropy seem to promote a cohesive whole or ensure the team's survival. Over time, it became apparent that this discourse generates an imperative for current members to participate in the club, and is possibly used by management to ensure engagement. Often people in the

WhatsApp chat were encouraged to come to training and play on the pretence that this will ensure the club survives year on year, battling the supposed threat of decline. This certainly resonates with Coalter's assertion that as a modernist sport, cricket contributed to the reification of a notion of citizenship (Coalter 2007). Playing for TCC was therefore presented as a sort of civic duty to the club. Furthermore, all at the club – not just management – appealed to the greater good, the idea of TCC being a collection of 'our people'. Members encouraged each other to participate in order to reinforce the character of the team and its ethos. The ideal of the team and the greater good was therefore held aloft as a reason for continued existence in and of itself.

Managing the Need to Succeed

This need to be part of a unified team was complicated by personal and collective desires for success. Despite these efforts to promote the ideal of a unified team, it soon became clear these efforts would be postponed by the determination to win. So, while team selection was clearly aimed at fostering a sense of equality in the team (all have an equal chance to play so long as you attend training), in my experience this policy was regularly broken. The management and captain often made selection decisions that focused more on team success than on ensuring everyone gets equal opportunity to play. For example, there was some quiet consternation about the fact that Fakhir was picked for the first match of the Division 3 tournament. Fakhir is without a doubt one of the most talented batsmen at the club, played professionally in Colombo for a short period, and would be part of the club's best side. Yet, Fakhir had not attended training in months, and had even claimed he was retiring from playing cricket the previous year to focus on coaching his young boys. He suddenly turned up at the Sunday training session a week before the first match, and then was picked for the team. This forced out other players who had attended training regularly. In terms of the club's selection policy, especially when considering attendance, he should not have been selected. Fakhir's selection was clearly based on the selectors' desires to win, and shows these egalitarian rules about team selection can be broken.

The importance of winning is explained in part by the fact that The Titans was run like a business. Two of the founders told me that one reason they left their previous club was because they felt a new club would have a better chance of success in the league. They set the ambitious

target of gaining promotion to Division 2 within only a few years, and they had previously offered financial incentives to players who did well in matches.⁶⁴ There was therefore a certain sense of ruthlessness pervading the management's decision making. Many at the club recognise that the team's success, especially in the league tournaments, was paramount too. Though Fakhir's selection caused some chagrin among players at TCC, especially for those he replaced, there seemed to be a sort of quiet resignation that this was unavoidable. Many simply made pity comments along the lines of: "when the season starts they will come [for matches]", suggesting that these same selection dilemmas occurred each year. This could be avoided during friendly matches, when swapping on and off the field was a bit more flexible. However, there was often palpable awkwardness during the warmups for league games, as we all realised that some people would definitely have to be dropped from the squad. In this instance a desire to win was actually helpful for group unity, as the captain could frame his selection decisions in purely cricketing terms, expressing a desire to properly "balance" the side in order to have the best chance for success. Here, one rationale for selection (equality) is supplanted by another, equally valid rationale (balance). In all, it seemed that the discourse of equality was often weighed against the recognition that the club has to pick the strongest team in order to win, and thus the 'greater good' becomes a primary driver in managing group tensions.

A similarly pragmatic stance is evident in club recruitment. Despite the desire to retain a group identity and efforts to resist the influx of outsiders, there was recognition that the club would always need new members eventually. The worry over club decline was not only mobilised by club management to encourage participation by current members, but was used as evidence that they should continue to find new players. Management often sought to boost club numbers by recruiting new players through friends or social media, and indeed many initial TCC members were brought to the club through Facebook. Team numbers remained relatively static during my fieldwork. Membership did change occasionally, with previous members replaced by new ones, or old members returning. Though the management often indicated that recruitment was merely about ensuring that TCC survives, there was also an evident desire to recruit more talented players to ensure success. This recruitment was framed as a threat by some regular members, who saw it as management trying to replace them with

⁶⁴ For example, 500 rupees for a five-wicket haul or scoring a century. A man of the match performance usually meant waiving the match fee.

better players. This fear was to some extent justified, as the club's business-like approach to success meant management saw recruitment as a process of talent acquisition. New members who came to the club during my time included younger men just out of school, brought in with the hope of boosting skills and improving team performance. One manager often spoke about putting the right personnel in place to bid for the Division 3 title.

Minimising Individuals

Though many support these efforts to place the team above all else, and present the team as a unified entity, players often expressed their dissatisfaction with TCC. These dissatisfactions never seemed to boil over into overt arguments, but still occupied many. These reactions could be seen as the frustrations inherent in being a member of any institution. They are the kinds of problems that arise when shared concerns come out of alignment. Indeed, TCC had several cliques, and sometimes there were tensions between them. With the majority of the club being devout Muslims, a small minority of other ethnicities including Tamil Hindus, Tamil Christians, and Malay, seemed to naturally join together as they were alcohol drinkers.⁶⁵ As most Malays are Muslim, Tariq was unusual in that he drank alcohol and smoked, which are forbidden or *haram* practices.⁶⁶ This drew some criticism from other members of the club, who talked about him being a bad Muslim ("he doesn't go and pray", "he drinks", etc). Vimal, a Tamil Hindu, told me the criticism was especially bad when he was captain, and he spent a lot of time trying to defend Tariq. Vimal said that it caused unnecessary friction between players, but more than anything else, he was frustrated that this had become a personal issue. This became one of the reasons Vimal left the club for a while. Generally speaking, the manner in which some people vented their frustrations about other members of the club made the clashes in personality quite obvious, and some members were the target of this ire more than others. What was interesting was that such issues could also be pegged to the age of the club, aligned to the discourse about potential club decline. Some at the club recognised that older clubs like The Titans are no longer as spritely as they once were, saddled by infighting and personal issues.⁶⁷

⁶⁵ As an 'outsider' in the same sense, and a drinker, I naturally gravitated towards these guys too.

⁶⁶ While Tariq drank alcohol and smoked, he still observed some practices, like not eating pork. He also maintained his devotion to Allah and continued attending the Mosque.

⁶⁷ A proviso is that while there are these obvious cliques and issues at the club, many of my teammates are very quiet on their own, and it's clear they require mobilising to become associated with one group

However, while there were no doubt some personal factors behind such grievances, the way that people actually framed this dissatisfaction was not necessarily in personal terms. In expressing their frustrations about the team, people often resorted to explanations that drew from the idea that the team should be a unified whole for the benefit of the members, and that no one person should be above others. For example, in many of my chats with members of TCC there was a lingering concern about an over-reliance on individual players. For example, Vaz remarked that The Titans relied too heavily on "big game players", and instead they "need to focus on playing as a team". He suggested that a focus on individuals was detrimental to the club's chances of success. Similarly, Vimal felt that TCC "over-relied" on Fakhir, and suggested that whenever Fakhir failed in a game, this had a negative effect on team morale, causing some players to panic unnecessarily. Tariq added that TCC still won games they played without Fakhir. I remarked to Tariq that team spirit seemed to be higher when Fakhir was missing too, something both Tariq and Vimal agreed with. Vimal said that for him, cricket was a team game, and "you have to trust each other in order to succeed". While it was the team itself that failed in being unified, people tend to focus on individuals in their desire to lay blame. It was not so much personal issues with Fakhir that catalysed these frustrations, but a problem with the fact that TCC did not act as a team.

There were also frustrations about individual treatment outside matches, and concerns were sometimes voiced in private about a continued focus on individuals at training. I had noticed that during the net portion of our training sessions, little to no effort was made to ensure that *everyone* gets to bat during the session.⁶⁸ Furthermore, it was often the same players who were invited by the captain to bat week after week, which meant that some players spent a great amount of time in the nets, while others could go months between opportunities to bat. This element is definitely *not* egalitarian. When I queried this with a few members, some said that they felt the system needed changing so others could get a go ("or else how will they improve?"), while another told me that when they used to have a coach, the problem was in fact worse, as the coach tended to spend the majority of their time with a small handful of players. When I spoke with Hadee about this issue, he told me that they liked to give the batsmen an

or another. For most, cricket merely entailed fun alongside hard work. Everyone tried their hardest at training and during games, and went home contented with this.

⁶⁸ In my experience in the UK, most net sessions involve ensuring everyone – or almost everyone – gets a chance to bat, and thus individual sessions are proportional.

opportunity to bat and the bowlers to bowl. In other words, players could focus on their specific skills and play their roles. Though there was a pretence of equality in selection, there was no pretence of equality in training, and again the need for success and the idea of balance was mobilised to justify this inequality.

Again, these frustrations are not necessarily with the effect itself so much as a reflection on desires for club membership and the ideal of the unified team. Vimal noted that previous coaches not only focused on individuals, but wanted to bring in their own players from outside the club to join the team. This was a more pressing reason why many at the club felt resistance to new members coming in, especially those brought in purely for matches. Many at the club expressed desires to develop the skills of players who are already there instead. As Vimal succinctly put it, “coach *us* man!...we have brought you to coach us, so coach *us!*”. There are therefore desires for development *as a team*. Vimal and Tariq suggested that a good coach focused on winning with the people who are present and developed players rather than brought them in.⁶⁹ It was recognised that this process could (and perhaps should) take time. For example, I found it very interesting that Vimal suggested that TCC should have recruited new players six months before the start of the season. I felt this was rather extreme, but makes sense when considering the desire to focus on current members and group identity. It would take time to understand where players fit within the squad and establish camaraderie between everyone before the matches began. While I was told that new players were always welcome, this explains why new members were often integrated slowly, as players needed to pay their entrance fees and train for a few months first in order to serve their time. In essence, Vimal was pointing out that the route to success should not be to just bring a new, better player in, but to improve the people who are already at TCC. Otherwise, what is the point of the team? Here, the idea of the team complicates the role of individuals within it, and forms the framework within which people voice their frustrations about these tensions.

While it is true that individuals *were* often more focused during training and at matches, it is undeniable that the team generally performed well when these big players were in the team. TCC had many talented players, proven performers who usually boosted results. While people

⁶⁹ Both Tariq and Vimal told me they most respected ‘PK’, a former coach who apparently did this development well.

vented their frustration that some people come into the team without being present at training, the impact of these players on performances was also recognised. The fact that other people in the team panicked if Fakhir failed was clear evidence he was considered to be a match-winner. The way that team selection was often bent was an endorsement of the opinion that it was often individuals who delivered results, not necessarily the team. Equally, there seemed to be an acceptance of the individual aspect to training. Though some voiced concern, many simply got on with their jobs and focused on their own game. The notion of *role* helps explain this viewpoint, as individual roles are acknowledged as important for team success. Thus, while 'the team' was held up as a reason for not liking a focus on individuals, it is also the logic whereby these individuals are needed. Individual desires were often subsumed through appeals to a greater good, while it was recognised that some individuals were important for team success. I contend this illustrates a belief in careful management of what 'the team' means for people. There was still a lot of feeling within TCC that even though the team needed good players, this had to be balanced throughout the squad. Though individuals might be needed, it was indeed dangerous to rely on one or two individuals. Either way, it is clear that the cricketing discourses of equality do not function in a simple manner here.

These tensions show how complex maintaining the idea of a 'team' is, and reflect that the cricketing discourses of fairness and equality are intricately woven into social action. In particular, the idea of trying to do something for 'the greater good' is clearly fraught with difficulty. TCC seemed to be caught between several oppositions while trying to maintain the idea of the team. The pretence of fairness in 'the team' underpins the desire for a cohesive whole, but the idea of 'the team' is also the driver for success, meaning that paradoxically, equality and fairness must sometimes be sacrificed in order to benefit the team. There is similarly a desire to protect the identity of the team by resisting 'outsiders', while there remained a recognition that outsiders were needed for ongoing survival of the group. Though an individual's needs are subsumed by appeals to the team and the greater good, there is a focus on individuals at training and in matches. Furthermore, there are tensions caused by the idea that actually, group concerns might be best served by individuals. This exists as the antithesis of cricketing discourses that espouse the values of group identity and equality. Though the ideal of the team is a strong discourse in cricket circles, it is clear from my ethnography that it is incredibly difficult to actually realise this in practice. Furthermore, the

ideal of the team is often the idiom through which these concerns and difficulties are explained. The 'team' is a complex set of paradoxes and contradictions that seem to constrain and curtail individual agency as much as they liberate and allow for freedom of expression.

The Issue of Leadership

One of the most curious things I observed with The Titans was an apparent *lack* of leadership. It was clear that decisions about training were often made by consensus. Usually, the captain made suggestions for potential fielding drills or when to break for nets, but this was always discussed and agreed upon beforehand, rather than being imposed upon players. There was almost always a sense of pragmatism and doing what was best in accordance with personnel present and the conditions. Leadership of different aspects of training were also delegated out. For example, instead of having the same warm-up routine each week, one person was asked to lead the stretches. Almost always this resulted in a different pattern of stretches, even if the same person led from last week. Some players were better at leading than others, and those who were keen to lead were actually sometimes more forgetful and less capable. In these instances, other members of the team continued to stretch after we'd 'finished' in an effort to stretch off their whole body.

Initially I wondered if this was the expression of an egalitarian spirit, a conscious effort to maintain an equal space and foster a sense of team cohesion. However, there was also a very palpable sense of hesitancy in assuming leadership roles, suggesting that people were acting more out of fear than a desire for equality. Many of our training sessions began in an almost reluctant fashion, organically when people felt ready, rather than at an exact time, or by a command from the captain. Even those who were clearly eager to begin rarely forced the matter by asking if we should start, instead waiting for things to happen naturally. When stretching duties were delegated, many of the same players led for lack of others coming forward. This hesitancy was more apparent when there weren't many people at training. Once only six of us were present, and neither the captain nor vice-captain had turned up. The lack of a designated leader seemed to be very disconcerting for all present. People tried to call the captains, and receiving no response, struggled to know what to do. I was very surprised that none of the senior players present stepped up to take control and lead the session. It was only after some time that we dragged ourselves out onto the field to begin our warm-up. We then

engaged in an unenthusiastic session that lasted barely half the time of a normal session. In this light, the conversations our captain held in order to make decisions suddenly appeared as something guided more by anxiety than egalitarianism. No one wanted to take responsibility unless they *had* to.



Figure 25. We stretch, led by Hadee.

Leadership in Sri Lanka has been written about in several ethnographic studies, which highlight factors that explain where this anxiety stems from. Often, leaders are seen to represent the entire group they head, and are sometimes even solely responsible for the actions of the group (Said n.d., Alexander 1995, Heslop 2014). For example, Alexander notes that factions amongst fishermen in southern Sri Lanka are commonly referred to by using the faction leader's name, and thus 'Sunil Mudalalige Khattiya' refers to Sunil Mudalali's faction (Alexander 1995:71). Alexander goes on to note that this emphasises how 'in both ideology and practice they are leader centred groups' (*ibid*:72). This idea that leaders represent the entire group is very apparent with cricket coaches, who are regularly the targets of ire. I was often told that the national cricket coach and captain were the first people to be blamed if the

international team did poorly, and indeed I saw this myself in various media.⁷⁰ Many of my interlocutors shunned leadership as they disliked undergoing such undue scrutiny about the failings of the group. As TCC were without a coach at the time I trained with them, there was no obvious target for blame, and people were therefore quite rightly hesitant to put themselves forward. Lastly, with the strength of friendships at the club, there is perhaps a real reluctance to encroach on other people by taking a leadership role and doing something different. The role of shame in mediating Sri Lankan social life is well documented (Said 2014, Chapin 2014, Widger 2014), and perhaps people are mindful to avoid doing anything that reflects badly on them or to offend their friends.

Despite the egalitarian spirit and fear of leading, there is clearly also a recognition of the importance of leadership, and the need for someone to take up the role of leader. As I have noted, the lack of leadership was usually disconcerting, and so someone had to be found to lead. This is prevalent elsewhere in Sri Lanka. In the build-up to the 2019 presidential election, people often told me that Gotabaya Rajapaksa was a ‘good organiser’ and a man capable of leading the country, despite his problematic past. Even people from minorities, and others who I assumed would find his alleged human rights abuses unforgivable, seemed to suggest that Sri Lanka was in enough trouble to need Gotabaya’s organisational clout.⁷¹ The capacity to lead superseded other considerations. Similarly, at a government workshop I attended that focused on Sport for Development, one of the most common complaints was that the government lacked leadership, and ministries would be unable to work together without this. Political stability was needed for ensuring continuity of policy, but the main request was that one of the parties “take the reins of sport” and move it forward. Equally in the cricket sphere, at the Gamini Dissanayake Memorial Lecture of 2019,⁷² Dissanayake was heralded as being a true leader as he possessed the capacity to organise people, but more importantly had ‘the vision’ necessary to take these people in the right direction.

⁷⁰ Achintha used this example in explaining the nature of the ‘-va’ relationship and the idea that proximity = relationship that I mentioned in Chapter 4.

⁷¹ This perspective has of course been drastically revised since the 2022 economic crisis in Sri Lanka, culminating in Gotabaya’s resignation.

⁷² Gamini Dissanayake was the chairman of the SLC during the period when Sri Lanka was trying to win test status. There is an annual lecture held in his memory, very much in the mould of the Colin Cowdrey Lecture.

As these examples suggest, the desire for leadership often indicates a desire for direction.⁷³ On the odd occasions I found myself in a coaching role, I was asked to arbitrate in a variety of situations, and found myself guiding training sessions down to the most minor of details.⁷⁴ Young cricketers felt uneasy about the prospect of simply running training drills without much guidance, and expected me to establish the roles of *everyone* involved. This was the case even when I felt these details were broadly inconsequential to the drill. What players craved was a clear outlining of roles and of action, or argument might occur. There seemed to be real hesitance in doing any independent thinking. This is perhaps why many teams have a manager, even at the amateur level. Externalising leadership ensures that potential blame and responsibility is placed outside the team, enabling friends to play with each other without fear of offending one another. Essentially, teammates can retain the egalitarian ethos of the cricket team, and thus avoid the shame that comes with conflict-induced hierarchy changes. Leadership can ensure conflict is avoided in the first place. Without someone organising things, nothing happens quickly.

This need for direction from a leader was once made clear to me in a discussion about Lasith Malinga and Niroshan Dickwella being selected as captain and vice-captain for the Sri Lanka World Cup squad. Both cricketers are known as popular members of the squad and good motivators, but they are not considered to be thinking cricketers. On this, Tariq told me that “Sri Lankan cricket is done, I think”, suggesting that Sri Lankan cricket was going downhill rapidly, before stating that “if you get a smart leader, people follow him”. Leaders had to be thoughtful and know the right direction to go in. Intelligent, thinking leaders were recognised as extremely beneficial. Conversely, leaders who lack direction were considered more dangerous than not having any. So, while leaders obviate the potential for equality in a team, they are seen as necessary for the greater good. In essence, leaders are responsible for key strategic decisions. They are not the major motivators, as the team ethic should be promoted by all, but are essential for maintaining order within the team. Most importantly, they externalise frictions that might arise between players in the act of decision making.

⁷³ The importance of direction for notions of change will be pulled apart in Section IV.

⁷⁴ Arief occasionally needed me to help with his academy sessions when his assistant coach was absent, in which case I led drills for a short period of time.

Managing Leaders

The thorny issue of how to choose leaders fairly is dealt with in a couple of different ways. A pragmatic solution to establishing leadership roles for matches was to ensure the captaincy rotated each year. In my 19 months with the club I did not overtly see this happen, but I was told that captains had usually changed for each season in the past. A second solution follows on from the logic that good leaders are intelligent and thoughtful. It was apparent that those who took up leadership roles were deemed to be the most knowledgeable about cricket. In my very first training session I noted that Laman was leading the group, organising the drills and critiquing people's techniques. I naturally assumed he was the coach, but when I asked him about this, he told me that he had just come in to "help the guys out". Laman's reasoning was that he had played in Division 3 for a long time (and with other teams who had been very successful) and therefore had knowledge to give the others. Because TCC had lost their coach the previous year, he seemed to have taken up the mantle of leading the session. Similarly, Fakhir told me that he had stepped in to coach at TCC because he was a former player with Moors Cricket Club. He therefore had more experience at a higher level and could spread his knowledge to players at TCC. Fakhir enjoyed helping his friends and eventually transitioned into coaching by becoming a personal trainer.

That leaders should be knowledgeable is unremarkable. However, the emphasis on knowledge above other characteristics in leadership is particularly significant in this context of amateur cricket. One particular example can clarify this point. Thanyan, a talented young cricketer and popular member of the squad, once asked to be made captain. The others in the group laughed, explaining that he wasn't very knowledgeable about cricket, and needed far more experience before he could assume this sort of leadership role. Thanyan would probably do well to motivate the team, but was unlikely to hold the cricketing knowledge needed to command his players with any authority. Similarly, select criticisms of Fakhir's captaincy in the past suggested that while he was "a good motivator" he had "no organisational skills". People I spoke to seemed to suggest that Fakhir crumbled under the pressure of captaincy, and his game-time decisions suffered. Some suggested Fakhir's field placings were usually poor. Vimal mentioned in particular about how many captains at the club don't have the right knowledge to set good fields for Vaz when he bowls, and we agreed that Vaz always sets his

own fields as he knows what he's doing. Thus, people were allowed to take leadership roles over others, so long as they were considered to be knowledgeable or experienced.

Though it is clear by now that leaders are seen as necessary for the good of the club, and that leadership is a role few wish to take on,⁷⁵ leaders still seem to face remarkable levels of scrutiny and interference from others. Vimal was a prime example of this scrutiny. A confident, talented and intelligent young cricketer, Vimal was asked to be captain the season after Fakhir's tenure. He told me he was determined not to repeat Fakhir's mistakes when it came to dealing with pressure in matches. Yet, the pressure Vimal had to deal with was not from the opposition, but from his own team. He said that the other senior members had 'unrealistic expectations' for success. Furthermore, senior members often sought to interfere in his decision making. Vimal felt he had a cool head, and emphasised that while he relied on bowlers 'to do their thing', there was often panic from others when things went wrong. Vimal explained that you have to trust your players, and disliked the fact that others began to lose their heads when the game wasn't going to plan. Senior members interfered by suggesting new field placements or bowling changes, or even moved the field without his agreement. Vimal seemed to hate this captaincy-by-committee, and asked "why ask me to be captain then?" In the end, along with the personal issues highlighted above, this scrutiny and interference contributed to Vimal leaving the club for some time. I was also told how Arief was in charge of team selection when he coached the club a few years ago. Under Arief's selections, Aqil often played, but Hadee and Yasir rarely did. There must have been some kickback for this as they were team management, and it was mooted by some that that Arief was forced out due to these disagreements.

Avoidance of leadership roles was also seen in club administration, such as when the four main organisers of TCC handled a pay dispute. Several members were said to be in debt to the club due to unpaid membership fees and match fees. However, it was unclear what these fees were specifically for as no one was forthcoming with the accounts. In trying to access this information, each of the four members (as I was told) pointed to another and claimed that they instead were responsible. In other words, none wanted to appear to be the head of the club, expressing a real hesitancy to lead. Some of those who owed money therefore refused to pay until this was cleared up, but actually in the end many relented and paid up in good faith.

⁷⁵ Thanyan asking to be captain stood out as the only anomaly to this trend.

Scrutiny of others is not just about tactical concerns, but also a result of trying to temper the imbalances in hierarchy that leadership threatens to create. Vimal for example explained how it was never clear who was actually running the club, suggesting that the members of the management all have egos that need to be kept in check every now and then. As with training and on the field, taking up the mantle of leader threatens to disturb the (fragile) hierarchy already in place.

These examples convey a clear tension between the need for equality and subservience to the team, and the recognition that someone must step up and be a leader. Yet, despite the fact that players seem to recognise this tension, avoid leading wherever possible, and try to keep things equal and avoid conflict, they still seem to forget these fears when they scrutinise those who become leaders. There are indications that, while leaders are desired and needed, they are merely tolerated, and more often kept in check.

The Productive Illusion of Sporting Discourses

In this chapter I have shown how members of TCC conceive of their club. In particular, I have shown how the idea of the team needs to be managed in order for the group to function. This management of people is not unusual for any social institution, and the palpable tensions among individuals should not suggest that The Titans struggled as a club. What is important here was how various sporting discourses structured this management. The notion of The Titans as ‘a team’ evoked the sense of equality promoted by cricketing discourses of fairness and ideals of the unified team. This was seen in how people portrayed The Titans as a team; felt in the encouragement to be present at training and matches (even if not playing); found in the way people justify this continued presence; and made statements about the importance of the team over individuals. Generally speaking, a cohesive whole was promoted, and individuals were minimised. The modernist foundations of citizenship can be seen in the imperative for participation (Coalter 2007), while the ideals of muscular Christianity encourage an unquestioning deference to the team (Mangan 1998). Altogether, it seemed these numerous tensions between individual and group concerns are managed by appealing to some sense of a ‘greater good’.

At the same time, the level of politicking and the need for management of competing concerns highlights that the cricketing discourses of equality and fair play are not merely positive. The team dynamics are far more complicated than the ideal suggests. There are complex relationships between individual and group, between equality and individuality, between fair play and success. While deploying discourses of the ideal team and appeals to the greater good can help maintain the group, this invites scrutiny on the individuals within the team. Players impose constraint on others in the name of the team, which also explains why players comply with such constraint without complaint. There is pragmatic acknowledgment that in many ways group concerns might be best served by individuals. Yet this is the antithesis of the ideal of equality'. So while much effort went into fostering and promoting an equal team environment, there was a pragmatic acceptance that equality is not always possible. In summary, this shows how fundamental ideas regarding groups are raised and negotiated in the cricketing space. It also shows that people's motivations and modes of thinking about such groups are constrained by the same sporting discourses that bring people together. Thus, the deployment of these discourses – despite their 'good values' – can be problematic. This suggests that the power of sporting ideals to effect reconciliation is limited, and indicates that individuals in sporting teams are encouraged to focus on moderating their own agency. In the next chapter, I note how these sporting discourses and local ideas contribute to the way cricketing persons are conceived, by discussing the ideas of role, talent, and potential.

CHAPTER 7

TALENT & ROLE

Scenes: A Close Chase in Polgala

I've just been caught out, sweeping a full toss from the opposition off-spinner straight to square leg. In my desire to minimise risk, I simply didn't hit the ball hard enough, and my caution is my undoing. The next man to bat, Thevindu, smiles in an apologetic and knowing manner as he walks past me to the wicket.

Only a few moments later, Thevindu is run out in a shocking mix up with Aqil and we are suddenly five wickets down with only 50 runs on the board. Despite restricting our opposition to only 109 in their innings, we look to be letting an opportunity for an easy win slip through our fingers. Spirits are suddenly subdued as people realise our strong bowling and fielding effort might come to naught.



Figure 26. The team nervously watch on.

Of the five wickets to have fallen, four were batsman whose role it is to be defensive and hold the innings together. In the middle now are two of our most aggressive, Aqil and Fakhir. They

decide to counterattack, and a few lusty blows from Aqil take us quickly up to 60 runs. Fakhir, possibly our most naturally talented player, hits a few boundaries himself, to applause and cheers from the boys on the side-lines.

At 70 runs, Fakhir takes a fancy to the opposition pace bowler. First ball, he launches him back over his head for a six, and for the second he plays a similar shot straight past the bowler for four. My teammates holla and clap at the extravagance of these commanding shots. Fakhir is imposing himself.

Only, Fakhir then slashes the third delivery at 90 degrees through point, barely past the outstretched hands of the diving fielder placed there. It was a wayward delivery that deserved to be punished, but Fakhir didn't control the shot. I see Fakhir's fabled talent, but I feel he is at risk of being careless. He has taken 14 runs off the over and we're now 84-5, a much more comfortable proposition in the scheme of things, but still with some way to go. The bowler looks a little crushed, and one would think that a simple, risk-free approach is all that is needed to collect the remaining 26 runs.

Fakhir seems to agree, defending the next delivery, a better ball that he dead bats straight down into the ground, showing a more measured approach. I think he has finally taken stock of the situation, and nerves seem calmed, my teammates sitting more relaxed. Only, for the fifth delivery the bowler offers another short, wide delivery. Fakhir cannot resist the bait, and hits the ball straight to the point fielder he had missed two balls earlier.

The opposition are jubilant, the bowler runs around, offering Fakhir a little send off. He has managed to get his own back, and this could be a big moment in the game. Fakhir has failed, we are suddenly 84-6 and voices are immediately hushed. The nerves return, and Hadee – one of our most defensive, but less talented players – goes out to try and guide us home.

Twenty minutes later, we are 98-8. Hadee rotates the strike, takes singles, but is quickly running out of support. Tensions are much higher, and we all watch on with bated breath. This is far too close now. We are at real risk of giving the game away.

One more wicket falls and Arfan, one of our youngest players and known only for his role as a bowler, makes his way out to join Hadee. There are shouts of support, and many of the players shout '*hadeesi ne!*' urging him *not to rush*, to be defensive, that he can do it for the team. We are now 108-9, only two runs shy of victory, but things still feel like they could go either way. Hadee is defending, Arfan is defending, and the two take it ball by ball, playing risk-free cricket, dropping the ball as close to themselves as they can.

After another five minutes of agonising waiting, the score remains 108-9. Suddenly Arfan is beaten by the bowler, we gasp as he edges the ball, only to see it race away past the slip fielder to the boundary for four. Everyone jumps up, celebrating wildly, fist pumping and cheering, shouting out Arfan's name for taking us to the win. After the celebrations die down, the two are congratulated warmly in the post-match chat. Hadee, complimented for playing his role and holding the innings together, and Arfan for helping the team out when others had failed.

Playing for the Team

In cricket in Sri Lanka, the fundamental concern of personhood is mediated through a combination of local concepts and sporting discourses. In this chapter I note the importance of 'role' for my interlocutors, of ideal types that one should try and fill in order to help the team. I show how such roles as the stoic batsmen, the extravagant hitter, the wily spinner or the fiery pace bowler provided my interlocutors with a way of giving greater coherence to their own skills and character. Often, they described how these roles shaped their intentions, or used them to frame their own actions after the event. Despite their best intentions players often fail to fulfil these roles, while conversely some players find a new role they weren't previously known for. I also detail the pre-occupation with ideas of talent and *potential*, which inform an understanding of how such roles are filled. Notions of potential and talent are of course not unusual within sport, but in this context, it seems that talent is understood as innately given and residing *within* the body. This leads to the idea of what I term a 'potential system', a system wherein people are only considered coachable if they have an innate talent ('potential') to begin with. These notions of role and potential are significant when considering the team as a social institution and cricket as a space for experimentation. Role in cricket allows people to understand their current social position in relation to others, and also suggests what kinds of

person cricketers might be. Altogether, this highlights that cricketers are especially concerned with who persons are and the wider groups they are a part of.

Role

Most team sports (and some individual sports) incorporate a strong sense of *role*. This is particularly true of cricket, which is split into the three disciplines of bowling, batting and fielding, but then is further divided in numerous ways. The most obvious is that people bat and/or bowl left or right-handed, but beyond this binary there also exist a huge number of sub-disciplines. Bowling for example includes (but is not limited to) leg spin, off spin, pace, swing, seam, etc. Various kinds of batsmen exist, such as opening batsmen, middle-order batsmen, and wicketkeeper-batsmen. Wicketkeeping is a fielding position, but is also a specialised role in itself and must be designated to one person to fulfil. The number of potential fielding positions is infinite, but there are still a number of common positions that players find themselves occupying time and again. One player may be a good ‘slip’ fielder, for example, or an expert in the ‘covers’, or be skilled at fielding near the boundary rope. Each individual player is often known for doing one or more of these disciplines well, and within each discipline, will probably have their own preferences about the kind of role they play. Even people skilled at two or more disciplines (known as ‘all-rounders’) will often play a particular role based on the combination of their attributes.

The importance of properly assigning roles was clear. Professional cricketer Harry said that in a good team “you have to divide the roles to the players”, and that for him, an important aspect of coaching was to ensure individuals “know their responsibilities”. The St Thomas’s side of Roshan’s youth were strong was because everyone “knew their roles” and they just got on with the game without requesting assistance from the coach. Equally, Jit – who played for Wesley college – said a strong team meant having people that “knowing your role and excelling in your role”, which indicated personal responsibility. As Jit put it: “each of us know I’m in this team to fulfil that role, so I can’t drop the ball on that”. Not only are individuals encouraged to find a suitable role, they are encouraged to take up their role without complaint. Speaking about fostering team spirit at The Titans, Yasir remarked that a good sportsman “accepts his role”, even if that means being dropped for a match. He asserted that a good sportsman, if tasked with running the water on that day, would simply “do his contribution in that role” in

the knowledge he is part of the whole squad. Roles can therefore also be sitting on the bench, and these must be accepted in equal measure. Similarly, Hadee said that some players needed motivation, that they “don’t know that they are useful for the team”, giving the example of bowlers who don’t work on their batting. He said that sometimes these players don’t understand they might be needed to bat to save the match, and said that with a little bit of encouragement, “they will know what is their role in the team”. In this instance, players need to be given roles or else they become lost, and more generally, a sense of role and responsibility seems to ensure team cohesion.

When I first trained with TCC, some three years after their foundation, it was clear that ideas about role were well engrained within the club. Players were aware that certain roles existed and needed to be filled in order to serve the team. Over the course of my fieldwork I learned what these roles were, and who filled them. ‘Role’ was an emic term that people often raised in conversation, and roles were usually illustrated with reference to oneself or others. They were also drawn from ideal types, which are derived from cricketing discourses. At its most basic, role was invoked in introductions, used like epithets as a basic identifier of character or claim to a certain skill level. Early on in my fieldwork, someone pointed out the various members of the team during a game to me. They went around the field, saying how Aqil was “a really talented opening batsman”, and stated that “Yousuf is our tall, quick bowler”. Meanwhile, Vaz later introduced himself to me as an “all-rounder, bowling off-spin and middle order batsman’. I noticed this tendency to define people only by role and attribute more strongly in coaching. The ‘father of Sri Lankan coaching’ Nelson Mendis often spoke about people he coached – whether young boys from his CCC academy or international players – as a combination of name and role. For example, ‘Mahela Jayawardene, Right Hand Batsmen’, ‘Chaminda Vaas, left arm swing bowler’. It became obvious to me that this was a mnemonic device for remembering the hundreds of children he coaches, but also reinforces the idea that role is attached to person. Similarly, at a coaching camp in the east of the country, I noticed a professional coach quite assertively tell a young player “you *are* a swing bowler”. The invocation of role during introductions is common throughout cricket globally, but it may be that the logic of assigning role strongly to person simply finds its strongest articulation in Sri Lanka.

Either way, role is considered essential information to give when meeting someone for the first time at cricket. The idea of ‘zones of trust’ indicates that Sri Lankan persons often ‘retreat’ into their traditional networks, ‘typically those provided by kinship, religious affiliation, party membership, education and caste’ when meeting others for the first time (Simpson 2012:158). In this context, role may act as a safe category of difference when players are looking to ‘socially locate’ themselves during their introductions. Claiming a certain cricketing role is an easy way to establish common ground and position oneself in relation to others. This became particularly apparent to me in one particular introduction during a training session. There was a lot of laughter among my teammates when Yugan (who is a batsman) ironically introduced himself to my GoPro camera as “Yugan, fast bowler right arm”. This play on introducing oneself shows how strongly role is tied to person, as my interlocutors were primarily amused that Yugan made a claim to a role that was not his own. Furthermore, Yugan said ‘fast bowler right arm’, instead of ‘right arm fast bowler’ as per normal cricketing conventions. This slip up caused additional laughter for my interlocutors. Several people present instantly picked him up on this, and made fun of him for messing up his lines. By pointing out his failure, my interlocutors reflected the importance of using role when attempting to locate oneself. Role was a distinctive marker for locating players in relation to one another in the cricketing context.

A more nuanced articulation of roles often emerged unprompted during interviews, revealing much about how people characterised themselves and others. In their efforts to describe themselves, my interlocutors used cricketing roles, revealing personal qualities in the process. For example, Tariq talked about how he wasn’t the most “naturally talented” player, but that he was “clever” and “keen to stay at the wicket”, and therefore he wanted to play what is known as the “anchor” role in the team. Similarly, Hadee recognised that his technical skills made him well suited to staying at the wicket for long periods, and therefore he aimed to “prize his wicket” and focus on “batting long”. Essentially, both players put emphasis on defensive play, and saw their role as helping the team bat as long as possible. Conversely, Vimal, a powerful and clean striker of the ball, was known for his aggressive batting at the top of the order, giving the team’s innings some momentum. Vimal spoke about how his confidence was what gave him the capacity to fulfil his role of putting the opposition under pressure. Similarly, Fakhir and Aqil were seen as ‘natural’ players of the game, talented men for whom attacking cricket came easily. All were characterised as people who played offensively and put the

opposition under pressure. In outlining their approach to cricket and their particular style of play, these more nuanced articulations of role enabled each person to convey something of his personality. Role was clearly a medium through which people framed an understanding of themselves.⁷⁶

This understanding of person conveyed through role was often expressed more clearly when people remembered their earlier experiences of cricket. It was notable when talking to players who had more success as youngsters that they not only appeared to have much more detailed memories of cricket to convey, these memories also held a stronger sense of their role within the team. It was as though their sense of role had been amplified by the positivity of the memory. Chaminda, a Thomian in his mid 30s who had played in ‘The Big Match’, had an incredible memory for his scores and figures. He vividly drew to mind his performances, relaying the specifics easily and directly in our conversation. Though I remember some of my own scores and performances, I could not hope to reach the level of detail he seemed capable of conveying. Questioning the veracity of his story, I later double checked these scores, and found that he was invariably right about his stats and his characterisation of each game.⁷⁷ Furthermore, a really strong sense of role ran throughout the description of Chaminda’s schoolboy career. In his own words, he had “established his role” in the Thomian team quite quickly, developing a solid sense of who he was as a player and his style of play. Chaminda was a successful player batting in the middle order with the tail, something of a ‘rescuer’, and he regularly played innings where he was the link in turning the team’s fortunes around, and the team winning. These stories were all borne out by the scorecards and reports I could find.

I found that players at a lower level who were successful had also reflected on their roles more and developed these in finer detail. Vaz also had an excellent memory, a very strong sense of his own style and his role within teams he had played for. Vaz was a top order batsman who was capable of batting for long periods and setting the tone of the match. He often spoke about games in detail, relaying information about various aspects easily. Conversely, less successful players I spoke to didn’t have detailed memories about their schoolboy games to share with

⁷⁶ As I show in Chapter 11, these roles contribute to the retrieval of life lessons from cricket.

⁷⁷ The big schools record their matches in detail, so it was possible to pull up the exact scorecards and ratify Chaminda’s claims.

me, and didn't reflect on their role in their teams to such an extent, somewhat confirming that reflection on the past is important in formulating a sense of role. However, some of these players *had* cultivated a strong sense of role about their cricket in the present. Tariq for example admitted he didn't have a great schoolboy career, but nonetheless has carved out a solid sense of role at TCC. The overall story he relayed to me in his life history interview outlined a process of learning where he fit in the team, what role he could play.

The descriptions of roles that came up in conversation were often coloured by familiar tropes. Roles often fell into ideal types that were common across cricket globally. I found that older Sri Lankan men in particular revelled in using these traditional descriptions of players, and they clearly have a strong underpinning in Sri Lankan cricket lore. Typical examples include 'explosive', 'anchor', 'stylish' or 'dependable' for batsman, and 'cunning', 'nasty fasty' or 'metronomic' for bowlers. Typical tropes like being a 'natural' and having a 'good eye' are applied to particularly talented players of any discipline. These more traditional descriptions are prevalent in the souvenir books of schoolboy big matches across the country, where entire teams are introduced with formulaic description of their disciplines, role, and assessment of skills. In the programmes for the Big Match, these more formulaic introductions of each player are accompanied by a separate cartoon, which pokes fun at them and reveals more about each personality, showing a unique development of the form.⁷⁸ Cricketing discourses therefore shape the centrality of role and the forms it can take. This enables cricket players to think about their position within the group, while also developing an understanding of their own character.

If role is the description and understanding of individual place within the wider group, then it must be noted that this is predominantly formulated by practical concerns. Teams require a diverse set of players, or would be at a severe disadvantage; you cannot have 11 specialist batsmen and no-one capable of bowling, and vice versa. Role is therefore not merely invoked for describing individual skills and/or character but is also part of strategic considerations, and a necessity for success. These considerations solidify the importance of role and the sense of each role. Take Tariq for example: it was recognised that the opposition team will possess

⁷⁸ Ethically I cannot publish these images. While these are public documents, the content remains very personal. On a two-page spread, the traditional introduction is on the left, while the opposite page includes a cartoon of the player with accompanying quotes from friends that poke fun at them.

skilful bowlers, who might make life difficult for the more ‘natural’, aggressive batsmen in the team. Despite not being the most naturally talented or technically proficient batsman, Tariq’s skill lay in his strong mindset, giving him defensive capabilities that could counter the threat posed by the opposition bowlers. He would often be sent out in tricky situations to counter the threat and protect other players in the team, “to ‘anchor’ the innings”. The same logic is equally true of bowlers, as Vaz was often brought on to bowl his off spin, to counter a batsman who had attacked the fast bowlers. Without a sense of opposition, these roles would not be developed. The understanding of individual place within the group – the team – is formed through playing the game against other groups.

The use of role in descriptions of people and its invocation in memory all shows that role has a strong place within Sri Lankan cricket, that there is a sense of what roles can be, and that one should find a role to occupy. These descriptions of role suggest that players possess nuanced understanding of roles, and that individual identities are strongly developed through cricketing practice. Next, I move to discussing how people try to occupy or assign roles by examining concepts of talent and potential.

Scenes: In the Body

The boys sit down in neat rows on the coconut matting, looking up at these strange coaches from Colombo. There is a real mix of youths present. Some are lanky, surly teenagers, others tiny boys under 10. Some look eager, some nervous, some are steely faced. The odd boy has turned up in whites, while others wear jeans and a t-shirt. Most have some form of sporting clothing on, tracksuit bottoms or shorts. Some of them don’t have trainers, instead wearing flip flops, or even hiking boots. I notice a lot of football tops from amateur British clubs, and realise it is likely that aid gets funnelled here from the UK.

Dumped by a van at the centre of an expanse of rocks and sand, this coconut matting is the current epicentre of these boys’ cricketing experience. All 55 of them gaze up expectantly at these coaches, sent by the Foundation of Goodness to deliver a coaching camp. All of these strange men have played cricket professionally, and some have even been international players for Sri Lanka. I get the impression they do not realise the stature of these men, yet they defer respect all the same. I realise that here in one of the most deprived parts of eastern Sri Lanka,

this may be the first time they have been coached in cricket by true professionals, people whose vast experience and knowledge of the game far exceeds the average coach.



Figure 27. Senior coaches from Colombo address the boys, near Kalmunai.

One of the more senior coaches from Colombo steps forward first, speaking in English to the boys before him. He welcomes all warmly, thanking them for coming, to the Foundation for organising, and to the sponsor for their support. The boys' faces are mostly blank before one of the Foundation staff carefully translates into his native Tamil. The coach continues, introducing the other coaches with him, highlighting their credentials and explaining that some of them have coached at national levels. Soon, he gives over to the head coach, a former Sri

Lanka player, who has coached many international stars himself and demands real respect amongst his peers.

This head coach begins by clarifying that the camp is mostly a scouting exercise. “Show us the cricket that y’all have” he tells the boys. “We want to see you exhibit your talents”. I notice that like the other coaching camps I’ve attended, he claims that when it comes to cricket, some people are simply “born with it”. I know from previous conversations that he is aware some of these boys will not be “naturally talented”.

I get the immediate impression he is trying to inspire excitement while equally tempering expectations. He suggests that while he hopes “we can give y’all something”, their coaching was “not magic”, and all would have to work hard to see results. He continues to point out that they can’t coach everything in one day, and therefore emphasises that the boys shouldn’t worry, and instead take the opportunity to “express themselves”.

In wrapping up his welcome speech, the head coach notes that being coached is very much “all about how you take in that knowledge”. It seems apparent he wants to see receptive students today. I wonder to myself whether this means he wants to see players who are capable of changing quickly. I have already experienced – when others have coached me – a sense that I should instantly change. I wonder if the emphasis on ‘natural’ talent means a capacity to change and to progress quickly.

When the speeches are done the boys are itchy, and raring to go. They get up, are portioned off with coaches into smaller groups. I look at them and wonder what talents they will exhibit today.

Talent and a ‘Potential System’

The strong sense of role promoted in cricket intersects with local ideas about talent and an idea of ‘potential’. In particular, role seems to function according to an underlying structuring principle I call a ‘potential system’: a system whereby the potential of persons is managed. As it integrates my interlocutors’ own notions of talent, this system appears to have broad purchase

in explaining how and why cricketers chose to pursue certain goals and shape their character a certain way.

Talent as ‘Potential’

While discussing the etymology of words for ‘learning’, one of my language tutors – a Sinhalese ethnolinguist – explained that caste is perhaps best thought of as a ‘potential system’. While he admitted that the influence of caste is waning in Sinhalese society, he suggested that there remains some latent logic of the caste system today. For example, when describing how people learn, he suggested that people often study a particular subject because of some perceived pre-given potential in it. Furthermore, there remains some sense that certain roles exist ‘out there’ in the world, and that these merely need to be found by individuals and then worked upon in order to fulfil that potential. The ‘potential system’ is therefore a way of ensuring that persons find and occupy the proper roles according to their innate potential. This idea is similar to that found in modernist cricketing discourses, which reinforce an idea of the abstract individual (Walker 2013) who through personal development (Mangan 1998) becomes a good citizen (Coalter 2007). In sport, role becomes not one’s innate difference, but one’s innate *potential*.

The concept of talent and ‘natural talent’ is of course widespread in sports, but the way it is framed in Sri Lanka suggests a uniquely local understanding of ‘potential’. As the earlier comments about team balance show, it is recognised that teams should comprise individuals who are suited to certain tasks, who can counter the opposition’s strengths, or whose skills might counterbalance the team’s own weaknesses. Recognising personal talents are therefore important for finding and occupying one’s potential role. At its most basic, players take up roles in cricket because they recognise their potential to succeed. Arief outlined that he decided to become a coach because he realised that it was not only his passion but his *strength*, what he was best at doing. Recognising one’s talent and therefore potential for fulfilling a role was crucial for success. As Muttiah Muralitharan put it during a public lecture, the successful man “finds out his talent, his strong point early”, and “if you work through that, you will be a world beater”.

Though the idea of playing to your strengths is common almost anywhere, the specific form talent takes in Sri Lanka is as a kind of pre-given capacity or disposition. Many coaches and

cricket admin I worked with spoke about ‘identifying talent’ early on in a cricketer’s career, which would then reveal the role(s) which could be played. Coaches see it as their responsibility to help their students with this, as the earlier that talent could be identified, the sooner the process of development could occur. Good coaches were deemed to be good at spotting character, skills, and physicality. In Arief’s opinion, the best coaches were able “to understand a player’s mentality, their background”, and therefore perceive and identify important factors that others couldn’t. In many ways, coaches seem much more like managers, selecting and assigning persons to particular roles that are needed in a team. Likewise, ‘selecting’ talent was a recurring aim of the FoG. At various training camps around the country, the FoG is forming specialist squads of cricketers who have been identified as talented individuals worthy of more intensive training to bring on their talents. These squads grow smaller over time as they hone in on the top players in each squad. Talent is therefore not so much something that emerges from nothing or is developed from scratch, but something innate that must be identified, a task which itself requires skill. This would explain why much of my discussion with Arief revolved around the importance of identifying and understanding players, rather than actually how to coach people. It became apparent that each player is weighed up for their potential *before* any development actually occurs. As Arief put it to me, you begin with “identifying player talents, and then you think about player development, so you identify the player, you identify where he’s suitable to play, and then according to that, you think about skills enhancement.” In essence, developing cricketing skills came much later in the process; the first step was always identification of potential.⁷⁹

The sense that talent is pre-given is reinforced by the way it is often described as residing within the individual. When I asked Tariq why he played cricket he first said he had a passion for it, but on reflection, added that “cricket is *in* you”. This idea was common across all the coaching I observed, at various levels. At the FoG training camps while addressing the young boys ahead of one day’s activities, the head coach said, “we want to see what cricket you have”, a statement he backed up by saying that some people “are born with cricket *in them*”. The head coach was ostensibly tempering expectations about the workshop and what could be achieved in a day, but did so by drawing from the idea that talent was something pre-destined, not merely

⁷⁹ One proviso is that the choice of the child was also deemed to be important. A good coach has to listen and allow the child to follow their passions.

possessed by all. He further suggested that coaches were unable to work “magic”, but would rather try to coax out whatever the boys already had in them. That coaching was conceived as difficult without innate talent was obvious when coaches talked about their less skilled charges. Often, they would remark sadly about one boy or another that “he has no cricket in him”, as though to say he could not be trained and would not improve. One even said that “no matter how much you try, it [cricket] just won’t come out”. As one academy coach told me, ultimately for success “you must have cricket *in the body*”, telling me that people often use the Sinhala phrase ඇඟෙ නියෙන්න මින (‘æ-ŋgé ti-ye-n-na oh-na’), which literally means ‘needed within the body’, but is closer to the English idiom ‘in the blood’. This claim that talent is seen as predestined is further strengthened by the similarity of ‘talent is needed in the body’ to other local logics, such as the Sinhalese idiom ‘there is no need to sharpen the thorns of the tree’⁸⁰ (See Simpson 2007), and the notion of ‘peraperudukama’ which literally means ‘state of having previous practice’, and suggests an innate familiarity from a previous life (Simpson 2004). The idea that cricketers simply have an innate talent for the sport within them or not feeds strongly into the logics of this potential system.

Expressing and Assessing Potential

If a player’s potential is considered to be talent simply residing within the body, then by extension playing cricket becomes the expression of a true self, an intrinsic nature. The idea of revealing a ‘true’ self was quite consistent among my interlocutors, particularly those who had found success in the game. As national cricketer Harry told me, cricket is “the easiest way to convince others about me”, while former club pro Harold suggested cricket enables people to “prove who we are”. Even for those with limited success, there remained a sense that cricket enabled people to convey a true nature to others. Anthony for example – who was purely a recreational player – suggested that in cricket there is a “freedom to select what [style] suits us. I can play very patiently, or I can go and smash the balls around the park or any kind of mentality”. In saying this, Anthony was not reflecting the idea of individual choice so much as suggesting that cricket was something where various characters could find their own style. Roshan, an Old Thomian, recounted how the famous Derek de Seram was an excellent coach at St Thomas’s, precisely because he encouraged individuality in the team. Similarly, Tariq

⁸⁰ This is akin to the English saying, ‘the apple doesn’t fall far from the tree’.

argued the best way of being a good player was not to imitate others but "to be yourself", stating that he often gives junior players advice like this: "nobody can be Sanath Jayasuriya, nobody can be Chris Gayle... not anyone can be *you*". For many, the joy of cricket was that it reflected a more appropriate sense of individuality.

The idea of a 'true self' means that players are encouraged simply to display their talents, while coaches consider it their duty to see these talents and to accept them. Jit emphasised that players needed to identify their potential then work with it. As a young opening batsman, his emphasis was on understanding what his best role was: "how do I increase my skill level to deliver on that role consistently". Famous coach Nelson Mendis tells his students that they must work hard "to show their latent talent". In these terms, talent is literally hidden in the body and has to be brought out in order to begin development. As is perhaps already evident from the notion of 'identifying', this revealing process is considered in a somewhat mechanical fashion. Coaches urged their students to 'show' or 'exhibit' their talents, as though this was a simple and straightforward thing. When the head coach of an FoG training camp said, "we want to see your natural talents" and encouraged the boys to "exhibit your talents", it did not appear as if the possibility of a bad day or nervous mistakes crossed his mind. One either had talent or not. Similarly, the sense of bringing forth a true nature hidden within is commonly found in the idea of 'expressing oneself'. As Anthony put it, "a cricket field is a place where we can *express our self*. I can *show others* what I am capable of". Revealing his hidden talent and true character was simply a matter of going onto the field and playing cricket. The extent to which this true nature can be revealed (how much one can "convince others" in Harry's terms) and how much this self can change is debatable, as I examine in Section IV. Notwithstanding, there remained a sense of the importance of revealing your potential among students of cricket.

While emphasis was usually placed on the player revealing their hidden nature, revealing talent was something of a two-way process. Speaking about playing cricket at school as a youth, Vinod said how he "showed the coach [his] talent", and that the coach "accepted" that talent in return. Equally, Vaz described this process happening to him on multiple occasions as he completed trials for various teams in the East of the country. Students knew they had to show their talents, but needed someone – a coach – to see this. There appears to be a mutual recognition of this two-way process in the coaching relationship. This is why it is important for

good coaches to be able to ‘see’ into people and find their talents. The irony of Arief’s journey as a cricketer was that one day, he recognised his real talent was actually identifying the talent of others. He recognised his own talent after winning a tournament with a team he organised. As he put it to me, “I can analyse things well so I can identify skills well, and I can manage well, I can prepare things well *with all this observing*, and then I decided that I should be a coach”. While talent is understood as pre-given, talent can also be hard to see, and coaches work hard to reveal it.

The mechanical nature of revealing talent appears to be why ‘selection’ and finding talent is seen to be so important. For those in cricket administration, the structural problems in Sri Lankan cricket are not a lack of talent, but a lack of opportunities for young cricketers. It is not the process of revealing talent which is seen as difficult, but that the opportunities themselves are hard to come by. Dhammika told me he didn’t get into his school’s cricket team very often. Not because he felt he wasn’t talented, but because he “couldn’t *show* his talent”. The problem as he saw it was one of *not being seen yet*. Indeed, this is why so many I worked with spoke about “providing opportunities” first and foremost when discussing development. Arief often spoke about giving his academy boys matches, to give them ‘exposure’.⁸¹ Muralitharan, likewise urged the governing authorities of cricket to “provide opportunities and facilities” to young cricketers, to ensure that the process of identification and development of talent can happen. Talking about the north, the FoG’s head of sports said that opportunities are important because people couldn’t “showcase their talent before”, and that increased cricket in the north lets people “come and play openly”, so that “their talents can be seen”. Thinking with the notion of a potential system, it becomes clear that without the opportunity to express oneself and be seen, a person cannot achieve their potential. In order to live up to their talents then, a person has to have the opportunity to showcase their potential. ‘Expressing oneself’ is not just an act of experimenting with one’s character, but a process of finding a particular role, a process of finding a place within the world.

⁸¹ ‘Exposure’ is an emic concept explored in Chapter 9.

Developing Potential, Producing Cricketers

The relationship between display and acceptance of talent highlights an imperative to develop talent whenever possible, to enable individuals to realise their potential. Remarking on the Jaffna cricketers he helps, Anthony told me that although he couldn't become a cricketer, he “should not allow someone with talent to fade off”. People involved in cricket encouraged talented players to learn and provided them with their knowledge, no matter how insignificant this might seem. The risk of stopping or limiting potential was often implied and sometimes mentioned explicitly. For example, national player Harry suggested that while there were players who were more talented than he was, they had no chance to play cricket “so automatically their talent went down”.⁸² Similarly, Dhammika told me that in his team's amateur league, the administration requested that any cricketers who are scouted by bigger clubs should be released to play at a higher standard. This reflects almost a moral imperative to develop individuals, and this is most clearly present in coaching. By characterising himself as someone whose talent was identifying talents, Arief clearly saw himself as a facilitator for the development of young people. Similarly, Roshan was cajoled into coaching the St Thomas's team by friends on the school committee, but he took up the position mostly because he felt a sense of duty to improve the next generation of Thomian men. Meanwhile Nandak, a school coach in Jaffna who was prevented from being a player due to the war, became a coach because he wanted to “produce some players for the future”. His goal was ultimately to get cricketers from the north into the Sri Lankan side.

However, while there was an imperative to develop talent whenever possible, people could not be helped if they didn't have a pre-given aptitude. Those who had ‘no cricket’ didn't just lack talent, they lacked the potential for development. Referring to one particularly untalented boy in his academy, coach Sayed reflected sadly that as much as he teaches him, he doesn't seem to learn. Sayed appeared to have largely washed his hands of the boy. He said he would support the boy if he wanted to keep coming to his academy, but that it was largely up to him to realise that he didn't have the talent or potential to succeed at the game. As he put it, “you cannot tell them they are bad and not to come, but eventually they have to work it out for themselves”.

⁸² This need for perpetual movement is discussed throughout Section IV.

Such attitudes may explain why the previous coaches at TCC spent more time with those who were already the more able players.

Once individuals who show potential have been identified, their talent can then be developed. While coaches saw it as their duty to help those who were talented, many were critical of other coaches who they felt were too controlling, and didn't let younger cricketers learn how to think for themselves. Old Thomians like Roshan stressed that good coaches nurture individuality, and should avoid providing too much instruction from the side-line. Arief clearly felt the same, as he claimed such coaches don't allow players to 'make mistakes', adding that people can't learn without such mistakes. Instead, Arief often described 'motivation' as the primary objective of a good coach. He stated his main role was to "create interest in the player", by which he meant encouraging their curiosity about the game, and preventing them from becoming bored by it. This often involved simply being there and supporting players, even when they were not doing too well. Arief also placed emphasis on the individuality of each player when demonstrating and coaching cricket technique. His style involved asking constant questions of his students, often comedically acting out the wrong way to do certain movements, before asking and cajoling his students to tell him how to do it right.⁸³

As described in Chapter 1, the emphasis in cricketing discourses lies on the idea of being a 'gentleman'. This idea is widely used in Sri Lanka, and as Muttiah Muralitharan put it in his cricket lecture, "you have to be a gentleman to play". As such, the emphasis in Sri Lankan coaching remains not merely on coaching cricketers, but on producing gentlemen. The formulation is simple and consistent. Former St Thomians claimed their coach FC de Seram developed them as "men first, and as cricketers second", while Arief used an almost identical phrase when articulating his own approach, stating that coaches "make you a gentleman first, and then a cricketer". This approach has a long and established history in Sri Lanka. Nelson Mendis and his deceased brother Lionel – 'the father figure of cricket coaching in Sri Lanka' (Thawfeeq 2015) – are the archetypal proponents. Both emphasised discipline and order, whether through clothing, comportment or speech, and Nelson continues to use a "word of command" when addressing his young players. More than anything, Nelson emphasises the spirit of the game, giving speeches and writing articles about fair play, which usually revolve

⁸³ This is expanded on in Chapter 9, and also relates to the discussion of *boru* in Chapter 8.

around stereotypical gentlemen of the game like Colin Cowdrey, Garfield Sobers or Don Bradman.⁸⁴ Arief, who follows this approach as a consequence of working with Lionel Mendis, is quite particular about his own players, telling me that he requires his students to wear full whites, have their collars down, be quiet when training and not to laugh at anyone's mistakes. Similarly, Roshan was intent on fostering 'the spirit of cricket' at St Thomas's, emphasising the idea of fair play and controlled aggression, to "make sure the boys came out as gentlemen". Thus, coaches not only expressed a desire to promote individual talent, but felt that they had a duty to produce good persons when doing so. Here, the idea of 'gentlemen' suggests that through the potential system cricket enshrines an idea of the abstract individual as a fair person.⁸⁵

The Potential of Cricketing Persons

The ideas of role, talent and potential convey that what is being experimented with in cricket is ideas of the person within society. The dominant presence of role within cricket reinforces an understanding that cricketers have a place in society, a job that they can do. Roles in cricket help individuals to understand their social position in relation to different others. Meanwhile, the idea of talent deployed in cricket reframes an understanding of the person from possessing innate difference to possessing an innate potential.⁸⁶ In trying to identify their talents and fulfil their potential, these cricketers are staking a claim to a particular place in the world. They are not merely developing their individual character, but experimenting with social position, specifically the *potential position* they might take up. This is possible because – in theory at least – cricket is a truly meritocratic social enterprise. As Richard put it to me, "once you get on the field, what matters is your skill and what you bring to the game". There are supposedly no constraints to achieving one's potential and engaging in personal change, as long as someone is there to witness it. Talent and potential therefore suggest what kinds of person cricketers might become. Once talents are found, roles can be assigned, and in a sense cricketing persons can then be produced. Players learn how to become part of a group, taking up a place in a wider whole. Very importantly these are often a certain *kind* of person, and therefore the potential system in cricket should also be thought of as a system of enculturation. While

⁸⁴ Cf. with example in Chapter 1.

⁸⁵ Other aspects of the gentlemanly discourse are explored in Chapter 9.

⁸⁶ Importantly if someone lacks talent in cricket, then their potential is considered to reside elsewhere.

cricketing discourses enable a more egalitarian view of personhood, they also constrain young men to being 'gentlemen'. Cricket therefore provides space for experimenting with new ideas of the person and of role, but also constrains this experimenting somewhat. Notwithstanding, cricket can be said to create an understanding of the world and one's position within it. In the next section, I discuss how these experimentations work in practice.

SECTION III CONCLUSION

'SAFE', BUT NOT SIMPLE

I have shown that some of the fundamental concerns that people experiment with at cricket include the ideas of persons and of groups. Cricketing discourses provide different ways of thinking about these fundamental concerns in the Sri Lankan context. I have illustrated how the idea of 'the team' evokes a sense of equality that motivates my interlocutors to protect the group. The idea of role and talent meanwhile mesh to produce a similar sense of equality, one that encourages cricketers to find their place within society. Overall, cricket can help individuals to reflect on and experiment with ideas of role and social position in an ostensibly 'safe' environment. However, in studying the confluence of ideas from cricketing discourses and local contexts, a fundamental tension emerged between individuals and groups. While cricket enables an experimentation with social values, it also introduces tensions that must be navigated. The idea of 'the team' led to the minimisation of certain individuals, while the concept of talent meant that players were excluded if they lacked the potential to succeed. The concepts of equality and meritocracy within cricketing discourses fail to provide unity as is often claimed. Though cricket promises to make a new, equal, 'Sri Lankan' identity, this does not work in practice. Though the notion of proximity brings people together, it does not engender reconciliatory relations in and of itself. The fundamental tensions between individual and group cannot be defused by sporting discourse alone.

This foray into the kinds of concerns that people experiment with in cricket suggests that in cricketing spaces, people are more concerned with *conciliation* than reconciliation, more with avoiding conflict than repairing relations. It is therefore apparent that cricketing discourses structure the way fundamental ideas are experimented with. There is something within cricketing practice that helps people to do sociality well, so if the cricketing space does promote change, then it is most perceptible on a more everyday level. Change is apparent in the practical ways people learn to get along with each other, rather than at the abstract, rhetorical level of relation building. Notwithstanding, this also indicates that interpersonal reconciliation is more likely than true systemic change. Taking this sense that sport structures experimentation and ways of thinking about change, in the next section I look at how people

try to do sociality well at cricket. In turn, I will look at the concepts of change that emerge as a consequence, before describing the ramifications that this has for potential social change.

SECTION IV
CHANGE

INTRODUCTION

IDEAS ABOUT CHANGE, DOING CHANGE

Depicting how a cricket team is conceived and how individuals view themselves within it has shown that people in cricket experiment with fundamental social concepts. This raises a series of inherent social tensions between individual and group concerns. In negotiating these fundamental concepts, people are also trying to manage such social tensions. In this section I present various ways that cricketers attempt this management, which indicate how change is understood in Sri Lankan cricket, and more broadly. In Chapter 8, I first examine how tensions between individuals are managed through ‘testing’ and through the rhetorical deployment of cricketing discourses. I argue ‘testing’ exists as a way to mediate these various contradictions and tensions and come to positive outcomes, without hopefully causing upset or infraction. Then, in Chapter 9 I examine how individuals manage themselves, focusing internally on developing a sense of *control*. Control is taught as a tool for cricketing success, encouraging cricketers to personally manage the contradictions of social life outside the arena. Both forms of management indicate that cricket emphasises individual responsibility for social cohesion. This also indicates that players’ potential experimentations with social values are limited by those of others. In Chapter 10, I look at the concepts of change that emerge from cricket by examining cricketers’ life histories with the sport. This reveals their sense of personal development and their understandings of how change functions. Finally in Chapter 11, I examine ideas of change more broadly, and how these ideas are applied in SDP. The consequences of this focus on individual responsibility appears to be an overly formulaic approach to SDP, which struggles to induce social change. Furthermore, the models of change that are deployed in SDP and cricket more generally seem to emphasise social regulation more than social change. This further reflects how cricket can effect *conciliation* far better than reconciliation.

CHAPTER 8

CRICKETING RHETORIC

In Section III, I showed how various cricketing discourses give rise to a particular idea of the team and players within it, which suggest that cricketers experiment with fundamental ideas about persons and groups. However, this also highlighted the kinds of constraints that are imposed on individuals, and the tensions that exist between individual and group concerns. So, while cricket enables individuals to experiment with their own social position and social values, people have to manage these experimentations within the team. In this chapter, I explore *how* this potential conflict is managed, noting the responsive strategies cricketers employ when dealing with others. In particular I return to the notion of ‘testing’, that I explained was prevalent in cricket in Section II. Here, I detail further how testing actually functions, illustrating how social positioning and experimentation occurs. To do this, I introduce the idea of *boru*, a Sinhala word which relates to a series of practices that evoke the sense of ‘obvious pretence’ (Argenti-Pillen 2007). As obvious pretence, *boru* colours the way the power dynamics within and across teams can be dealt with. Although not all testing is *boru*, this concept helps explain how testing works.

Furthermore, I investigate how persons manage these tensions through recourse to the same cricketing discourses that create them. Following Carrither’s depiction of rhetoric as commonplace acts of persuasion which draw from and mobilise certain ‘cultural schema’ (Carrithers 2005), I suggest that cricketing discourses are the cultural schema my interlocutors rhetorically deploy for their own purposes. Cricketers attempt to improve their own social position through cricketing ideas, drawing from the fundamental concepts of equality, meritocracy and hierarchy, to make social moves that benefit them personally. To deal with the restrictions that equality and the greater good imposes, many of my interlocutors raised the idea of meritocracy or hierarchy. This rhetorical deployment of cricketing discourses therefore suggests that these concepts are manipulated or played off against one another as is deemed appropriate. Given the presence of both *boru* and cricketing discourses, I suggest that a confluence of cultural schema is at play within Sri Lankan cricket. In testing and managing tensions, persons sometimes rhetorically deploy cricketing discourses, use *boru*, or both. Finally,

if the rhetorical deployment of cricketing discourses and/or *boru* fails, then arbitration is invoked where people come into conflict, or judgement is made if the extent of personal experimentation is unclear. All of this shows how persons learn how to interact well with others, to deal with the constraints of the team, and sometimes even improve their own social position.

Boru

The idea of testing employed by my interlocutors appears to be heavily influenced by a local concept: *boru*. *Boru* is a Sinhala word often translated into English simply as ‘lies’ or ‘deception’, yet as Argenti-Pillen argues, *boru* is not directly analogous to ‘lying’ in the Judeo-Christian tradition (Argenti-Pillen 2007:316). Instead, *boru* incorporates a wider set of social practices that involve deception more broadly (‘pretence’), including seduction, eliciting humour, disorientation, conflict avoidance and indirectly addressing awkward topics (*ibid*). This broader framing of *boru* resonates with Gilsenan’s work in Lebanon (1976), which suggests that frequent lying is an integral part of social worlds which are deeply concerned with status and honour (Argenti-Pillen 2007:315). Likewise in Sri Lanka, Gombrich suggests that *boru* plays a role in saving face (*ibid*), whereas Spencer indicates people regularly conceal ‘awkward truths’ through lying (Spencer 1990:177). Various ethnographers have suggested lying is prevalent in Sri Lanka (Argenti-Pillen 2007:315), but regardless of the extent to which people actually lie or not, many Sinhalese in particular assume that others often lie (Spencer 1990:177), suggesting that *boru* is an established strategy for maintaining social relations.⁸⁷ More recently, Argenti-Pillen (2007) and Said (2016) have examined the sophisticated ways that people employ *boru* for such purposes. While they differ on the extent to which people wilfully deceive others, both seem to agree that *boru* can act as a ‘rhetorical mechanism that reveals the depth of social relationships’ (Said 2016:102). These interpretations suggest that *boru* is therefore understood more simply as a broader set of strategies for the regulation of social relations, a tacit understanding Argenti-Pillen refers to as an ‘ethos’ of *boru* (Argenti-Pillen 2007:321). It is within this broader notion of an ‘ethos’ of *boru* that I interpret this tendency to test, and enjoyment of testing.

⁸⁷ In my own experience other groups – including Muslims and Tamils – also tended to believe others frequently lied.

As I suggested in Chapter 3, the notion of testing oneself and testing others is understood to be an integral part of the game. However, some of my experiences with cricket are clear examples of people employing deception, and these interactions resemble the character of *boru* more concretely. Obvious deception was often attempted before a game started. It is mandated by the league that a standard cricket game in Sri Lanka lasts 50 overs per side. However, in friendly matches some of the teams we faced asked to play less overs than this.⁸⁸ On multiple occasions I watched the two captains do the coin toss (to decide who bats or bowls first), only for the opposition captain to then say, ‘is it okay if we play 30/40 overs?’. This would put our captain in a tricky position, as one element of the game (who is going to bat first/second) has already been decided, and different numbers of overs require a different strategy. Often, the opposition captain would request to play 30 overs, which our captain would argue about, resulting to a split down the middle from 50, I.e., a 40 over game. The general logic, the opposition teams would claim, is that they are ‘a new team and we’re worried we can’t stay out here for 50 overs’, followed by ‘we are worried about getting beaten really badly’.⁸⁹ The logic behind playing fewer overs is to level out the playing field, as less-skilled teams tend to do comparatively better in the shorter formats of the game. However, these claims of being poor or unskilled were always refuted by my friends at The Titans, who said the opposition were fine, or indicated they already knew some of the players and could vouch for their skill. I could not figure out definitively for myself if this acting worried was a ploy, or a genuine concern. The semi-rhetorical question ‘*boru, ne?*’ (it’s lies, no?) was often quietly uttered, before people got on with the game. Obvious deception in cricket is recognised as part of the game, and is assumed to be widespread in much the same way that Spencer claims *boru* is.

The specific nature of the deception at cricket also seems to be similar to *boru* as described by Argenti-Pillen and Said. Generally speaking, it was obvious that people tried to push the limits of social interaction in a bid to understand what they could get away with without being reprimanded. When the opposition captain requested to play fewer overs, all seemed to be aware that this was a ploy to gain some advantage, but went along with it anyway, ceding to the request. There was limited moralising about this interaction; no one got frustrated or

⁸⁸ The status of friendly is crucial. Outwith rain delays, no team would argue with Umpires at a league match to try and change the overs per team.

⁸⁹ If my team has ever tried to pull this kind of thing, I have never seen it.

annoyed, suggesting a lack of shame at making the request or inconvenience in receiving it. The fact that they bartered on the overs played (40, rather than the original 50 or the requested 30) suggests that our captain was amenable to some kind of change, but also not willing to simply accept the opposition's request at face value. The blatant nature of the lie and the willingness to compromise shows that pulling off the deceit itself is not critical to the interaction. This (along with the commonly accepted idea that testing is prevalent) shows that testing is consistent with the idea that *boru* is not true deceit but rather 'obvious pretence' Argenti-Pillen (2007, emphasis mine). In essence, employing *boru* in this interaction appears more like an effort in testing the limits of social relations, rather than being purely deceitful. This more nuanced reading echoes Said's interpretation that *boru* employed among men is often 'a form of character testing' (Said 2016:102), and Argenti-Pillen's that *boru* allows persons to probe and evaluate social possibility, to 'get to know one's interlocutor teasingly or rather to find out the interlocutor's expectations.' (Argenti-Pillen 2007:321). Placed at the very beginning of the cricketing encounter, the interaction appears as an anticipatory strategy, echoing Said's assessment that 'in many situations, lies were actually about creating conflict and assessing the resultant reaction' (Said 1016:101). Similarly, testing in the game of cricket seems to be about working out the parameters of social relationships.

Understood as an exploration of social boundaries, testing concerns more what is revealed about participants than what is concealed (Argenti-Pillen 2007:316). Argenti-Pillen further states that because of the widespread awareness of the tendency to deceive, the true power of *boru* lies not in deception but in the consequent revealing of that deception (*ibid*). She describes the joy that some of her interlocutors take in revealing their more banal lies ("ha! I got you"), but also indicates that this revelation takes on a more exaggerated manner in ritual usage. In particular, she draws on Kapferer to describe how the use of *boru* in exorcism rituals entails the 'elaborate springing of a trap' on the demonic entity (1983:317). She describes how when dealing with enemies, the 'rapid succession of deception and revelation can be used to disorientate an opponent' (Argenti-Pillen 2007:319), and therefore it is not merely the deception that works to disorientate, but the constant destabilisation of reality.

Both springing traps and destabilisation have parallels in cricket. In the above example about captains arguing about overs, the claims that the opposition were 'new' and inexperienced

were likely to be unfounded, and were perceived as lies, but these claims still likely raised doubts in the minds of those involved. As my teammates indicated, they wanted to *appear* to be novices in order to gain some advantage later down the line: the primary aim was confusion. Similarly, when re-reading Vaz's encounter when bowling from Chapter 3, his statement of "you start it, I finish it" towards the previously dominating batsman suggests that he revelled not only in deceiving the batsman with his skill, but in the revelation of his deception, in the springing of his trap. Whether the trap was intentional or not is inconsequential, and in many ways the confusion caused by not knowing has its own effect on the other opposition members. Thus, deception is not the primary objective, but disorientation is. This also explains why many good players were described as "wily" or "cunning", because as Argenti-Pillen notes, the power to resist deception by the powerful lies in also being able to deceive (2007). The powerful players must be able to take part in deception and cannot resist the deception of others without it. Here, *boru* is a clear subtext to how testing is understood.

Revealing something about participants is often negotiated through humour. A lot of jokes were often bandied around TCC, whether on the training ground, during match day or in the WhatsApp group. Jokes were generally directed towards everyone, and no one seemed above humour, fitting with the egalitarian spirit of the team. Most importantly, in a similar way to that described by Said (2016), *boru* is invoked for the mediation of difficult situations with friends through making jokes. This highlights issues that are potentially problematic without directly addressing them (*ibid*). By making light of potential issues in a humorous way, this makes the target aware that others know about their situation, and actually evokes a sense of care (*ibid*). For example, Tariq (who is Malay) was often the butt of jokes because he smoked and drank alcohol. Some in the team even referred to him as a 'bad Muslim'. Vimal told me he had defended Tariq from these comments in the past, but the comments I overheard personally were delivered in a playful manner, and Tariq did not seem too displeased by them, laughing and smiling along. These jokes seemed to reflect the care people had towards Tariq; they respected his decision to follow Islam in his own way, but did suggest they were worried about his current path. Elsewhere, I noticed that some of these jokes are almost mean, and one player who is Tamil and cannot speak much Sinhala at all, was often ribbed for the childlike way he speaks Sinhala. Similarly, some of my younger teammates often asked me to say Sinhala phrases, laughing at the unpolished way I speak. Another player, Thanyan, was teased

because he is a skilled player but often asks for things above his station, like to be captain ‘for one game’ or to open the batting (when he is definitely not an opener). This fits within the ideal of roles, but is dealt with largely through humour. Overall, jokes made persons aware of their position in the team, and were used to make others aware of that position too.

Boru is clearly a local concept that influences social interaction at cricket in the mode of ‘testing’. In the various interactions above, different ethnic groups were testing one another by drawing from this commonly understood cultural schema. Further reflection on the more nuanced interpretation of *boru* as a set of social management strategies is important, as it helps illustrate what might be happening in these social encounters. Argenti-Pillen draws from Gilsenan to suggest that *boru* ‘possesses its own aesthetic of baroque invention’ (Gilsenan 1976:193 in Argenti-Pillen 2007:316), going on to suggest that the primary enjoyment of *boru* lies in this aspect of creating ‘illusory realities’ (2007:323). In these terms the draw of *boru* lies in suspending reality for a time and experimenting with an alternative sociality. How this invention works can be illustrated through the concept of ‘tone’. Argenti-Pillen draws from Bakhtin to suggest that *boru* always has a particular ‘tone’, which is not only established through the context of the speech event, but by the relationship between the speakers, on their social position (2007:322).

Boru is therefore essentially relational, being concerned with the active comparison of individuals and their social positions. Through *boru*, effort is placed on defining oneself and others. However, the extent to which these positions are fixed is limited. As Argenti-Pillen argues, the two primary tones of *boru*, of domination/aggression and accommodation/seduction are equally possible and valid during *boru* speech events (2007:322). This air of ambiguity suggests that the social relations upon which interpretations of *boru* are made are themselves suspended and liable to change. This is important as it suggests one can have the potential to move socially. Thus, the illusory nature of *boru* suggests social norms are suspended, while it is precisely the ambiguity of *boru* that enables invention to occur. Meanwhile, *boru*’s relational aspect suggests this invention concerns social position & mobility. Altogether, this suggests that *boru* can be an apt way of experimenting with ideas of the world and one’s position within that world, something which may be appealing in broadly hierarchical societies. While not all testing in the liminal space of cricket is *boru*, testing is clearly heavily influenced by *boru* and

occurs in a similar vein. Testing, like *boru* reveals social position, exactly where individuals stand in comparison to one another.

Rhetorically Deploying Sporting Discourses

While *boru* might influence the idea that testing is about social position, it is through cricketing discourses that people typically characterise such testing. Thus, testing is a mode through which broader cricketing concerns such as equality and meritocracy can be realised. For example, the ambiguity that the twin tones of aggression and supplication raise mesh nicely with the complicated world of cricketing discourses, wherein one must be aggressive and play to win, while also playing fairly and being gentlemanly. A reading of testing informed by *boru* incorporates these contradictory impulses. Similarly, because *boru* is relational it shines a new light on the idea of the ‘level playing field’. For example, the instance of *boru* at the toss described above can be read as an awareness of cricketing discourses. It is likely that the opposition captain was trying to understand whether our captain was amenable to the spirit of fair play, offering him an opportunity to create a more ‘level playing field’ by balancing the terms of the game. Our captain, not wanting to lose face, agreed to reduce the numbers of overs, but compromised, thereby also retaining the spirit of competition. Here the complexities of paradoxical sporting discourses are worked out in social interactions. Broadly speaking, the ideas of *boru* and testing provide scope for working out these contradictory discourses, in the process illustrating how people rhetorically deploy them for their own aims.

‘Meritocracy’ is commonly understood as the idea that one is chosen to play cricket based primarily on their skill, as I explained earlier.⁹⁰ Having an abundance of skill may enable a certain player to gain an improved hierarchical position, thereby cementing a new hierarchy. For example, sometimes performances were invoked to justify rewards. Bottles of fizzy drinks and cake often appear at the end of a match to celebrate winning the game. On one occasion, a big bottle of glucose water appeared and was passed around the group.⁹¹ Some of the guys were laughing and joking around, making claims about their worth (‘I did this, I did that’) to

⁹⁰ Skill was not the only marker of meritocratic worth, but it was the main one. Being experienced or understanding the game were also highly valued, but secondary characteristics.

⁹¹ Small tablets of glucose are added to water bottles to create a very sweet drink, often used in sporting contexts to fight dehydration.

justify getting more of the drink. Aqil for example, who made a lot of runs in that particular match, drank a lot more of the drink. The joking nature of this became clearer as these claims became increasingly outlandish. Aqil (who played well) and Nassim (who in this particular match achieved very little) took enormous swigs out of the drink and started to play-fight, pushing one another aside to get the drink or defending it from others. Here, it seems clear that a kind of meritocratic claim is being made (worth dependent on skill) to justify preferential treatment in what is an ostensibly egalitarian unit. This suggests that ‘equality’ is actually a very unstable and contestable state. All are deemed equal, except when one does well at the game.

Similarly, higher position in the team’s hierarchy often inflated the egos of my teammates, and seemed to influence decision making about the game. However, this was equally justified in terms of skill, of meritocratic worth. In one match, Hadee was unavailable, and so Aqil was asked to stand in as captain by the team management. Though Aqil is undoubtedly a talented player and someone who regularly plays well for the club, he seemed to abuse his new position somewhat, in that he assigned himself more roles than he usually held. For example, Aqil regularly opened the batting, and this was accepted as his primarily role at the club. He opened the batting and played well, scoring a 50. Yet, when it was time to field, he also decided to open the bowling with himself, despite there being other better (or at least, more regularly used) options available in the team. Even though his bowling was largely unsuccessful, he persisted with bowling himself and didn’t change his plans. It wasn’t until he took a lucky wicket in the 10th over of the game that he finished bowling. Here, it is evident that rather than things being egalitarian, meritocratic value (being a good player) actually solidified Aqil’s elevation in the hierarchy (he became captain). It is also evident that once Aqil became captain, he used this hierarchical position to make decisions that would give him further chance to show his skill and therefore his meritocratic worth, in an attempt to perpetuate the cycle. It seems as though Aqil worked hard to make himself indispensable to the club. By testing the realms of acceptability, it appeared he was also drawing from the notion of *boru*, and this highlights how *boru* impacts the management of power dynamics. Either way, cricketing discourses about meritocracy can be manipulated by individuals for their personal gain, subverting the more broadly accepted tenet of equality.

Allusions to meritocracy and hierarchy also often seemed to be invoked during less conspicuous interactions as a club, including during the little games we played while waiting on match days. Often, we played a game called ‘one bump’, where a bowler bowls a rubber or tennis ball at a batsman who stands in front of a chair, and they try to last as long as possible without getting out. The game is called ‘one bump’ because the batsmen can be caught even if the ball has bounced once. During these games it gets lively pretty quickly. I noted that those players who were skilled were taking on more of the fun roles, including bowling, and seemed to bat more often. Furthermore, players often requested forgiveness or to be given the benefit of the doubt during contentious moments when a decision had to be made, and it appeared that these same players got given such forgiveness more often. This fun and inconsequential game appears therefore to be a vehicle for expressing hierarchy, as those who were more skilled got more leeway because they were deemed to be higher figures. Thus, meritocratic worth – one’s skill – was employed for personal gain, and any hierarchical position gleaned from meritocracy was then employed to retain the status quo. The good players got to play, and then kept playing more than others. Essentially, the team’s hierarchy is modified by the idea of meritocracy, and while things should be egalitarian among the team, they often aren’t.

Although meritocracy and hierarchy were often employed for personal purposes, the subversion of egalitarianism wasn’t always appreciated when it was too obvious. An example of this is when Fakhir and Yasir returned to training just before the league season began. Neither had been present for much of the build-up to the season and hadn’t attended for weeks, and therefore weren’t supposedly eligible for selection as I outlined in Chapter 6. Yet when they did come to the final couple of training sessions, they both tried to control the session and influence how the sessions were carried out, as if they were integral members of the squad. They ordered people around, reprimanded players for taking breaks at ‘inappropriate’ times, and made uninvited comments about players’ skills. Some members resisted quietly, simply laughing and shrugging off their commands, while others just ignored them completely, refusing to move when instructed, leaving it until a time that suited them instead. Both Yasir and Fakhir attempted to use authority derived from other statuses to influence matters on the pitch. As Yasir is identified with management and Fakhir is a knowledgeable coach, it appeared they deemed it their right to control what was going on. Yet their attempts to invoke hierarchy failed because they lacked requisite markers of equality. Neither were allowed to control the

group as they had not attended training in a long time, and their attempted control was deemed to be unjustified. One cannot simply invoke hierarchy if one hasn't got meritocratic worth to back this up, or possesses a record of attendance.

Some members seemed to recognise when they lacked these markers of equality and meritocracy and tried to rectify the situation. Fakhir for example appeared to try and compensate for his lack of attendance at training, aiming to prove his worth to the club in different ways. Following a victory after our first league match of the season, he was very eager to draw everyone into a huddle, stating "I have some messages I want to give you, some thoughts". Slowly, everyone came in and stood round to listen. Fakhir gave sage if basic advice, telling those who succeeded to keep going, and those who failed to clear their minds for the next game, emphasising the role of effort and the importance of a clear mentality. It would appear Fakhir felt like he had the right and reason to address the players in this manner. It was significant that he brought everyone in and waited for them to come, refusing to speak until he had the whole team before him. On reflection, while this was good advice and received well by those who listened, it seemed that Fakhir's aims were really about atonement for his lack of attendance at training, his lack of claim to egalitarian worth. Fakhir is certainly a talented and knowledgeable player, yet much like Aqil's manipulation of captaincy, Fakhir seems to be mobilising these cricketing values for his own gain. Here, he employs his skill and knowledge to atone for the lack of presence at training, and attempts to cement himself in the hierarchy once more. By providing something which has not been asked for, ideas that might help the club win, Fakhir was attempting to make himself indispensable to the group.

Viewing these rhetorical deployments of cricketing discourses in the light of *boru*, one can read how Aqil and Fakhir's efforts to cement their position in the team worked by constructing dependencies, or as Argenti-Pillen puts it, subordinating others (2007:319). Similarly to *boru*, 'one's superiority is confirmed by the power to deceive without having to hide it' (*ibid*). Thus, Aqil and Fakhir used their higher meritocratic worth to take liberties and avoid their egalitarian obligations. I became acutely aware of these dependencies and the power dynamics that surrounded them once Fakhir returned to the club following a long absence. Although it was Fakhir who originally introduced me to TCC, he didn't play with us for the first year I was a member at the club. For that year, I encountered no teasing or comments, but when he

returned to training, I noticed his attitude towards me was different. He often went about emphasising the strangeness he perceived in me, calling me out on the fact I had a second shirt to change into, saying it was a very ‘suddha’ (white) thing to do. He commented on the quality of my cricket equipment, which is by comparison higher than my interlocutors,⁹² and made comments in the WhatsApp group which suggested I was high strung, or teased me for being English. I read these occasions as being part of the power dynamic I had presumably disrupted. It seemed that I had emerged as a potential threat, an unknown and therefore Fakhir needed to exert some form of control over me, to place me into a social position to make himself feel more comfortable. I feel this is made clear by the fact I received no comments and was integrated openly by TCC before Fakhir returned; I didn’t affect the status quo in any negative way.⁹³ But once Fakhir returned, his position needed to be renewed, and therefore dependencies had to be reinstated.

To summarise, players within TCC drew from cricketing discourses to carefully negotiate their social position within the club. This was particularly acute amongst those who had aspirations for a higher position in the club’s hierarchy, or who lacked markers that showed they were committed to equality or meritocracy. In mobilising these discourses for their personal gain, players showed it was possible to achieve some level of social change within the group. Fakhir was largely successful in reintegrating himself into the group, for example. To the chagrin of other members, he played for much of that season’s Division 3 campaign. The idea of testing and *boru* influence these strategies, encouraging players to construct dependencies and show their capacity. Consequently, these examples show that while sporting discourses are employed to reinforce the idea of a team and constrain others, they can also be used to navigate this constraint too.

Resolving Conflict: Arbitration

Although testing, *boru*, and cricketing discourses are often used to avoid conflict, not all situations can be resolved amicably. Thus, there exist arbiters (the umpires) who adjudicate

⁹² I was also unique in that I had a set of kit just for myself. People often share a communal stock of kit (and indeed I happily shared my kit with others).

⁹³ I feel this interpretation is further justified as these kinds of messages again stopped once I left the field.

following the 'spirit of the game', laying down judgement that is considered final. Cricketing discourse is therefore also invoked during testing situations that get out of hand. Two incidents that happened while playing for The Titans are indicative of this.

The first incident occurred during a warmup match, a friendly before the Division 3 season. We were fielding, and at the time Vaz had just taken a wicket with his first ball of the over. The next ball was hit very gently out to me, and I calmly bent down to collect it. Another of our players insisted on the ball, so I casually lobbed it to him, who then passed it straight to Vaz at the non-striker's end. Before I knew it, Vaz had emphatically knocked the wickets clean out the ground, and turned around to appeal to the umpire for a run-out. Both batsmen at this point were in the middle having a chat, thinking the ball was dead. The umpire instantly gave the batsman out, causing a mild celebration from our team and much confusion for the opposition. Once the opposition realised what had happened, a fight almost started. While the rest of our team gathered in the middle to celebrate, the batsmen who had just been given out was yelling first at the umpire. Despite the protestations the umpire upheld his decision, reconfirming it. The batsman then directed his ire at Vaz, who was engaging him with his arms out plaintively, shrugging his shoulders and trying to act blameless. Vaz motioned to the umpire, stating that a decision had been made and it was out of everyone's hands. The batsman continued to yell various expletives at everyone, which I was later told were variations on 'fuck you all and fuck your mothers'. In the end, the batsman was pulled off the field by one of his own teammates, the incident passed without violence, and the game continued with no further problems.

The second incident happened at one of our Division 3 matches, but this time the conflict occurred between the opposition team and the umpires. While we were getting changed and ready for the match, the opposition captain was arguing with the umpires about some aspect of the game. This captain was incensed, waving his arms around, while the umpire remained calm in response, speaking softly to him and not showing any signs of rising to him. Notwithstanding, things seemed to escalate remarkably quickly (as with other conflicts I've seen), but eventually things calmed down and the match proceeded. I was later told the opposition captain had annoyed the umpires earlier in the day. They were the designated 'home' team for this fixture, and therefore responsible for hosting the match. Although most

of their team had arrived on time, the ground was not ready, and they then tried to dictate to the umpires when the match would start. The umpire had therefore simply responded that “this is not how you play a Division 3 game”. Other teammates said this team were apparently new to the tournament and didn’t know how to “do things properly”. Someone told me they also had some “previous beef” with the umpires, and that the situation “flared up over that”. The umpires seemed fairly calm in response, and it appeared they were comfortable handling the situation. Despite the obvious aggression, there was an atmosphere of respect, and my teammates framed this conflict as occurring simply because the opposition didn’t understand how to play these matches.

A thread running through both incidents is deference to an external arbitrator and reliance on their decision. In the first example, everyone recognised that running out the batsman maybe wasn’t the right thing to do, but no one wanted to change the outcome. As Vaz pointed out, “the umpire made his decision”, and in a later discussion, another teammate said he “agreed it’s probably not right, but it’s done”. He added that the umpire had made a decision and was supposed to be impartial. He also said the umpire was a friend of the opposition and “was provided by them anyway”, so the opposition batsmen really had no grounds for complaint.⁹⁴ The second incident was more curious, being between the opposition team and the umpires themselves. As teammates framed it, the umpires apparently suggested that “this isn’t how a Division 3 team should play”, highlighting an appeal to objective standards in cricket. The opposition team were new to league cricket and the umpires had to explain to them that the rules were in place and could not be broken. I believe this situation appeared a little jarring for our team because the umpires are the arbitrators, and it is understood you simply do not argue with them. In both instances, arbitration revolved around a judgement about what had transpired, while discourses about the importance of the umpires were invoked to justify these interpretations. In both instances, the arbitrators are ultimately deferred to, and their version of events is taken as the truth. After the run out, the umpire’s decision was final, while in the conflict between the opposition captain and the umpires, the umpires dictate exactly how a game should be played. In both instances, there is deference to the cricketing discourses about respect for authority and fair play.

⁹⁴ In this friendly match, the opposition had paid a friend – who is a registered umpire – to officiate the match. There was no sense of foul play, as his decision in our favour indicates.

Defining Events: Judgement

Arbitration remained very important for more ordinary events, and here the same principles of establishing a judgement and resorting to cricketing discourses were found. As I mentioned earlier, on the odd occasions I found myself coaching at the academy, I was often asked by the boys to provide judgement about how events played out. If I happened to be around the nets watching the boys train, I was asked whether something was out, if a delivery was a no ball, whether someone was right or wrong about a technique, and so on. There was often a shout of ‘Sir! Sir!’ followed by a ‘is it this?’ or ‘is this right?’. This is obviously a key part of learning the game for young men trying to understand the intricate rules of a sport, but there are certain features of this that speak of other motivations. For one, many of the boys often issued their disbelief with my decision or would try to debate with me about what happened, before ultimately backing down. Thinking with the idea of *boru*, I saw this as a part of testing and establishing boundaries. Secondly, I found it intriguing how my judgement on events was used by the boys in their own debates. My judgement held more weight when used by one boy to another, but could be dismissed if either party felt I was wrong. Either way, I remained an important figure of authority in these situations and so lastly, it was apparent that the boys were uncomfortable if I couldn’t establish a judgement. For example, in certain situations where I needed to arbitrate a situation by providing a decision, I employed the commonly used tactic of saying ‘it’s just a game’ to try and defuse the situation. This *never* worked, and I was often pressed upon to make a judgement. This reached remarkable levels when I was once asked to decide what kind of game a simple knockabout after training should be. The decision was essentially meaningless, yet seemed incredibly important to the boys. They seemed unable to decide which game to play among themselves and begged me to make a judgement. This deference to an external, hierarchically significant figure is similar to that mobilised between the adults and the umpires above.

I was also often asked to organise the drills more directly, and this centred on providing an indication of the role and responsibilities each boy had. For example, I did not see the value in putting the boys into a set order when they lined up for a drill, as this had no real consequence, given that everyone would get a turn. When the boys asked me to order them, I usually replied with “it doesn’t really matter you will all get a go”, but this was never received well. The boys expressed discomfort if equality was not strictly adhered to. Left to their own

devices, the boys did attempt to sort the order out themselves. If this was upset because someone had to leave, they soon worked out what the correct order should be. Yet more often than not, there was great consternation about the right order being imposed and they usually demanded I set one. What became most interesting in these situations was how this request for me to arbitrate a situation evoked a desire for equality. Unlike other instances where I have to make a judgement about events, such as deciding if someone is out or not (where there is a clear winner and loser), this particular request for arbitration has to be equal.

A similar discomfort was also felt at matches with the adults if the ‘right way of doing things’ was ever subverted. Here, there were also appeals to a greater power. Fakhir for example once tried to make many changes to the field settings during a match, telling people to move around almost constantly. This raised the ire of the umpires, who eventually asked, “do you have more than one captain?” and “who is actually the captain here?” As my teammates put it, the umpires “blasted” Fakhir for continuing to act beyond his capacity, saying that the captain should be the only one setting the field. When he played the next game he was much quieter, clearly fearful of this retribution. It is interesting that this pressure to have a sole leader came from the umpires who act as arbiters for the match, rather than from others within the team. Fakhir’s leadership push was tacitly accepted by the group, whereas the umpires were more concerned with proper protocol. Leadership is deemed to be necessary for the success of the club, but it appears efforts are made to ensure this is done properly, that this hierarchy is not subverted unduly. Here, arbitration is invoked when proper protocol is absent, and there is a reliance on – and deference to – an external arbitrator to make this so.

Placing arbiters in the context of cricketing discourses and the idea of *boru*, it seems that arbiters allow the experimental and inventive nature of testing to take place. The arbiters act only when the social positioning being worked upon becomes unsustainable. In these instances, there is also palpable discomfort if a definitive version of events is not decided upon. Conversely, people seem more comfortable testing one another if they understand that the arbiters are there as a safety net. To crystallise this point, I once mentioned to a teammate that we umpired our own games in the UK, and this might be a problem in Sri Lanka. On consideration, they agreed that there would “probably be a lot more fights” in Sri Lanka and it would never work. It is probably for this reason why *all* matches have independent arbitrators, to the degree that

I have seen matches that happen without bails, but never without umpires. If managing conflict is about avoidance, then perhaps this is why cricket can be particularly troublesome, and is why having someone to cast definitive judgement about events is necessary. One cannot simply leave things unanswered, like when the boys I coach argue vociferously with each other about any dubious moment at training, repeatedly asking me to make a judgement. The whole idea of cricket being ‘just a game’ seems to be rarely upheld or mentioned. There *has* to be resolution. It is for this reason that there is usually a reliance on arbitration where testing breaks down.

Negotiating a Position in the World

In conclusion, the idea of testing is prevalent within cricket spaces and is widely employed by many cricketers. This testing is informed by the widely used concept of *boru*, which suggests a conscious suspension of social norms and a joy in working out social positioning. This enables persons to pit themselves against one another without coming into overt conflict. This testing is more often phrased in terms of cricketing discourses, through ideas like equality, meritocracy and hierarchy. Through the rhetorical deployment of these disparate cultural schema my interlocutors attempted to negotiate their own social position or present a particular version of themselves to the world. In the event this testing and suspension of norms fails, arbiters make a judgement to defuse tensions. Arbitration is not just about making good between two sides but providing a definitive version of events. These examples of testing show how individuals learn to manage these various dynamics, to get along with one another, and improve their own social position. Testing, *boru*, cricketing discourses and arbitration are all essential mechanisms in managing the tensions that competition inevitably creates. This all suggests that cricket can act as a vehicle to teach people how to do sociality well, and is more about conciliation and avoiding conflict, than reconciliation.

However, as these individual rhetorical moves are not always successful, this suggests that the potential responses to tensions and conflict are themselves constrained. Testing is tempered by cricketing discourses, by notions of fair play and the ‘right way’ of doing things. Thus, the same cricketing discourses that promote individual experimentation with social values also constrain these experimentations. This highlights how sporting discourses are certainly not unequivocally good. This also highlights that the onus remains on the individual to deal with

the constraints and contradictions cricketing discourse place on them. So, while individuals learn how to navigate the social world, they never question the tensions between individuals and groups, or the constraints this places upon them. Next, I look at how people deal with this contradiction and constraint internally.

CHAPTER 9

CONTROL

Scenes: Importance of Control

I am feeling good. I've just nailed a cover drive, head, legs, chest and hands moving in sync towards the ball. I timed it sweetly, hitting the ball safely along the ground. I get the instant sense of elation one finds when successfully playing the most aesthetically pleasing shot in the game.

“No, no! Wrong! Wrong!”

My coach is yelling at me, the disappointment clear in his voice, in his face. Confused, I linger slightly, holding the pose. My left leg is bent, stretched out towards where the ball pitched. My head is easily in line, and my weight has pressed evenly and smoothly forwards, enabling me to hit the ball with power. My hands are now behind my left shoulder, the bat pointing back over my head, having reached the final point of a flourishing bat arc.

“Where is your control!?” Arief asks me, progressing down the net towards me, looking at me inquiringly. “You must be careful”. Still confused and now standing up to face him, I feel like a naughty school child. I murmur about having hit the ball nicely, about getting a good weight balance, about hitting along the floor. He shakes his head. “But your hands were wrong. You must not take the bat over the shoulder like this. It doesn't give you control. You might hit the ball in the air”.

Arief shows me the correct technique, taking the bat from me and modelling his perfect cover drive, hands raised and bat extended out in front of him, as if drawing an invisible line from his nose to the end of the bat. “You must always raise the bottom of the bat to eye level, and count: one, two, three, four. Then you will play it lovely every time.”



Figure 28. Arief demonstrates his cover drive technique.

Arief walks back to the other end of the smooth concrete slab that forms the pitch of this dusty cricket net. He turns back to face me, arm extended over his shoulder, ready to bowl another ball. Sensing my doubts, he merely states: “I want you to hit ten balls with your technique, and then ten with mine, ok?”

We go through the process. The first ten balls I hit the ball hard, but maybe half of the balls I hit go in the air, creating the risk of a catch. Arief doesn’t let me forget this, mentioning it every time it happens. Next, we go to his technique. I am diligent, I hit the ball nicely, bat raised in front of my eyes, extending carefully outwards. ‘Lovely, lovely!’ he shouts, admiring my shots. Nine out of ten go along the floor.

We stop for a breather, taking on water and discussing what just happened. Arief looks at me carefully, his hands open, giving advice:

“Do you understand now? I do not like this technique with taking it over the shoulder. Lionel Mendis Sir taught me that it is too dangerous. You must hit the ball like this instead, and you will play much better. The way you are hitting it *does not give you control.*”



Figure 29. Taking a break at Bandara.

Turning Inwards

Many concepts and ideas arose during my time playing cricket in Sri Lanka, but none seemed more prevalent than *control*. The concern Arief showed about control was echoed across various ethnographic settings, evident both in the way people talked about cricket, and how they actually played the game. When situated within the wider ‘moral tradition’ of cricket (MacIntyre 2007[1981]), control appears to intersect with a number of related ideals and virtues. When people spoke about cricket using these virtues, they seemed to be expressing a desire to exercise control. The idea of control has long been popular in cricketing discourses, with careful play traditionally encouraged. Bowlers are taught to bowl ‘line and length’, to repeatedly hit the same spot on the pitch, while batsmen are likewise advised to be patient and risk averse in response to this.⁹⁵ What I found surprising in Sri Lanka was not the existence of this common discourse on control, but the extent to which this notion of control then becomes a philosophy for living a successful life.

So far, I have illustrated that the agencies one can mobilise in the imagined community of the cricket team are limited and constrained. Yet despite these tensions, (or perhaps in ignorance of them), many of my interlocutors spoke about cricket as a tool of change, describing how they are individually improved by it. In this chapter, I focus on the personal strategies that cricketers employ in dealing with these constraints individually, on the tactics they use to manage their individual desires and how they choose to navigate conflicting sporting discourses. In this light, control seems to be one of the ways people learn how to improve themselves and change their lives. More than just a strategic solution to a difficult game, exercising *control* over the self and external factors enables an individual to achieve their goals. In the face of life’s problems, of testing, of *boru*, control can be a powerful strategy. Cricket provides a means for honing this control through developing other related virtues. This highlights how cricketing discourses can affect players’ comportment, influencing action in a less obvious yet still powerful manner. In Brownell’s terms, the idea of *control* dictates the sorts of ‘embodied responses’ cricketers make during the game (1995). As I will show in Chapter 10, the idea of control and learning to exercise control also influences how people conceive of their own lives, and can directly impact life choices.

⁹⁵ Much of the ethnographic material in this chapter comes from discussions about batting, but it should be noted that many of the same concepts can be attributed to bowling.

Why the Need for Control?

Various examples highlight why control is expected from individual players. Previous examples include the context of testing I detailed in Section II; here, control is a suitable tool for negating the interference of others. Similarly, the cricketing discourses I explored in Section III indicate that control is helpful for managing conflicting ideas about the team and individuality. In Chapter 7, I highlighted that players are encouraged to ‘be yourself’, but must balance this expression of individuality against their assigned role. In a similar fashion, players are also expected to be adaptable in order to aid the team, otherwise they are considered to be selfish.

For Laman, “being a good cricketer means adapting to situations according to what your team demands. If you can do that well, that’s what makes you a complete cricketer.” As Sarath put it, the one thing cricket really taught him above all else was adaptability, an ability to deal with what the game can throw at you. Adaptability appeared to be a key indicator of experience, yet seemed to come easier to some than others. Younger, more inexperienced players were often criticised for being impatient, and as Tariq explained, many of the younger players simply try to hit every ball as hard as they can in matches and quickly get out. He said this was the same approach they employed in the practice net sessions, and therefore showed a lack of ability to change their game appropriately for matches. As he put it, many inexperienced players simply “don’t think from the head”. However, some senior players were equally guilty of the same problem. For example, Tariq mentioned that Fakhir was a very naturally talented player, but lacked game awareness and mental fortitude. Fakhir also wanted to “hit every ball”. He was very capable of hitting the ball hard and well, but didn’t recognise when this wasn’t feasible, and often got out. He failed because he was unable to adapt to the game situation.

Players who are unable to recognise when their assigned role isn’t suitable for the task at hand are therefore criticised by others. Just as players who exercise untempered individuality were seen as problematic in Chapter 7, players who stick to their assumed role above the needs of the team are equally chastised. For some players, this can actually be the same thing, especially if their individuality and assumed role intertwine. For example, Laman told me that while cricketing discourses often advocate that “you do always play your natural game, I’m not a big advocate of it”. He explained that “if you’re just gonna come and play your natural game all the time then it’s like you don’t care about what your team requires from you right now”. Here,

an inability to adapt to the match situation suggests a disregard for the needs of the team. Thus, senior team members at TCC were equally critical of players who did not play to their assigned role as those who showed disregard for the match situation. In either case, these players are admonished for playing without thought for the team and are accused of selfishness. This highlights that onus is placed on individuals to control themselves to fulfil their obligations to the team. As Arfan put it, just as the captain should try to control the game situation, “when things go wrong, everybody in the team has to be in control of himself”. Players are ultimately responsible for their own actions, and if they can’t control themselves, then they shirk the team. Just as Jit said in Chapter 7, individuals playing their own games do not help teams to win matches. Control was often invoked when discussing responsibilities to the team, and individual control is clearly recognised as a strategy for group success.

What this discussion of control and responsibility highlights is that cricketing discourses tend to emphasise the responsive element of the game. That cricket is mostly a responsive game is literally true for batting, although the same can be said of bowling.⁹⁶ As Arief indicated to me often in training, “you can be a god in the nets, but out in the middle is where you make original mistakes”. By this he means that pressure changes the way a player performs, affecting his capacity to respond to the match situation. Equally, Aqil said that selecting a team for The Titans was tough, because players often struggle to translate their form in practice into form in matches. The mental challenge of cricket is therefore how to respond appropriately.

The Idea of Control

Control is both an emic and an etic concept. Control was most explicitly talked about by coaches, and was also a common theme of discussion during training. Control also appeared during games, as an underlying subtext in the support yelled from the side-lines by teammates. While control was rarely mentioned by name in interviews with my interlocutors, I saw it as something which brought together numerous related virtues. Many of these concepts, like focus, discipline, patience, respect, and hard work, were expressed in a way that also suggested a concern with control.

⁹⁶ ‘Let’s see the response’ is common encouragement for a bowler if they have been hit for a boundary the previous delivery.

The idea of control is informed by these related concepts. Returning to MacIntyre's framework for virtue ethics, these concepts are virtues in their own right and are things that people strive to achieve (2007). They are however also examples of internal goods produced through cricket. As such, they enable persons to develop the virtue of *control*. For example, my interlocutors often spoke about the values of patience and calm. Tariq's mental strategy was based on advice from Kumar Sangakkara. He said that in cricket, especially when batting, one must be ready to cleanse the mind, to achieve a state where one is almost not thinking in order to focus. This is an almost meditative state, and there is a Tamil word that has been used to describe cricketers possessing this mental capacity, *nidanam*.⁹⁷ Virtues like patience and calm are therefore prerequisites for exercising control over the game situation. Furthermore, my interlocutors often spoke about the discipline required to be a good player. Players with discipline can carry out the sustained work needed to improve their fitness, or repetitively practice movements on the requisite scale to improve their technical skills. Without discipline, poor players were unable to control their bodies, and therefore to control the game situation. Discipline is therefore a virtue, but also an internal good that contributes towards gaining the greater virtue of *control*.

The idea of control is also informed by cricketing discourses of stoicism and risk aversion. The numerous cricket academies around Colombo have been heavily influenced by Nelson Mendis and his late brother Lionel. The Mendis brothers promote a very 'traditional' outlook on coaching cricket that relies on the apocryphal 'MCC Coaching Manual'.⁹⁸ This method of coaching espouses the same modernist, Victorian values that Mangan suggests were established on the grounds of public schools across England more than a century earlier (Mangan 1998). From watching coaches in a variety of contexts, including at the academies of several professional clubs, it was apparent that control was certainly an underlying principle in their approach. The importance of control was often conveyed through reason, being portrayed as a logical solution to succeeding in cricket. Not all coaches are so traditional, and some I spoke to certainly claimed to break from this mould, including Arief who claimed to be 'imaginative' in his approach. However, many of these coaches recognise the importance of

⁹⁷ For more on *nidanam*, see Fernando 2014 and Fernando 2015.

⁹⁸ The MCC Coaching Manual is a guide to various cricket skills, produced since the 1950s. The manual is often idiomatically referred to while invoking particularly traditional or orthodox approaches to cricket. It is employed with praise/disdain depending on the person's views about change and innovative play.

the basics and fall back on well-worn tropes about control where needed. This practical approach to control was only not the preserve of coaches. As I noted in Chapter 3, many cricketers relished the chance to test themselves and enjoyed the strategic elements of the game. Idris, who was not the most talented of players but was nonetheless successful, enjoyed bowling as he would “study the batsmen, know his weaknesses, and bowl to that weakness”. Vimal claimed that the battle was won in the minds of the players who could remain calmest, while Vaz suggested that the best teams are those who stay strong mentally. Importantly, many players described the mental part of the game as being the defining factor between teams. As Vaz put it, “anybody can bat, anybody can bowl, anybody can field... cricket has become a mind-game now.” Thus, individual control was seen as a clear strategy for success in cricket.

I argue the concept of control can be seen as an encompassing rubric that shapes and describes the various ways people strategize in cricket. It is informed by cricketing discourses but also incorporates various other locally understood virtues. What these examples also highlight is an emphasis on individual but more importantly *interiorised* responsibility. Control often involved players reflecting inward on their own capacities. As I indicated earlier, cricket teams match up individuals against one another. As such, individuals are encouraged to focus on what they can do, whether that is exercising patience, or understanding the individual weaknesses within the opposition. Players are encouraged to develop control so that they can do their best for the team. Next, I go through various aspects of control, describing how it is developed, how it is taught, and whether it works in practice.

Cultivating Control

Cultivating a sense of control revolved primarily around developing different kinds of understanding. When my teammates at TCC spoke about batting in particular, this idea of control through understanding was particularly prevalent. Firstly, players had to understand their own capacities. More experienced players at The Titans like Vaz and Tariq and coaches like Arief all emphasised understanding one’s own skills. Developing cricketing awareness and adaptability meant first developing an inward focus, on knowing oneself. Tariq emphasised that as a batsman, one should “know their strokes, know their gaps, know their fielding positions”, and therefore players needed to be confident in their own skills and knowledge. However, this individual understanding must be placed in context so it can be applied to the

match situation. Good players must hone their observation skills and increase their overall awareness to understand the game in progress. Senior players often talked about being watchful while playing and trying to grasp the conditions. The difficulty of this is not lost on players, as many of these factors can only be tacitly understood, such as the pitch, the climate and atmospheric conditions.⁹⁹ Overcoming this difficulty is crucial however, as Tariq bemoaned that younger players “don’t study” the game, or give themselves time to “get used to the environment”, to establish a feel for the conditions. Vaz equally noted that observing and understanding the game was the key difference between a good player and a great player. Adaptability was developed less through playing lots of matches, but rather through a willingness and desire to observe the game keenly and understand the match situation.

Understanding these more tacit conditions is important as the opposition can use them to their own advantage. For many of my interlocutors, successful batting meant understanding what others can do, and then attempting to resist this. My teammates highlighted many factors that can make batting difficult, including the pitch, the ball, and of course the bowlers and fielders, whose cunning can undermine even good techniques and strong mental capacities. When my teammates spoke of the importance of observing all these factors, this was because ignoring them was a perilous approach to batting. One has to bat cautiously against spin on a dry wicket, as the ball will turn more, for example. One had to be aware if a bowler was trying to get you out with a certain strategy by observing the field placings. This is also why the often-raised virtue of respect is important, not just from an ideological standpoint, but because playing too aggressively against a good bowler is a sure-fire way to lose your wicket. When training with Arief, I was often told to “respect the bowler” after playing a poor shot, and therefore reminded that I should be focusing on responding more appropriately to the situation. Cricket often seemed to be an exercise in risk management. Tariq explained that when batting you always have to weigh things up, “see what are the options you can go for, if it’s a loose ball yes you can go for it [hit it hard], but you can’t always hit a loose ball for a boundary or a six”. Success in batting was largely down to a player’s capacity to make calculated decisions, and the most successful batsmen were those who regularly make the best decisions. Understanding how the opposition might use the same environment to their own ends is crucial for trying to respond

⁹⁹ The climate of the day, including the atmospheric conditions, can noticeably affect how the ball moves in the air and understanding this can be crucial.

appropriately. Such understanding is the critical first step in establishing control of the situation.

Because controlling the game depends so much on individual responses, this is why coaches tend to focus most explicitly on helping their students to develop their own understanding and self-control. Control cannot be taught directly, it must be cultivated. A common trope I heard was about coaches who “coach from the side-lines”. One particularly striking example of this came from an old boy from St Thomas’s, who described an old coach as a “policeman”, because he was always waving his arms around and instructing from the side-lines. Coaches were roundly admonished if they tried to dictate the game too much. This is partly tied to role, as guiding from beyond the boundary was seen as preventing the players from developing their own individuality, and thus no one in the St Thomas’s team under the “policeman” was ever really sure of their role. As I indicated in Section II, to have a good team you need to be individuals and to know your roles. But controlling from the side-lines also prevented players from developing their own awareness and understanding of the game, so as one old boy put it ‘the captain wasn’t really a captain’. Control instead had to be instilled in the individual, and this became immediately apparent in my early sessions with Arief. He told me that he likes to train “thinking persons”, players who could analyse the game themselves in order to succeed. He tried to highlight that the onus was on the player to figure it out for themselves, which he framed in direct opposition to this discourse about controlling coaches. He also repeatedly mentioned imagination when it came to coaching, highlighting the role that this had in how he coached technique, but also suggested that this gave him an edge in analysing the game. Clearly, Arief valued analysis of the game highly and tried to be a role model for his students in this. Control is therefore something which has to come from within each individual, and players must learn to control themselves.

Coaching: Learning Control

As control cannot be directly taught, coaching strategies often focus on ensuring people respond optimally to each match situation. While control came from within, it could be shaped by a diligent coach who made the logic of certain responses apparent. I spent most of my time on coaching with Arief, as he also coached me one-to-one. There was a lot to be learned from these three-hour net sessions. I had not received any formal training for years, and had never

been coached one-to-one before. Each time we met we worked in a basic concrete net at the municipal ground, focusing for two hours on batting and one hour on bowling. Like many Sri Lankan coaches, Arief has to deal with sub-standard facilities, has minimal resources at his disposal and no specialist equipment, but is still very effective. I found him to be an excellent coach and I quickly saw progress. In particular he is very clear and honest, explaining in a manner that is easily understandable. Arief was a big proponent of control, and with his particularly strategic mindset, spoke expressly about controlling the variables during a game. Focus inward was encouraged, while outward thinking – apart from assessment of conditions – was considered a waste of valuable energy. In teaching control, Arief deployed a considered, progressive approach.

Coaching control requires first the refinement of skills and bodily conditioning to carry these skills out repeatedly, and it also requires tactics, the knowledge about how to play the game. As such, cricket coaches were concerned with instructing players how to first control their bodies, then their minds.¹⁰⁰ Control can therefore be categorised in terms of physicality and mentality, and both are considered equally important. In terms of teaching this control, coaching can be divided into three basic elements: technical, tactical, and mental.¹⁰¹ Technical coaching focuses on the skills themselves, moulding the body to better perform set movements. Tactical coaching focused on how to manage the game, i.e., strategy. Mental coaching mostly regards maintaining awareness and clarity of mind. Each is of course interrelated. For example, a large part of tactics relies on employing the skills one has rather than those one doesn't, while mental fortitude improves the capacity to carry out these skills in pressure situations. Coaches like Arief sought to establish a strong foundation of both physical and mental control by deploying all three of these elements, which then enabled players to respond to and control any game situation. This foundational approach can be seen in the way Arief went about his coaching. Usually, when teaching either technique or tactics, Arief built from nothing, explaining step by step his approach. This application of reason was crucial to his method and made it hard to ignore the logic of his recommendations.

¹⁰⁰ Despite the supposed absence of cartesian dualism in South Asia, many of my interlocutors clearly understood body and mind as separate, at least in terms of coaching.

¹⁰¹ Arief and I discussed physical fitness briefly, but he assumed I knew the basics; we focused more on cricket-specific mental fitness.

Control of the Body & Mind

Before a player can respond to others, they first have to learn how to control their body. With technical coaching, Arief often coached by instructing what not to do, how poor bodily movements led to a lack of control. Arief deployed reason to ensure that his students truly understood the value of control. Arief would often introduce a particular technique by exhibiting how a poor technique makes one unbalanced or less powerful. For example, not moving towards the ball prevented you from hitting it properly, but he then showed how moving into a strong base was better. When he taught the children at his academy how to catch, he held his hands in numerous different positions, in order to show how the wrong position makes it hard for him to see the ball or means he could end up getting hurt. He was often comedic in his movements, highlighting the error of his ways, much to the children's delight. When coaching my batting, Arief introduced a particular technical point, a method of holding one's hands close to the body to increase power. He invited me to try and pull him over. He showed me how I could easily destabilise him if his hands were far from the body, and how I could not pull him over if his hands were close. As the opening vignette showed, we had a debate about how to play the cover drive. Arief asked me to play it one way for 10 balls, and then his way for another 10. The difference was starkly in his favour. This made it incredibly hard to disagree with his approach. Whenever Arief coached technique he always checked comprehension before moving on, being repetitive if necessary. In particular he wouldn't let the conversation move until he'd explored the technique fully and was satisfied with my understanding. I noticed he was always careful to hear what I was saying, but also in how he disagreed with me. He was tactful in how he explained his opinion and usually in the end I agreed with him. Good technique and physical movements – control of the body – therefore provided a foundation for control of the game.

While bodily control might be something the batsman possesses, this is nothing without mental control. One must choose the correct shot to play and do so in a controlled fashion. Arief's deployment of reason and logic aimed not only to improve understanding of technique, but also to encourage this creation of "thinking persons". This was most apparent in discussing tactics. Arief started with the tactical advice straight away in our first session, explaining how to play an innings from the very beginning. I felt this was a little basic and below my experience level, but it was good to have a common starting point. He also asked what I felt about batting

in Sri Lanka, and how games had gone for me in the past. Later, it became obvious that Arief was trying to find objectives for our training sessions together and scope me out as a student. In doing this, Arief often highlighted to me that physical control was not enough on its own, and that mental control was equally necessary for success. He often spoke of “mental fitness” in conjunction with physical fitness, highlighting that training was not just about training the body, but about training the mind to play the correct shot or bowl the right ball, to carry out cricket in a controlled, responsible fashion.

Arief’s training sessions followed this program, with the latter half of my batting sessions dedicated to mini games that replicate potential match scenarios. Often, he would set a target (30 runs off 20 balls for example) and try to re-create the game situation in the net. The aim of these challenges was obvious, to test my tactical capacity, my awareness, and my mental strength. The reasoning was to create focus in my mind and to make better decisions. Technical skills I wielded with authority in the first half of the session might easily crumble under the influence of pressure through these scenarios. Arief often spoke of control in these scenarios, requesting that I take the “percentage shots”, calculated risks that would limit my chances of getting out. In doing so, I maintained control over the game and over myself. Arief always questioned me during these scenarios, getting me to elaborate on why I did things in certain moments, in an effort to get me to engage with tactical elements of the game during training. As such, Arief was encouraging me to develop control and an understanding of why it was important.

Encouraging the student to think hard in a logical manner was a strategic move in Arief’s coaching. In a sense, Arief was himself testing me during our coaching sessions. Other aspects of his coaching also encouraged developing control through resistance. I found Arief to be particularly disruptive during our sessions, never more so than during these little game scenarios. Arief barked orders and comments almost non-stop. He would comment on poor technique, issue rebukes for poor shots, and yell the current situation at me all the time (13 off 10!, 12 off 9!, etc). One particularly ironic moment came when he told me to clear my mind of all thoughts and really focus on the game, only to then instantly shout the score at me, before yelling “come on come on” when I didn’t play the next ball well. I was incredibly angry during this session, as what he wanted me to do and the atmosphere he was creating felt completely

contradictory. Arief clearly did this somewhat intentionally, as he once explained: “do you know why I am so tired after a coaching session? Because I am saying so many words”. Despite my frustrations, these challenges did make me calm and improved my focus. I realised quickly that if I entered the challenge with a clear mind and ignored Arief, not letting him get under my skin, I generally played the scenarios better. Playing better meant less comments, so there was a cumulative effect. I soon found ways of getting him out of my mind. This felt like shock therapy, but being treated in that way made it easier to remove far lesser distractions. This deluge of comments instigated a need for calm, for control. By getting me to focus on my own sense of control, whether physical or mental, Arief enabled me to make better decisions in the moment. This coaching strategy seems to acknowledge that developing and asserting control is far from easy.

Difficulties Asserting Control

Finding control was never seen as an easy process. As I noted in Chapter 3, ‘playing mind games’ is as much a part of cricket as the physical contest. Wily and cunning bowlers will employ strategy to undermine the opposition, and in this manner Vaz told me about how he bowls his ‘variations’, deliveries which are intentionally designed to look like the stock off-spin ball he usually bowls, but that have a different effect after pitching. Meanwhile, opposition players will remind you what you have done wrong in the past and will try to get under your skin. This is why “being strong mentally” was deemed to be so important, as one had to adapt quickly and resist these attempts at confusion and obfuscation. This is also why patience and calm are again important, as these enable entering an almost meditative state to retain clarity of mind. For many of my informants, people achieved this clear mental state through what are referred to as ‘routines’, a common concept in cricket which refers to what a batsman does between deliveries.¹⁰² Many of my informants had quirks; Tariq was known to switch between looking down at where he imagined the ball would pitch and up again at the bowler while he ran in. Hadee however tapped the bat on the floor three times while the bowler approached. As Tariq put it, you “need to do the simple things”. He tried not to think too much, as while it is always important to “watch carefully” and focus, one must also keep calm, and be relaxed. Arief often told me to think of my favourite jokes between deliveries, or to sing a song in my

¹⁰² I have my own routine for example that I habitually follow.

head to clear my mind ready to focus again on the next ball. For almost all of my teammates, a lot of effort was placed on how best to do control, while recognising the at times contradictory need to focus but also remain clear minded.

Any lack of control was not always a selfish or intentional problem. Indeed, sometimes the problem of playing without control actually came from a well-intentioned effort at exercising it. During a self-confrontation interview with TCC captain Hadee, I asked him to first describe his general approach to training before we reviewed the video footage of his batting.¹⁰³ As we went through, he then indicated what he was thinking before each delivery. Hadee first told me how young cricketers in Sri Lanka are taught to play defensively at the beginning of a batting session, but that he feels he is less effective when he does this. He feels he plays better if he “feels bat on ball” early in a session, gaining confidence by hitting the ball well. As we went on to review the footage, it became obvious Hadee felt a significant amount of conflict in decision making while he was trying to bat. Reviewing each delivery he faced, we agreed that the video showed he was often playing the wrong shot to each ball. On several occasions, Hadee played aggressively when he would have been better off playing more defensively, for example. On several more occasions, Hadee played neither defensively nor aggressively, but was caught between the two. In one instance, Hadee leapt forwards to attack the ball, but then doubted himself and tried to play defensively, missing the ball in the process. Interestingly, Hadee told me he was not annoyed that he had played aggressively, but rather that he didn’t go through with his intention. Hadee consequently reflected that he is often caught in two minds, between defending and attacking play. The cricketing discourse of risk-aversion and stoicism tells him to do one thing, but his body tells him to do another. Hadee mused that perhaps his greatest difficulty when batting was therefore not the aggression itself (as the cricket discourse might suggest) but the indecision. He continued by stating that this indecision was often a problem for him, reinforcing something he had hitherto not really consciously thought about. Hadee struggles to match the expectations about how he feels he is supposed to train with what he considers to be effective. In this instance, control was not about playing

¹⁰³ As described in Chapter 2, Self-Confrontation Interviewing involves ‘confronting’ the interlocutor with video of their practice in order to better get at the nature of their embodied movement and decision making.

conservatively, but about assessing risk and managing it properly. Hadee needed to find the right strategy for himself.

However, while many of my teammates often talked about patience, about batting long periods, and waiting for opportunities in the field, these same players do not always go about their business in this way. While some players said before going out to bat that they would be careful, be patient, and take their time, it was not long before they were trying to hit sixes all around the park. This contrast was most obvious when Vaz went out to bat in one game at number three. It is already clear he has a strong belief in control. Before this particular match, he told me he was going to make the number three position his own and was going to be primarily a defensive player in this role, keeping his wicket and playing the ball very safely.¹⁰⁴ Yet around four or five balls into his innings, he hit a huge 6, and was then caught playing a similar shot a few balls later. He did pretty much the exact opposite of what he said he was going to do. Other batsmen in our team are similar, as Fakhir's desire to "hit every ball" illustrated. Often, I found it was the less talkative ones who hold to the patient ethos more. Tariq was remarkably dogmatic in taking his cautious approach. This discourse about a lack of control and a lack of patience was evident when players critiqued other teams. A couple of the teams we played were newly formed, and while they often started brightly, as the game progressed they began to fall apart. Few of their batsmen showed any real desire to dig in and remain at the crease for long periods of time, and likewise we saw these teams beginning to panic in the field, not trusting their bowlers or their plans. Many of my teammates suggested this was the reason why these teams lost against us. It was clear that these newer teams lacked experience, but by this also meant they lacked patience and control. So, while the idea of control is particularly strong and many claim they deploy it, many players are guilty of failing to show control.

Supporting Control

Clearly players do tend to forget the mentality they claim they should possess at all times, and this is perhaps why TCC created such a loud and continuous atmosphere at cricket matches. My teammates appeared to recognise that people rarely stick to their own plans when batting,

¹⁰⁴ Number 3 is a spot in the batting order that typically requires strong mental fortitude, and the batsman should be able to bat for a long period of time.

and attempt to manage this discrepancy from the side-lines. Always before a game, those who were not playing were asked to give good support and motivation to the players, to give advice and be positive in their comments. The loud atmosphere and this support are motivating, as I found out when I was myself batting, but also helps the players to focus, reminding them of their objectives and how they should accomplish them. The support itself is almost overwhelming, and you cannot ignore it for long. Just as Arief tried to overwhelm me with his constant comments, it is clear that with time and practice my mental capacities greatly improved, that this barrage during training definitely helped with my mental state during games, improving my composure and confidence. So, although initially I found this atmosphere at matches distracting and unhelpful, now I see it as an integral part of the team effort. In this context, the continuous calls by teammates exert a force on the individual, not distracting them, but helping and enabling them to prosper while out on the field. Control is certainly something that individuals must deploy, but the ability to exert this control can be improved through team effort and support.

Within these comments and support, I often heard two Sinhalese phrases shouted from the side-lines, the connotations of which are revealing about the idea of control. The first word I heard a lot was නියමයි (ni-ya-ma-yi), which I was told is slang for 'great' or 'superb'. It is often shouted when someone does something good on the field, like a catch, a quick run, or a nice shot.¹⁰⁵ The base form, නියමය (ni-ya-ma-ya) means various things such as 'destiny', 'predestination', 'canon', 'decree', 'command' and so on. The connotations therefore include a sense of pre-giveness or of certainty. Conversely, the second phrase I often heard was හදිසි නෑ (ha-di-si næ) which a teammate told me essentially means “don't rush”. This is often shouted when people are batting, imploring them not to give their wickets away or play a rash shot. The base form හදිසි (ha-di-si) is often used to mean 'emergency', and other connotations include 'sudden', 'hurried', 'abrupt', but also 'cursory', 'unpremeditated' and 'casual' - therefore conveying a sense of uncertainty. Clearly, the language deployed here is primarily focused on promoting a sense of being risk averse, on exercising *control*. Thus, the primary strategy for

¹⁰⁵ Tellingly, it is often shouted when someone plays a solid defensive shot just after hitting a boundary.

success is the exercise of control, while the main reason for failure is deemed to be a lack of it. Shouting these things during a match reminds those batting about this.

Does Control Work?

One of the related virtues that ran through discussions about control was the idea of ‘respect’. Respect added another layer of reasoning for deploying control, and informed how people approached cultivating it. For Vaz, having ‘respect’ was a pre-requisite for playing well. He claimed his younger teammates couldn’t “respect a good ball”, and this is why they tried to hit it hard and often got out. Equally, he said that players should respect the opposition too, that his teammates “should realise that the opposition also came to play cricket, not a different sport.”

Above all, senior players spoke about respecting the conditions, and thus Tariq always said to “respect the turf”. Players who don’t respect these factors are not necessarily seen as immoral, but are at real risk of failure. More pertinently, this idea of ‘respect’ reflects an understanding of the limits of control. For Vaz, respecting the opposition means having an awareness of their skills, but more importantly accepting that they might be better than you. By emphasising the need to respect the pitch, Tariq was not just highlighting an individual’s responsibility to contribute to the team, but also acknowledging that there are certain things one cannot control. Here, the aforementioned need for awareness and adaptability is framed in terms that evoke the cricketing discourses of gentlemanly conduct and fair play. Learning control is a critical skill, but without respect, it is hard to ascertain what one cannot control. Players needed to understand what was outside their remit. Consequently, Tariq was eager to remind younger, nervous players that “runs will come” or “wickets will come”, and promoted a detached mindset. As he put it, “just be relaxed. You don’t need to worry about anything”. Tariq suggested the best way to play cricket was to focus on what one can do, and not to worry about what one cannot do. As he succinctly put it, “only change what you can control”.

Respecting one’s opponent and the conditions had ramifications for training and coaching. Once technique and tactics have been explained, repetition and hard work are key to improving these skills. Arief’s taste for hard work was never clearer than when he chastised me during the game segments of our training. Often my response to a run target was to try and hit

the ball harder, losing my technique.¹⁰⁶ At the end of one of these sessions he said, “you can’t take shortcuts in life and you’re always trying to take shortcuts.” It was obvious in his comments about my ill-discipline that Arief had an aversion to hubris. He also explained this through the notion of respect: “sometimes the bowler will be on top, sometimes they will bowl a good ball. You have to respect that”. Arief instead encouraged me to be disciplined and patient, to wait for my opportunities. In order to respect the opposition and the conditions, I also had to respect my training. Building discipline and patience was possible through the constant repetition of deliveries, where we worked on grooving in a particular shot. Arief shouted at me if I did anything improperly, pointing out the faults as I made them. He then told me to focus on every delivery and to repeat the technique properly. Repetition was the defining characteristic of his training regime, ensuring the proper functioning of a technique. Through repetition and testing, I did slowly but surely grow assured and more controlled in my batting. It was impossible after time not to see the improvement in my skill and to appreciate the difference that consistent, disciplined hard work makes.

In our discussions, the ideas of awareness and adaptability were also often gathered under the rubric of “getting used to things”. Getting used to things takes time, and this is why patience was often encouraged as a related virtue. It was recognised that batting was always difficult in the beginning as understanding had to be built, but that fortunes would change. For Tariq, his patience and detached mindset rested on a recognition that success was always around the corner. Vaz meanwhile suggested that patience enabled success, as wearing the opposition down by not getting out created opportunities to strike later. Tariq claimed that what made him so successful was his calm demeanour, and this is why he tried to teach the youngsters to simply “keep calm and enjoy your game”. This is also why Tariq’s maxim was “runs will come”. So long as one remains calm and also respectful, then a payoff is always around the corner. Playing aggressively and frenetically might work initially, as it did for Fakhir at the beginning of Chapter 7, but the risk of getting out remains high and therefore success is not guaranteed long term. Getting used to things – playing in a controlled fashion – is what ensures long term success. With hard work, respect, and patience, one can cultivate control.

¹⁰⁶ This can be a common problem. By trying to hit the ball harder one ‘loses shape’ and becomes unbalanced.

Importantly, this manner of control was tied to a strategy of acceleration. Vaz claimed that “If I’m set, I don’t mind being at zero for 25 balls. Because I know if I leave, and if I defend, if I stroke, then after 25 balls I’ll have zero runs, but yes, I can make 30 runs in 30 balls. The next 5 balls I can hit sixes. “Vaz’s supreme confidence is unique, but the logic was commonly found elsewhere. Arief often tried to instil this strategy in me in his one-to-one coaching sessions. He would bowl 40 balls at me, telling me to defend the first 10, stroke the second 10 for singles, and only then try to start hitting boundaries. If I tried to go too quickly, this is where he chastised me for being impatient and ‘taking shortcuts’. Arief’s coaching clearly worked on me. I was widely praised after one match where I came in to bat early, during a difficult period of play. I proceeded to bat for several hours with Thevindu in a 100+ run partnership. I batted slowly at first, then became increasingly expansive as the game went on. After the game, the captain said this in the club’s group WhatsApp: “Yesterday was a good display of how to bat when quick wickets fall 👍👍 Ben and Aqil was holding their nerve while the ball swinging, and took the singles. Then Thevindu and Ben played a dream partnership. Was nice to see how gradually they shift gears 🙌🙌🙌. Keep in mind this game while conditions are tough to bat. It will last only for maximum of 15 overs, and we can catch up the score if wickets in hand.” In my debrief with Arief during the next coaching session, I explained I felt very confident batting as time went by, and he was very happy, continuing to extol to me the importance of controlling the match situation.

Contradiction

Various contradictions were present in exercising control. While many people emphasised the importance of studying the game and understanding the situation, they also emphasised the importance of clearing one’s mind. Tariq told me that when he was younger his preparation was ‘stupid’, but now he “settles [his] mind” before a match. During the game, he told that “I don’t bother much thinking about so many things, I don’t think much [about past failures], I just enjoy the game. There’s nothing to put in my head’, while Vaz similarly said “I should reset my mind” whenever something bad happens in the game, in order to deal with failures and keep going. In a similar vein, Arief emphasised the importance of organisation to me, saying that “when you’re prepared, you have a clear mind”. Ironically, many of the most thoughtful, analytical cricketers I met in Sri Lanka equally preach the virtues of *not thinking*. Being patient and calm required one to not think, which made exercising awareness and

adaptability difficult. Notwithstanding, the best players therefore seemed to exercise control instinctively, without thinking about it.

This kind of contradiction highlights similar issues within coaching, and the sorts of problems that less experienced players must learn to navigate. For example, Arief suggested that developing the virtues of discipline and patience should not come at the price of positivity. Arief often spoke about how one should approach the game positively, with an open mindset. He wanted me to punish the bad ball, to score runs whenever possible, but to also be positive in defence.¹⁰⁷ Even while trying to exert control, the key is that *too much* exertion can be problematic. Similarly, one consequence of the emphasis on hard work and repetition is that many coaches said they only ever make slight adjustments to their charges. Arief was careful not to overload his students with information, while one of the FoG coaches told me that you “shouldn’t rush to coach players”, before stating that ‘ruining players’ was a “Sri Lankan problem” which had gotten worse in recent times. Too much change too quickly was seen as damaging, which resonates with the idea raised earlier that coaches who exercise too much control are viewed negatively. When Roshan coached at St Thomas’s, he said that one should not try “change too much” about players, and should instead “be patient”. There was a sense that change involved making gradual adjustments to improve the odds of success. One comment by Roshan brings these various contradictions together. When Roshan was coached as a child at St Thomas’s, he told me how they were taught and encouraged to be free thinking individuals, yet were also rigorously drilled, so that they didn’t necessarily *have* to think. Here, there are tightly wound contradictions between encouraging thinking and not thinking, between changing and not changing. Such contradictions highlight something about the difficulty of properly doing control.

These various aspects of control highlight the intense desire to change but also the difficulties of doing this. The tensions between individual and collective modes of thinking constrain persons, prompting them to look inward to their own responses, to reflect on what they can control. But just as these modes of thinking prompt contradictions that need to be unravelled,

¹⁰⁷ ‘Being positive in defence’ typically means to have good footwork, to move towards the ball positively, which will help a batsman play a defensive shot better. While being tentative make seem more risk averse, it can make playing a defensive shot dangerous.

so too is the interior reflection often contradictory. Players are invited to think and assess the situation, but also urged not to think. To control their bodies, but not to be too controlling. To be calm and composed, but to remain adaptable to the situation. Control is therefore something that can help players manage the contradiction that cricket throws at them, but cultivating it can also raise other contradictions. As I will show in the next chapter, these difficulties in exercising control in cricket provided lessons that my interlocutors took away with them into their everyday lives. These struggles in managing contradiction conveyed an acknowledgement that life can be difficult to navigate.

Learning to Cope with Constraint

Control is clearly very important for my interlocutors. In a game that is known to test a player's skills and character, control emerged as a popular strategy for success. By encouraging players to focus inwards and control themselves, they forge resilience and develop a capacity to cope with difficult situations. Control enabled players to respond appropriately to any given situation in cricket. Success in cricket is as much about understanding the situation and how to respond as it is about possessing any particular skill. Learning control therefore also requires forming an understanding of oneself and one's capacities, and can therefore be a very personal journey of discovery. Control is not only a viable strategy for success in cricket, but is also a valuable learning experience more broadly. In learning how to play cricket, my interlocutors told me they also learned a great deal about themselves, sharpening an ability to deal with the world when things don't go to plan. Furthermore, through diligent coaching cricketers can learn to develop this control, which is itself enabled through other related virtues like discipline, patience, and hard work. As such, my interlocutors learned how to improve themselves in more diverse ways than simply their skills.

Notwithstanding, exercising control and achieving personal change is recognised as difficult. Discussions about control were mobilised as a wider comment on living life and progress within it. As Tariq put it, there are plenty of people in cricket who are "eager to learn, but don't want to change". I was often told that people wanted things without having to work for them. Furthermore, exercising control was also contradictory. Players are forced to navigate a number of paradoxes, like playing the right role for the team, yet also being adaptable. Players are taught that to succeed one should carefully assess the situation, yet one should also retain

a clear mind and *not* think. These various aspects of control and the extent of their success suggest an acceptance of the constraint that holds cricketers. In many ways, control reveals the limits of one's own agency. As Tariq put it, control is as much about learning what one cannot control as what one can. These aspects of control also reveal an emphasis on personal responsibility to the greater whole, and importantly an interiorisation of that responsibility. Players are encouraged to change what they can, rather than to resist systemic pressures too strongly. As I will show next, these life lessons were often taken outside of the cricket arena, and therefore control was as much a strategy for success in life as it was in cricket.

CHAPTER 10

CRICKETING LIVES

Thus far, I have described the sorts of constraints that the social structures of cricket impose, and shown how individuals are encouraged to manage such constraints themselves. In this chapter I explore how this individual focus contributes to broader ideas of personal change. I show how persons see cricket as a source of positive virtues, and formulate life lessons which are taken outside of cricket. I explore how cricketers present themselves when describing their exploits on the field, and suggest these narratives similarly reflect a desire to *control* one's life. I describe how these individual and collective constraints – this delimiting of agency – affects how people see their own stories as successes or failures, and therefore how they characterise the past and plan for the future. The stories my interlocutors described provide an indication of how life is understood as a journey, and their search for the right path. The idea of *balance* is presented as something cricketers learn that improves their decision making. These narratives help illustrate how people learn to navigate life's problems via cricket, managing their individual concerns and responding to their social constraints. Like the last chapter, these narratives also suggest the idea of constraint is internalised, and thus persons accept the limited scope of potential change. These various aspects together reveal the sense of personal development my interlocutors maintained, which illuminates Sri Lankan concepts of change more broadly. In this chapter I explore what people think cricket teaches them about life.

Cricket as Beneficial

Despite the tensions, conflict and contradictions my interlocutors had to negotiate, they remained adamant that participating in cricket entailed benefits they took into the rest of their lives. In my previous work, I have found that cricket in South Asia is often seen as a medium for personal development. In Mumbai, I saw that development of cricketing skill also entailed spiritual development, that good cricketers were good people, and vice versa (Hildred 2014). I encountered similar perspectives in Sri Lanka, yet these coalesced around traditional cricketing discourses including the idea of producing 'gentleman' (Hildred 2017). Here, the idea that cricket entailed some kind of personal and moral development is somewhat taken for granted.

Firstly, it is important to note that just as Mangan wrote that cricket inspired the values of fair play, sportsmanship, and teamwork in Victorian England (1998), so too is cricket seen as a valuable tool for producing good persons in Sri Lanka. There exists a strong discourse of what cricket can provide. For example, old boys from St Thomas's were keen to tell me how they received plenty of 'life lessons' from coach FC de Saram.¹⁰⁸ According to them, FC was more interested in developing people than cricketers, so as they put it, he wanted to "create gentlemen first" and "if they are cricketers too then that is great". This hierarchy of interest came about because ultimately, FC "wanted the boys to be gentlemen and to play in the spirit of the game". As Roshan told me, he still thinks about being coached by FC and his life lessons quite regularly, and he felt his old teammates often did the same. Roshan told me he employed the same strategy when he came to coach St Thomas's. Here, a line can be drawn from the Victorian schoolmasters through FC de Saram to the present. The modernist cricketing discourses contribute to the idea that cricket is a vehicle for sculpting good people, and colour the way that cricket is understood in Sri Lanka more generally.

This beneficial discourse was particularly prevalent among parents of young cricketers I spoke to – whether in Colombo or Jaffna – who tend to put their children in academies to boost their development. One father from Colombo told me that when he was young, cricket was seen as something of an evil, that his parents didn't allow him to play it and he was kept away from it. It was seen as a fun game, but not something to let one's children do indefinitely. However, he told me perceptions were changing, that cricket is increasingly seen as no longer a distraction but a positive force. In the face of "new evidence", as another parent put it, people are acknowledging the skills and capacities that playing sport can give their children. Similarly, one father in Jaffna told me that in the last 10 years "leadership skills have been going down", largely due to the lack of sports and other extracurriculars. Now, he thinks people are realising more needs to be done to create well rounded, 'holistic' people. He told me that a lot of parents are concerned with education, but if their children only get education, they get bored and don't have other skills they can use in their life. Parents in Colombo seem to have progressed further in thinking in this way. A few academy coaches described struggling to get boys to come to their training sessions because middle-class youngsters now have so many extra-curricular activities that they always have something going on. As such, attending cricket required greater

¹⁰⁸ FC de Saram captained Ceylon and is one of Sri Lanka's most famous pre-professional era cricketers.

justification. Notwithstanding, parents generally cited that participation in sport often entails increased academic performance, alleviating a stereotypically common concern. People involved in the administration of cricket at schools level (both in Colombo and in Jaffna) were keen to tell me that they saw cricket as something which drives academic achievement, and they use this to justify their ongoing investment in sport.

Many seemed to take it for granted that cricket did this development work. In explaining the appeal of cricket as a learning tool, Arief told me that because “excellence doesn’t have boundaries”, people can always get better, and therefore cricket is a great way of improving oneself as there is never a ceiling to reach. Similarly, those who actively used sport for development purposes, at NGOs or in government, often simply said that cricket gave “good values”, without being specific about what these were. At the Foundation of Goodness, discussions often revolved around how best to give these good values, and occasionally people simply said, “give the good stuff”. Pushed to explain what “good values” meant, Duminda from the FoG mentioned encouraging their young beneficiaries to have respect for others (“respect your parents, respect the elders, respect your religion”), to develop a general sense of knowing right from wrong, or to simply care about the world around them. Occasionally “good values” was tied by staff to the word “ethics” too, and Duminda’s words clearly suggest an ethical outlook. Cricket was seen to provide some of the ethical virtues described in the last chapter, like respect, discipline and hard work. The fact that respect was tied so heavily into these descriptions and that cricket is chosen as a vehicle for giving good values suggests that life lessons are also framed within the classic sporting discourses about moral development. As sport has a ready-made set of virtues built into its discourses, many use it as shorthand for this moral development. This also suggests that ideas about life lessons are equally as ‘mythopoeic’ (Coalter 2010) as the sporting discourses themselves, being ill-defined and built on reductive logic. The idea of moral development with cricket is driven by sporting discourses, but this is also why the specifics are often somewhat empty, as the sporting discourses themselves are equally vague.

In a similar vein, numerous interlocutors identified *balance* as particularly important for positive change. The director of FoG said that “education is absolutely necessary, but if you don’t have good values to balance it, you’re not going to be a happier person... It’s education

and the good values that gives you supreme bliss”. Likewise, Vaz said in his view “education is important, sports is also important. Teach your kids from childhood how to balance your life”. For many, education was therefore not the only important thing for improving young lives. The head of sports at FoG told me that “what they tried to showcase through sport is how you can balance your life”. ‘Balance’ was therefore something NGOs like the FoG aimed to provide their beneficiaries, and this also clarifies the purpose of giving “good values” to some extent. The idiom of balance was particularly prevalent in the north, too. My interlocutors told me that after the war, great efforts were made to improve education in Jaffna. Local NGO worker Isaac suggested that in the interim leadership skills have gone down, largely due to the lack of sports and other extracurriculars. He said many parents focus on education, but because of this many of the children are now falling behind Colombo students, as they don’t have skills gleaned from extracurricular activities. Ironically, the once high-achieving Jaffna students are no longer getting the good jobs. Likewise, Joseph, a teacher from St John’s College also recognised the importance of these ‘soft’ skills, indicating that leadership, humility and respect were all qualities that sport provided. He said St John’s encourage holism in their students, describing how their current cricket captain was a good example of balance, as he was both an excellent cricketer *and* successful at his studies. He further suggested that cricket meant the boys actually became more disciplined for their studies. Both men indicated that parents are now beginning to recognise that extracurriculars are important for their children too. Balance was therefore recognised as a positive consequence of participation in cricket.

Learning to Control Life

While these discourses suggest cricket develops good people, it was initially unclear how this worked beyond the recitation that cricket provides various virtues. However, what such ‘life lessons’ might be became clearer as I completed more interviews, and the way these lessons were framed helped to explain how these virtues intersect. Some of the perceived benefits of cricket have already been mentioned in earlier chapters: an opportunity to express oneself was important for many of my interlocutors, as was the idea of being tested. Cricket clearly engrains the idea of control, but through these discussions the idea of control also emerged as something of a rubric for life. Because of this sense of personal development, one can further argue that control is not only a tactical strategy for playing cricket, but promotes personal development

which can be taken ‘outside’ the sporting arena. Here, I explore how the idea of *control* shapes how people understand their wider lives.

On a substantive level, my teammates at TCC suggested that cricket provided many benefits, such as cultivating confidence they took into the wider world, conditioning their body, or forging new connections with people who they might otherwise never meet. For my Muslim teammates, cricket at the very least fulfilled the Islamic prescription for exercise, and was more palatable than the pastimes of swimming, wrestling or archery. Members from other ethnicities like Yugan (Tamil Hindu) also mused that cricket was a fun way to gain fitness and “avoid disease”. Many of my teammates explicitly mentioned that cricket provided an ‘escape’. Aqil told me that cricket helped him to “release stress” each weekend, while Vimal suggested that cricket provided him with genuine pleasure and “mental relief” from everyday life. Yugan said that for the time he played cricket, he could “escape the pressure situations in my own life”. All reflected that from the time they stepped on the field, little else occupied their mind. This idea is encapsulated nicely by the idea of a “forgetting mode”, which some at the FoG claimed players entered when participating in cricket. During the Murali Cup, cricket provided their beneficiaries in the north and east with a way to suspend their worries and social problems for a short time, and this is partly what they felt made cricket good for reconciliation.

In terms of making new connections between people, Aqil suggested sport provided an opportunity to be with the people you already know, to meet friends from your school days you might not otherwise see. Asad suggested that it was difficult in the city to meet new people, and that communities tend to “keep to themselves”, but sport brought together a lot of different people and could be a way to bridge that gap. This resonates with the idea of cricketing spaces as ‘safe’, wherein difference can be practiced safely. In particular, Asad noted the strength of relationship that cricket could foster when connections *are* made, saying that cricket can “make us like brothers”. These connections were valuable economically, too. Many of my teammates at TCC were self-employed, and gained business opportunities because of contacts they made at matches. Tariq (who is a freelance graphic designer) and Hadee (who designs websites) both told me they met several clients as a consequence of playing for The Titans, and they also often work together. Similarly, a few suggested that cricket benefitted their everyday lives purely through motivation, enabling them to be more successful in their jobs. Asad and Aqil both said

they were motivated throughout the working week because they had cricket to look forward to. Yasir flipped this framing, suggesting a “cricket match gets you going for the rest of the week”. Cricket first gave him confidence, and then the “motivation to do other things”. While others might see the money spent on cricket as ‘a waste’, for him it was an investment, something which enabled him to make more money throughout the week. On a substantive level, cricket therefore had tangible benefits people could point to.

On a more abstract level, a subtext emerged within our conversations about learning how to live. When my interlocutors discussed the virtues of respect, patience and discipline, it became apparent they were not merely sharing strategies for succeeding in cricket. They were also expressing that cricket taught them how to deal with difficult situations, how to bear hardships and overcome them. Particularly when discussing batting, the game was often framed like navigating the trials and tribulations of life, where your capacities would be tested. Many people told me that going through pressure situations in cricket helped them to respond to pressure situations in their own life. Aqil and Yugan both said the personal successes they had on the field gave them self-belief to succeed at work. Yugan, a middle-order batsmen who has navigated some tight situations to win for the team, told me he learned how to keep a “cool mind” and develop his focus. Hadee said that batting helped him to understand when to “absorb pressure”, when to simply resist and wait for the perfect opportunity. Through this he learned how to “observe the situation” in order to best help the team. Yugan similarly emphasised that he realised how much one has to encourage others to keep calm, and that backing the team means not just positive support but emphasising this cool mind and focus. Sarath claimed that the lessons in adaptability he learned through cricket also apply in his wider life, “so cricket taught me that adaptability is the most important thing in not just the sport but in life, like things aren’t going to go according to plan, but the question is what are you going to do about it?”. In all, there was the sense that one had to stay calm because the next test was always around the corner. Cricket in essence makes robust people, who can deal with issues that arise.

While successes provided confidence and pressure developed focus, cricket also helped people to accept their failures. For Vaz, cricket made it obvious when someone wasn’t doing well. Vaz was adamant that sportsmen should learn to step aside when needed, stating “if I don’t perform

continuously, I prefer to step down”. Similarly, Idris said that cricket helped you to “to face your failings”, because if you were repeatedly making the same mistakes, it was usually obvious. For the majority of my interlocutors, this meant not merely accepting mistakes but learning from them. Tariq suggested he got better once he started this acceptance. As he put it: “[once I] learn from my failures, learn from my mistakes, gradually I improved myself”. Vaz was equally adamant that success required acceptance, saying “if I am not performing, I should reset my mind, I should learn from my mistakes, and I should work hard to come over that failure. It’s not about quitting, it’s not about falling, it’s all about standing up”. Idris similarly suggested there was always another test around the corner, saying after acceptance one should “then try to improve, and perform well the next chance you get”. Yugan was similarly concerned to remind his teammates who failed about “the next time, the next catch”. Tariq added he didn’t start succeeding until he started taking risks, noting that once he was better at “accepting failures, accepting mistakes, so eventually [he learned] from them”. Yousuf, in the same vein said, “cricket specifically has taught me to take and accept a loss, I’m ok to fail, I’m ok to lose and learn from it and come up”. Despite what cricket taught people about accepting losses, almost all my interlocutors recognised that “a person doesn’t like to accept their mistakes. It’s hard”. As Captain, Hadee noted that while people clearly tried to learn from their mistakes, this doesn’t necessarily mean they then practice what is consequently needed. He said the best players “*really* read the game, understand weaknesses and improve”. Overall then, my interlocutors felt cricket taught them how to accept failure, but this primarily meant recognising and understanding their own capacities. This life lesson therefore emphasised being responsive and consequently learning to *control* the situation.

In a similar vein, this recognition of oneself also meant recognition for others. For Idris, accepting mistakes often meant trusting others, “because more than us seeing our mistakes ourselves, some other person can point it out. Their view matters”. Similarly, Hadee noted that a good player “needs to be talented and humble”, which he emphasised meant “recognising other’s talents and helping them out”, to know when you were not the star and when the team was more important. As he put it, knowing that “you can’t play alone”. For Hadee, cricket taught him first that “every individual is important”, but secondly that you should “respect people for what they are, do not underestimate”. As he succinctly put it, the

biggest thing cricket taught him was “not to judge too quickly”. Cricket therefore encouraged recognition of one’s own place within the group, but also taught people to accept others, too.

Learning from mistakes, accepting others and being humble all emphasised observation and reading the game. Though I have shown how decision making was important in cricket, this was also important in life more generally. Some used cricket to illustrate this. Vimal for example said that although a lot of people have talent, they don’t have knowledge and need to learn how to observe in order to succeed. Likewise, the first thing Laman said a good player had was “clarity of mind”, before adding that the truly great players (I.e., International) continually made good decisions. Fakhir also really emphasised the importance of decision making, suggesting that despite his obvious talents, he wasn’t supported as a youngster, and made some really poor choices which meant he didn’t succeed in cricket. As he has three very talented sons in cricket, he wants to make sure “these guys doesn’t go through the same thing as well”. He outlined how he intends to coach his sons and guide them through the game, because “the decision making has to be good. Like I would say between 20 and 30, that ten years are the key for your life”. Fakhir then walked me through how he intended to coach his sons himself, saying “it’s good for them because I have failed and I know how not to do things, so yeah that’s why I always make plans ahead for them”. Vimal also emphasised the many risks that could provoke failure and the constant need to make good decisions, saying if “today I have a party, tomorrow there is a match, I should be strong enough to avoid the party”. Likewise, Laman noted that good players know to contain themselves and not give into temptations like drink or partying. For Vimal, cricket actually helped him learn how to deal with peer pressure from friends who might not support his choices, and noted that if one can “withstand those comments, then you are a great player”. He suggested that cricket helped him to learn ““how to stay, do your duties, play for the team” and therefore how to make decisions for a higher cause. Ultimately, cricket taught my interlocutors the importance of making good decisions in their lives, not just within cricket.

The perceived benefits of cricket also outline what kinds of persons people could be. For example, Asad openly said that “sport makes leaders”, that cricket helped him in “learning to take on responsibility, doing your part, not being scared of failure”. It was recognised that if one learned the lessons about accepting mistakes, taking responsibility, and observing well,

then one could become a better person, not just a better cricketer. Laman told me cricket not only required discipline, but helped him learn it too. He told me how cricket helped him with his Islamic faith, that when he stands for several hours in the mosque to pray, he often reflects on the calm and patience he shows during sport. These lessons help him to remain steadfast in the face of fatigue and distraction. As he succinctly put it, he usually thinks: “if you can do it for cricket, you can do it for God”. Control is therefore both a tactic for success in cricket and in life. It taught my interlocutors how to deal with the world, whether that is dealing with other people, with difficult situations, or how to bear hardships. In learning how to be better cricketers, my interlocutors reflect they also learned how to be better people. Predominantly, they tempered their individual desires, learning to recognise the limits of their own agencies. Acceptance of failure and mistakes enabled the chance for success, and therefore people craved to be tested. Altogether they learned that observation and decision making was key to a good life. As I show next, how people expressed themselves when describing their exploits on the field also reflect a desire to *control* one’s life.

The Difficult Journey

In most of my interviews, I began by asking my interlocutors about their lives in cricket. For some, these cricketing life histories were short and stopped once they reached adulthood. Many of my teammates at TCC shared longer histories evidencing attempts to go professional, but these ultimately petered out to become a comfortable amateur enjoyment of the game. This trajectory was shared by many others who remained involved in cricket in some capacity, but no longer played. In comparison, the few professional and international players I spoke to recounted long and detailed histories. All revealed something of Sri Lankan perspectives on the life course and importantly, the idea of change. These cricketing life histories were often framed as episodic *journeys*. This is not unusual given the popularity of the journey as a narrative device, but the very consistent format of these journeys and their equally consistent tropes was illuminating. It seemed that everyone had a similar start, with softball around the family home from the time they could pick up a bat, to starting ‘proper’ cricket in their early teens. As I indicated in Chapter 7, many who had a successful schoolboy career has a story about ‘being seen’. Chaminda was spotted by a St Thomas’s coach and fast-tracked into the side at a young age, while Vaz was spotted by a regional coach in his teens, and likewise elevated quickly through the ranks. Following identification of their talent, my interlocutors

became established in a new team environment, before moving up to the ‘next level’. This cycle repeated until ultimately they failed to progress, having reached their peak.

In hearing these histories, it was impossible to ignore the choices that had been made. More than just a consequence of trying to navigate a cricketering career, choices and the notion of *chances* emerged together as a particular trope. Given the context of testing and control, it makes sense that these journeys were often framed as a series of choices that culminated in various tests. Again, this idea is not unusual, but the amount of emphasis that my interlocutors placed on these tests perhaps was. Many seemed to suggest one can only progress in life by passing these tests, and that they are held back if tests are not available. While they often spoke of *chances*, these moments of ‘chance’ were presented more like opportunities, and did not necessarily incorporate a sense of luck. Following the explanation of potential in Chapter 7, tests or ‘chances’ should be seen as opportunities for players to show their potential, usually in the presence of someone who can see that potential and then develop it.

As such, Duminda from the FoG suggested that cricket development meant “giving [their beneficiaries] the opportunity to showcase their talent, and then go beyond”, and that therefore to progress, one must merely be afforded an opportunity to do so. Vaz simply spoke about taking the chances he was offered, about “showing my abilities” while conversely noting that during the war “I didn’t get chance to show myself”. He noted that on many times he was unable to attend try-outs for teams due to the circumstances in the east. Others who failed to progress in cricket suggested they were similarly devoid of chances, not of talent. The trope of ‘not being seen’ was common in the North, where the war’s major impact was identified as a lack of opportunities for young players. The lack of opportunities was broadly seen as the major problem for cricket in the country, above other systemic issues like poor facilities, corruption, or unequal coaching representation. For these players, they were unable even to begin their cricketering journey. Chances were therefore seen as opportunities, the tests that one needs to come up against in order to proceed forward in life.

The idea of chances and life as a series of tests illuminates why people often stressed the importance of finding ‘the right path’. When I asked Asad ‘what is discipline?’ he immediately responded with “going on the right path”, while Tariq told me “to be successful you have two

paths, one is the right path, and one is the wrong path”. Both stressed that being on the correct path was crucial in order to progress forward in life, and that conversely being lost meant one would stall. The link to discipline suggests that personal qualities also affect the ability to find the right path. When I spoke to Laman, he hadn’t been training recently and felt quite listless. He told me “I’m lazy cos I’ve got no motivation, *I’ve lost my end goal*, because what am I gonna do?”. For Laman, not being on the right path was the main reason he wasn’t able to progress forward. Asad similarly said that what determined success was either “sticking to [the path], or deviating and losing the motivation to do it”. Tariq noted the onus was on the individual to take this path, stating that “it’s up to us whether we use the right path or the wrong path”. Persons had to find the right path to progress forward, and have the discipline to stay on that path once they found it. Efforts were therefore mostly made towards finding these opportunities to progress.

It *was* possible for others to show you the right path, so for Tariq “education is something in school where they show the right path”. But once the path had been found, it could be quite rigid. Asad explained that “you have your goal right, then you have your path planned”, suggesting that paths could become relatively fixed. Intriguingly, the more successful a player was, the greater the sense that their path was laid out before them. For example, former international players John and Shantha recognised they were held to a certain path and conveyed discomfort at the constraint they felt. These elite cricketers progressed through the Colombo system, a tightly integrated network of prestigious colleges and clubs through which boys progressed from youth to professional level. In this, they largely followed their fathers from prep to school to club, playing similar sports, being part of similar institutions and thus going on similar journeys. Shantha told me his father held incredibly strong influence over his schooling and his cricket. For example, although he was sent to St Benedict’s as it was most local (while his father was a St Josephian), other considerations continued across the generations (both schools were Catholic). Furthermore, Shantha pointed out St Benedict’s was well known for cricket, and thus Shantha’s attendance there was apparently more palatable for his Josephian father than other Catholic alternatives. John meanwhile said he played hockey and tennis while growing up in the mould of his father, but his cricketing career was largely fostered by St Peter’s, where both father and son had attended. John even followed his father through into the same club (Burgher Recreation Club), where they played together at

the tail end/start of their careers. Both John and Shantha were aware that their journeys through cricket had been largely dictated by their elders. Yet ultimately, while they felt constrained during their journeys, they were most of all happy to be offered opportunities to continue moving forward.

Thus, success was less about passing tests, but on taking the *right* tests, on finding appropriate opportunities to showcase one's potential. For most however, this guidance onto the right path wasn't necessarily clear. Those who had to try and work out the best path spoke about comparing the right path with the wrong. Tariq for example, said that "if you go on the wrong path, everything will be easier, everything is there for you, the money is there, the transport, job and everything and you will be happy, but in the end you will fail and lose everything. But, if you go on the right path, it has bumpy roads, tough times, frustrations, stress, losing money, failures, but you learn from those stuff tough times and be successful." This quote encapsulates the broader fear of things being too easy. Taking the right path was more discernible if things were harder. Just as there was desire to be tested and prestige to be won, people desired to take the more difficult route. These points highlight a couple of important things. First, that success was framed simply in terms of following the right path, and therefore *finding* the path was the priority. Second, that learning how to move forward meant focusing on the self and taking responsibility for one's actions. Taking the right path meant having the discipline to follow it, even though this path was assumed to be more difficult. This suggests that individuals are encouraged not to question the social structures that constrain them, but rather focus on navigating through them.

This emphasis on navigation is perhaps clearer when considering the ways people account for their failings, which often suggested they had a lack of control over the life course. Befitting their more controlled route, the more successful players naturally came to the ends of their roads with cricket. John and Shantha were fortunate to play during an era when corporate sponsorship supported professional players, and they easily slid from their playing careers into other work. Both chose which mercantile teams to play for on the basis of being able to forge a career with the company later down the line. John found himself in shipping, while Shantha ended up being a tea taster. While both had established international careers for Sri Lanka, there was little money in this, and almost their entire income came from their firms. Both

played cricket in England, but there was “little money in it” and both quit playing professionally in their 30s. Chaminda also played in England, but not professionally, instead playing for a league side during his university days. Unlike John and Shantha however, Chaminda quit cricket much earlier than them. He played a few seasons for SSC, but realising he had little opportunity to succeed as a player, left the game. As he had good qualifications and connections through his schooling at St Thomas’s he was able to get a decent job. All of these more successful cricketers found that their paths naturally led them into other careers. The path went through cricket, but led them naturally out of it too.

Others did not have the same luck and had to realise cricket was not the right path for them, giving up their dreams entirely. Vimal expressed to me that one day he simply “lost his mind” during a game, and said “that is the point I understood my cricket is not so professional, and I should continue myself into something else.” He realised his mentality wasn’t strong enough to succeed in the game, and so he re-framed cricket as purely a hobby. Fakhir, after a number of seasons with Moors CC, realised he could also not make it as a professional and reverted back to helping with his family’s business. Many others pivoted out of cricket into different careers like John and Shantha. Vaz realised in his early twenties he needed to focus on his studies, and took the exams he missed during his teens while playing for the Eastern regional sides. Many others diverted even earlier, recognising during school that they weren’t quite capable of building a life with cricket. Only Tariq never truly gave up and found himself a happy medium. After a quiet school career at a minor college, he got a job at a hotel doing graphic design, and played for the hotel team in the mercantile leagues. After a year or so of solid practice and attendance, he eventually got some opportunities to play and show his skills. Despite moderate success, he has played at a consistently high standard of cricket, as some of his former teammates and opponents were Sri Lankan players. People focused on navigating the cricket system rather than resisting the constraints it placed upon them.

Rather than understanding the cricket system didn’t work for them, my interlocutors instead suggested they simply weren’t suited to it. Generally when they explained their failures, they focused on themselves and their frustrations at lacking control over the situation, of not knowing the right route to take. Fakhir told me that despite his talents “the guidance that you need, I never had to be very honest”. He suggested that the continuous failures he experienced

were because he never discussed his plans with anyone. He could not find the right path, and this is why he was now so focused on helping his children navigate the cricket system. He often spoke about “being stuck in the comfort zone”, highlighting that when he failed, he felt he had stalled. Unlike say John and Shantha, Fakhir was unable to find the right path for himself or had a helping hand from others. Similarly, in the north my interlocutors often framed the lack of success players had made after the war as the amount of “distance left to cover”. Although people from the north did state the war had severely disadvantaged their cricket, they were more likely to focus on the amount of work they still had to do in order to catch up to their compatriots down south. Thus, there was less focus on social constraints and more focus on the self, with corresponding claims about the inability to get onto the right path, and/or the amount of hard work left to do.

Even for those who had found success, this sense of constraint remained something to resist rather than change, and there was a desire to control things oneself. As I noted, John and Shantha had very controlled paths through cricket. Both expressed a desire to be different to their forebears and also some of their peers. Shantha’s move to NCC was partly a result of wanting to move away from the established norms of allegiance, and he framed his move to work with the seasoned pro as a “purely cricketing decision”. John was particularly keen to reject his family lineage. As the son of a former general in the Sri Lankan Army who had played cricket for Ceylon, he held a name and cultural cachet which opened doors for him in the cricketing and sporting world. Although John followed his father to BRC, after playing there for a few years he felt the urgency and desire to move on. His move to NCC was partly inspired by Shantha’s persuasion but was as much informed by his own need to be different. John is not a snobbish or arrogant man in any way, and his desire to reject his elitism was sincere. However, he did mention that he “followed the lineage where and when [he] had to”. Even when subverting norms, he recognised the power flows that held him in some way. He told me this was particularly important after the Sinhala Only Act. As an English speaker, John leaned more heavily on his family name while circumventing the language barrier in the later years of his career. Thus, even people who are constrained learn to make decisions for themselves, yet importantly also recognise there are always things that lie outside of one’s control. This again shows a sense of emphasising the importance of navigation above all else.

Balance and Decision Making

This overt focus on decision making and internal control of the life course raises a concern about how to make such decisions appropriately. Here, the idea of balance is important not merely because living a ‘balanced lifestyle’ is seen as good, but because balance is integral for decision making. The clearest articulation of this came from Vikram, in charge of sport at St John’s. Vikram told me how Jaffna and the north now need to make various decisions as a community about moving forward after the war. He was adamant that these decisions could not be made by individuals without balance, and suggested that cricket could help provide this balance. Firstly, Vikram said cricket teaches people about decision making primarily because cricket is an “on and off game”, and therefore “you have to think, and take decisions”. Cricket helps people quite literally get used to making decisions on a regular basis. Yet Vikram also said that “if you play cricket you will balance your life. Because, not like other games, it takes a whole day. So in a whole day of cricket, it’s similarly like your life, there will be ups, there will be downs, there will be hard situations there will be easy situations, so you have to balance yourself.” He felt that cricket taught students at St John’s about accepting the good with the bad, to recognise that things won’t always go your way. This idea of balance is therefore more about learning to cope with the vicissitudes of life. Overall, cricket presented each participant with the opportunity to make decisions, and provided balance that improved their capacity to make the right decision. Finally, Vikram told me how this had improved the lives of his former students, as “normally a cricketer who comes through cricket, when he goes up his life, he is able to balance his life, and he finds it easy to make decisions.” He then told me how past students had made good life choices. As Vikram put it, several men who had good jobs “said to me personally, ‘because I played cricket, I have taken a good decision’”. Thus, balance is crucial for decision making.

If balance is crucial for decision making, and individuals need to practice decision making in order to get better, then current coaching trends poses a problem. Shantha explained to me that there has been a big change in cricket from ‘thinking’ to ‘analysis led’ cricketers. These days, he said that coaching is “too analytical” and as a consequence, there is “not enough debate and discussion”. Essentially, the growth of data-driven coaching within the game has meant that players are spoon-fed information, and become less capable of digesting and acting

upon that information independently.¹⁰⁹ When Shantha was a player, his team had discussions about strategy against certain players, whereas in his time as a manager, there was much less “debate and discussion” and far more one-to-one time where coaches worked exclusively on technique. Consequently, players didn’t learn to analyse the game for themselves, and this reduced their capacity to analyse their own games. Eventually, it became clear to Shantha that players didn’t “know themselves”. There was also a more general concern about the maturity of players as people as much as their skills. Shantha was concerned that some of Sri Lanka’s current international players were selfish, a sentiment echoed by Tariq, who suggested that “they play for themselves, not the team”. Overall, many of my interlocutors suggested that professional players were more selfish, more arrogant, and weren’t learning to put the team’s needs before their own. Conversely, many suggested that better players were better people, more well-rounded and ‘mature’ figures. This is why many in pedagogical positions are not only focused on individuals, but about how these players develop *as* individuals. As Shantha said, these players “needed to be trained to be mature” and “aren’t developing mentally quickly enough”. Shantha then pointed out the ages of some more senior players in the team, and simply asked “why is it taking so long?” This frustration with a lack of thinkers and personal development highlights the emphasis on individual responsibility and the need for players to control their own destiny.

Responding Appropriately

In this chapter, I have suggested control is not only a strategy for success in cricket, but a rubric for understanding the life course more generally. Cricket appeals to my interlocutors because it provides life lessons and develops good virtues. By learning cricket, players also develop their self-discipline to achieve success in their lives. Cricket therefore appeals because it also appears to enable control over one’s life course. Whether my interlocutors described their successes or their failures, their life histories evidenced this desire to exert control. They gained valuable insights from this into how to shape their wider lives. They searched for opportunities to test themselves, to take the difficult path, and to understand the importance of decision making. If cricket teaches life lessons that emphasise control, on being aware and making good decisions, then my interlocutors expressed a desire to take responsibility for more of these decisions.

¹⁰⁹ Like many sports, cricket now supports a wide range of analysts who scrutinise the game.

Consequently, there remains in cricket a focus on responding appropriately, on awareness, on finding balance. Yet my interlocutors also understood that sometimes, things will remain out of their control, no matter what they do. This highlights that constraint remains internalised, and individuals understand they may often fail in making personal change. This focus on the individual confirms that all life lessons derived from cricket tend to be framed in a responsive mode. The focus remains on how to navigate life and social constraints rather than how to challenge them. The kinds of change that occur as a consequence are internal, *not* external. In many ways, this suggests that cricket does not lay the foundations for change, but prepares individuals for the fact that there often is change. As it is understood that control in cricket also leads to success in life, cricket is seen as broadly beneficial to whomever participates in it. As a consequence, it is believed that individuals automatically make positive change for themselves through cricket. As I show in the final chapter, this has consequences for how SDP stakeholders attempt to do social, structural change.

CHAPTER 11

A FORMULAIC APPROACH

Scenes: Jaffna Central

Waiting for Anthony, I gazed out over the Jaffna Central College ground, watching the cricketers practice their fielding. They ran around with enthusiasm, clearly enjoying themselves. Since my previous visit, a new stand had emerged, simple concrete bleachers with an ornate roof overhead. The school must have found some money to develop these facilities. A couple of years earlier this ground was essentially scrub, whereas now things were in far better condition.



Figure 30. A boy walks off the field at Jaffna Central College Ground. Photo: Jessica Platt

Anthony soon arrived on his new blue motorbike, happy to see me. Things were going well for him, it seemed. He now coordinated FoG operations in the north, where they were making some progress. It wasn't all smooth, however. Anthony told me that although generally speaking things were getting better in the North, 'blocks' remained in place for many. Not

everyone in Jaffna was happy with the direction the community was taking, and there was much to do. Things might improve for the youth, but the current generation was still struggling.

Turning to cricket, Anthony admitted that some progress had been made in the north, but this had stalled in recent months. He pointed out the older schoolboy leading the fielding drill, Viyaskanth. He said how great it was that he had made it into the national under 19s squad, along with another boy from Jaffna. This was undoubtedly a great success, and proved that it was possible to reach the national squads from the North. Yet Anthony lamented the lack of opportunities for players like Viyaskanth and Mathushan. Viyaskanth only played two games (1 warm up, 1 test), while Mathushan didn't play any games at all. Just like talented players before them, these boys had come back from the under 19s tour no closer to a contract, no closer to playing for a club in Colombo. Of course, everyone in Jaffna is incredibly proud of them, but Anthony told me these boys still felt like a little bit like failures.

'What happens now?' I asked him. 'Now they have stopped playing?'

'Well, they came back.' He replied. 'What else can they do?'

Looking back at the youngsters, Anthony told me that Viyaskanth now coaches the children and his other classmates from the school, introducing the training regimes he was exposed to while with the Under-19s squad. This will at least help the next generation, we agreed, and slowly things will get better. But, we mused, what reward for these boys who have worked so hard?

'Doing' Change

Anthony's concern for his friends' progress in life is not unusual. In my ethnography thus far, all of my interlocutors have been concerned to some degree with change. As this was often expressed through the idiom of being on a journey, 'coming back' to where you started was possibly the worst thing that could happen. Yet some kind of change had clearly happened for these young men, and it is therefore important to understand how this change is conceived. As such, in this chapter I explore how various groups attempt to employ cricket for social good,

exploring the ideas about change that emerge. In particular, I examine the consequences this emphasis on individual responsibility for change has on attempts to do social, systemic change. I first examine what Sport for Development and Peace practitioners in Sri Lanka are trying to do with cricket. As I noted in the introduction, much of this SDP work revolves around delivering mainstream cricket. Unlike SDP in other countries, cricket remains largely unadapted in Sri Lanka. I depict various stakeholders in the development sector, but primarily focus on work done by the Foundation of Goodness. If cricket encourages individuals to take responsibility for positive change, then stakeholders rely on these individuals when trying to do structural change. With the belief that cricket automatically benefits participants, then the logical consequence is simply to provide more cricket. Then, I examine the concepts of exposure, vision, and purpose, to show how other ideas of change intersect with this approach to cricket. In doing so, I challenge the assumption that cricket automatically produces positive change and highlight some of the tensions that exist between individualist and structural approaches to change. This can finally reveal implications about how one might deploy cricket for reconciliation and social good.

NGOs

In Sri Lanka's development sector, a small yet growing number of stakeholders use cricket for development. These stakeholders are diverse, including local and international NGOs, businesses conducting Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), government departments, and the cricket board. Cricket is considered an obvious thing to deploy in many of these development contexts. They are often motivated by their love of cricket, but the prestige of association with cricket is a boon for many stakeholders, while the widespread appeal meant programmes rarely face opposition. For example, Tokyo Cement run a CSR scheme laying concrete pads for practice wickets, which is now prominent in their advertising, while Coca-Cola has contributed funding to numerous projects and sponsored young cricketers for many years. Similarly, the government ministries of sport, health, and education all regularly undertake celebrated cricket programmes. Cricket is usually low risk, an easy win. For many of these stakeholders, SDP simply entails securing funds and finding partners to carry out implementation. Cricket is also considered a suitable tool by local and international NGOs that have little involvement with sport, like Sri Lanka Unites (SLU) and UNICEF. These stakeholders do use cricket alongside their other activities, but this is not deliberately integrated

into their overall approach. For example, someone from SLU told me that whenever they travel around the country “there is a bat and a ball in the coach,” not as part of their programmes, but merely because “it is so easy to play a game, even if language barriers are there”. This suggests that cricket is usually simply an icebreaker before other activities (see Coalter 2007). Similarly, a worker from the UN stated that because cricket is limited to the ‘soft’ side of reconciliation, it had limited utility for them beyond this initial attracting function.¹¹⁰

The majority of these stakeholders focus overtly on widening participation in cricket, largely in acknowledgement of the structural issues with cricket I raised in Chapter 2. In particular, these stakeholders focus on expanding access to cricket in the ‘outstations’. At a coaching camp in the east, one coach remarked to me that the cricket system remained “underdeveloped”. He suggested that following the World Cup win in 1996 there was a “rapid expansion” of the cricket structure, which was largely unsustainable and resulted in a dilution of talent. Thus, boys in the outstations “don’t get opportunities” to play any sort of decent cricket as there isn’t a suitable system to support teams, and talent is lost. There is a recognition of vast disparity in participation across the country. This appeared to be felt acutely by the cricket-loving heads of these organisations.¹¹¹ Practically, many stakeholders seek to address these issues by funding and developing cricket facilities, from founding new cricket grounds, to developing practice wickets, to providing equipment in rural areas. Although addressing these structural issues is a noble goal, these activities are therefore much closer to ‘Sport Development’ than ‘Sport *for* Development’ (Kidd 2008). Like many other SDP stakeholders globally, these activities tend to focus on measuring implementation rather than social change (Coalter 2010). Furthermore, the availability of funding,¹¹² general eagerness to run cricket projects, and a lack of political stability means there is often a plethora of projects running concurrently.¹¹³ At a government

¹¹⁰ As mentioned earlier, reconciliation is often divided into ‘hard’ (legal frameworks/reparations) and ‘soft’ (a sense of unity and goodwill).

¹¹¹ Most of these heads are middle-class, part of the hegemonic group who promote the virtues of cricket. Many of these men and women had a personal sense of mission to enact positive change. But essentially, these efforts remained largely non-political and therefore ‘safe’.

¹¹² Profit and the prestige associated with cricket also means that corruption is invariably an issue. The SLC’s charity arm ‘Cricket Aid’ was investigated for fraud in 2019 (Daily Mirror 2019), having done much fundraising, with little in the way of implementation.

¹¹³ Sri Lankan civil servants I met agreed that every time a government changed, so too did the sport policy. There was no continuity.

workshop on using sport to achieve the UN's Sustainable Development Goals, each of the Ministry of Sport, Ministry of Health, and Ministry of Education gave presentations on cricket projects they were currently running. It became apparent that all were undertaking very similar work, usually providing services or facilities to widen access to cricket, yet none of the ministries were previously aware of what the others were doing. These points further support the idea that cricket tends to be understood in simplistic, causal terms, with an excessive focus on implementation and assumption that change will consequently happen.

Of these numerous stakeholders the 'Foundation of Goodness' (FoG) is arguably the only stakeholder who employs a considered strategy with cricket and development, and is certainly the foremost NGO using cricket for reconciliation. The Foundation was started by Kushil Gunasekera – personal manager of Muttiah Muralitharan – after the 2004 Boxing Day Tsunami. Kushil's ancestral village of Seenigama was badly hit by the tsunami, and the Foundation is one of several local NGOs to benefit from the consequent influx of foreign aid (Stirrat 2006). As an agent, Kushil also used his many contacts in the sporting world to secure donations for the FoG. Several former Sri Lankan internationals (including Sangakkara & Muralitharan) sit on the board of trustees, while links to professional clubs in the UK and Australia also ensure a steady stream of funding. Although initial efforts focused on post-tsunami recovery, as time passed the Foundation grew and has become an established NGO with programmes across the island. They now run numerous 'village empowerment centres' in rural areas, which provide education and health services that locals would otherwise not have access to. As Kushil puts it, helping to ease the "rural/urban divide" is their top priority. Their 'flagship' centre is at the original site of Seenigama, which is also home to their sports facility, a multi-purpose site which has a cricket ground with an AstroTurf wicket, a swimming pool, volleyball courts, table tennis area and a gym.

Following the end of the war in 2009, the FoG have also made concerted efforts towards reconciliation. In 2011 they launched the 'Murali Harmony Cup', a tournament for schoolchildren which became an annual event until 2016. While the first edition was held at Seenigama, from 2012 the cup was held at different locations in the north, with an aim to bring youth teams from around the island together and promote mixing of ethnicities and religions. Most editions have seen a 'Jaffna Combined XI' and a 'Northern XI' compete alongside

established sides from the elite Colombo schools. The cup has been supported by a wide variety of local and international donors, and many of these donors were secured by players like Sangakkara, Muralitharan and Mahela Jayawardene. These famous international players also attended the tournament and interacted with the children. The response to the tournament was overwhelmingly positive. Many participants bought into the reconciliatory spirit, with southern coaches encouraging their students to pair off with northern boys and share a room. All of the past participants I interviewed (coaches and players) noted it gave them fresh perspectives on their counterparts from the north/south, and forged new friendships, while some even had beneficial life outcomes. One interlocutor now worked for the FoG full time, on the back of his participation as a player in the 2012 edition.

Despite the success of the tournament, the ‘Murali Harmony Cup’ has not taken place since 2016 due to funding issues. Ahead of the 2017 edition, a sponsor pulled out at the last minute, and despite numerous efforts to make up the shortfall, the tournament had to be cancelled. The FoG has tried to find a new primary sponsor through their contacts, but has struggled to do so. It appears many actors wish to fund and be associated with cricket, but are less inclined to actually get things done. Furthermore, the scarcity of appropriate land has posed obstacles for holding the tournament in the north. Because much of the area is underdeveloped following the war, securing a ground to play upon has been difficult.¹¹⁴ Ironically, since the tournament stopped happening, the government apparently approached the FoG questioning why. According to an interlocutor, “they never provided us with any support, but now they ask why we are not putting the games on”. Again, this highlights the desire for association with cricket, yet little desire to work on it. Thus, the reconciliatory aspect of cricket has been diminished in the FoG’s work. Notwithstanding, the Murali Cup is merely the headline event in a wider sport programme run by the FoG. Much of their other work centres on their sports facility in the south of the island, and focuses on developing talent, then getting these talented athletes from

¹¹⁴ The FoG responded to an earlier version of this section which alluded to the holding of land by the army. They added the following clarification: The main reason we have not had many grounds available to us is that infrastructure was not developed in these regions due to the decades long conflict that took place in the northern region. Following the end of the war, we cannot make an educated guess as to why more grounds have not come up (or if they have), but the inherently arid landscape in the north combined with lack of rainfall or available water sources have been a hindrance in establishing and maintaining large grounds in the north (which requires frequent watering). This is a problem that the FoG has encountered when trying to identify a suitable land to establish a sports ground (in combination with the deterrents you have mentioned).

rural areas into the national sides of their respective sports. Even in the north and east, focus tends to be on finding talented sportsmen, developing an elite cricket squad and enabling selection to the national side. The FoG runs monthly coaching camps with elite coaches to try and find the next international players from these areas. There was often talk about “getting that first person [from the outstations] into the team”.

Thus, even for NGOs like the FoG whose focus is primarily on rural development and reconciliation, progress tends to be measured in number of pitches laid, equipment bags given, coaching clinics delivered, and sports scholarships attained by their participants. Interventions tend to be simplistic and evidently measurable. Ultimately, it is easier for sponsors to support these measurable things too. Most of this rests on the assumption that sports provide something unequivocally good. Many people told me that sport “will give ‘good values’” to those in rural areas, but I could never pin people down to what these values might be. If people believe giving sport gives ‘good values’, then this only further highlights the simplistic, causal approach to development and reconciliation.

A Formulaic Approach

The way stakeholders expressed their philosophy was noticeably formulaic. For example, FoG management told me they were concerned with providing “training, facilities, opportunities and exposure”, while the head of sport told me that “by providing [participants] the facility, we are giving them the opportunity, to showcase their talent, and then go beyond.” These formula contained themes I have discussed elsewhere, including the need for a strong foundation (facilities), the idea of chances (opportunity), a desire for expression (showcasing talent), and space and movement (going beyond). By providing these numerous elements, it was assumed the individual would then be able to achieve change. These various stakeholders therefore conceived of social change in an equally formulaic manner to other areas of cricket I’ve explore so far. This *formulaic approach* to social change explains stakeholders’ emphasis on implementation.

Prevalent in the way people talked about change was the idea of ‘exposure’. Exposure is an emic term, roughly analogous (but not equivalent) to the notion of being ‘outside one’s comfort zone’. For my interlocutors, it is important to be ‘exposed’ to different situations in order to

improve one's abilities, and this could include playing against people of different backgrounds or in vastly different environments. Interestingly, the quality of exposure was rated depending on various factors, and people sought to give their players "better exposure". A friend suggested that NCC's youth academy had the "best exposure" because they had the most diverse mix of people, from different ethnicities, religions, or schools. Likewise, FoG management were constantly trying to improve the exposure they gave their athletes. They often tried to get professional western athletes to come in and do coaching sessions, not because they think western athletes are necessarily better, but because what they offer is different to their regular coaches. Importantly in a formulaic approach to change, exposure appears to be the final step. For example, FoG management left exposure till last in their formula, while the head of sports at FoG told me that once the training, facilities and opportunities were given, then exposure was the final ingredient. Similarly, Arief told me that he wants a 'solid base' for his students (training and facilities) and *then* exposure, which would lead to progress. As another coach explained, coaching was about "putting things in place", and "setting a good environment". These coaches echo the FoG model of change. In Chapter 9, individual talent allied to *control* meant success. Here, training, facilities, chances and finally exposure ensure people can 'go beyond'. Thus, in a formulaic approach, exposure is the final step for stimulating positive change.

Just as I could not get people to express exactly what 'good values' meant, it was very hard to ascertain how exposure actually helped someone. People usually merely re-stated that 'good exposure' meant doing something different. As the last step in a formulaic approach to change, it may be that exposure is intentionally vague, an acknowledgement that change is hard to define and requires letting something undetermined happen. Either way, the consequence is that often a formulaic approach to change doesn't actually entail change. The idea of 'giving good values' appears to work in a similar fashion. In many instances 'values' were simply referred to as '*the* values' bundling them together in an equally vague manner. People within FoG often spoke about "inspiring people with *the* good values" and "elevating *the* standards". One employee noted that their children in the south "have been exposed to *the good values* for a while now", which meant they would see less improvement from some incoming foreign

coaches.¹¹⁵ In a sense, what the values were was unimportant. By focusing overtly on provision rather than detail, these models of change take the onus off the providers for actually doing change. At coaching camps in the east, the coaches I worked with acknowledged that even if the FoG provided everything these young men needed for cricketing success, they still might fail. If nothing happens, then the problem can be attributed to the final, vague element of *exposure*. So just as sports constrain the terms of change to the individual level, these models similarly rely on the individual to automatically do change. The way my interlocutors described their approach shows how problematic a formulaic conception of change can be for groups hoping to inspire social change, as it essentially absolves them of responsibility if nothing positive occurs.

This formulaic approach may explain the emphasis on planning in cricketing contexts in Sri Lanka. When I asked various coaches about how they did their work, many mentioned the need to plan to win success. For example, Roshan told me his first task after being made coach of St Thomas's was to "do some plans", from developing the pitches and improving the buildings, to "implementing better cricketing standards". Similarly, the head of sports at FoG makes detailed plans each month with his coaches, while Shantha – who managed the national team for a spell – spoke extensively about how he brought his business acumen to bear on improving the squad through robust planning. In widening participation, Nandak from Jaffna mentioned he started some "development programs" to improve cricketers from the north, while the FoG coaches emphasised the importance of a realistic plan, when telling locals how to help cricketers in the east. Previously, I saw this emphasis on plans as part of a neoliberal drive to attain certain 'standards', because coaches needed to obtain various qualifications to ply their trade and therefore relied on plans to advance their careers (Hildred 2017). Although this may still influence these actions, I now contend this emphasis on planning is more the result of a broader understanding that change requires a formulaic approach. When I interviewed another coach of St Thomas's about his philosophy, he initially listed the numerous achievements during his tenure. Pushing him to explain more, he seemed to suggest that it was his organisation that enabled his success, and these results came as a consequence.

¹¹⁵ After review of this section, FoG provided me with their curriculum, which details various 'good values', including 'trustfulness', 'empathy', 'respect' and 'discipline'. Nonetheless, these traits are together often referred to in this document as 'the good values'.

Almost all coaches I worked with conveyed that they first ‘put things in place’, and then the individuals they led did the rest. Furthermore, there was a sense of repetition involved; keep doing the right things and success will keep coming. Civil servants at the SDG workshop were more concerned about “how to get [parents] supporting the plans”, than they were about the content of such plans. This emphasis on planning is akin to the emphasis on measuring implementation, and therefore also conveys that in a formulaic approach, it is often taken for granted sport will simply work in enacting change.

Success Stories

Other ideas about change which intersect with this formulaic approach are important to note here, and have ramifications for what actually happens in cricketing scenarios. How people speak about change, where they get inspiration from, how they try to make decisions and take the right path all impact how people are held to account and the potential scope for change. I briefly mentioned stories in the previous chapter, where my interlocutors gave their life histories in the form of a journey, with remarkable consistency across them. Most notions about change I heard came from stories similarly framed in the shape of a journey. ‘Success stories’ were particularly prevalent, emerging as a trope throughout my fieldwork. The FoG extensively promoted any success stories they had, and indeed the director on our first meeting told me about a boy who had lost both his parents, came under the FoG’s guidance, then became a cricketer selected in the national squad. It is unsurprising for a small island nation recovering from civil war to take pride in successful people, but I think the framing of these stories as a journey suggests further understandings. These stories can themselves be remarkably formulaic. Typical were obstacles which had to be “overcome to make a progress”, whether that was helping people to “come through” problems, such as racism and corruption, or the ‘roadblocks’ civil servants said prevented further growth of sport. Again, while this is not surprising, it appeared many were proud not just of overcoming these obstacles, but in the distance they had travelled. I often found that people wished for greater difficulties, in order to more vividly express their success in moving past them. Conversely, some people seemed ashamed if they had failed without facing too many difficulties. People’s pride was derived from the length of their journey: the greater the struggle, the greater the reward. Of course, interlocutors may wish to present themselves in the best light, over-emphasising their

achievements, but as the idea of ‘distance *left* to travel’ remains a common trope, I contend that people remain somewhat realistic about their stories.

Coupled with this desire to be on a journey was a sense of relentlessness, encapsulated in the pursuit of ‘excellence’ from the last chapter, but also prominent in discussions about reconciliation at events I attended. At the launch of a book called ‘Voices of Peace’, many of the academics present were extremely positive in their comments.¹¹⁶ However, they usually started by saying ‘it would be really good in your next book if...’, and often referred to the book being ‘the beginning’ of something. Many comments from the speakers and the wider audience were forward focused in nature. The author shared her frustrations with me later, admitting she wished people could praise the book without immediately thinking about the next one. Yet, the desire the audience expressed to be on a journey was often equally matched by a desire to hear about the journeys and stories of others. A few of the commenters said that “maybe [collecting stories] is the way forward and we should pursue this”. Similarly, after asking someone at the SCRM¹¹⁷ if I could help them with my research, I was simply told “if you can just give us the stories that you hear, the stories are what we need”. Likewise, when the FoG director told me about the orphan cricketer, I was intrigued when he said that these are the sorts of “stories your professors would like to hear”. With time, it became clearer that many in development believed in the power of simply collecting stories, and that this was deemed an important part of doing reconciliation and enacting positive social change.

Why people desire to collect stories can be explained in two ways. Firstly, people want to be associated with such journeys. Current FoG sponsors Tokyo Cement (along with other potential sponsors) donate money because they want to be seen as having a hand in these success stories. To be associated with those who succeed is a worthy goal in itself. If overcoming the difficulties of life is a noble goal some can achieve, it is an equally noble goal to support others. Secondly, and more importantly, these stories act as examples which others can follow. With the FoG success stories, there seemed to be an emphasis on hearing stories where the person had travelled further, a search for greater and more extensive journeys. Similarly at the

¹¹⁶ ‘Voices of Peace’ is a popular book which includes interviews with a diverse range of people involved in both sides of the civil war.

¹¹⁷ Secretariat for Reconciliation Mechanisms

book launch, the author mentioned how many of the stories she collected were similarly dramatic in their trajectory, suggesting that there is a certain form of narrative that becomes ‘story’ shaped. Returning to the orphaned cricketer, the director was proud that this boy had travelled a great distance, recovered from losing his parents in the tsunami to playing cricket professionally. Overall, it is clear that change is conceptualised through movement. These stories become models of success, and therefore models of how to do change. If collecting and relaying such stories is enough for change, then this impacts how these models are implemented, as I discuss next.

Leading Change

At the memorial lecture in his name, former politician Gamini Dissanayake was roundly celebrated by past colleagues who were “able to see first-hand his visionary qualities”. In 1981 Dissanayake became president of the SLC, “with a vision to cement Sri Lanka’s place in the cricketing world”. He was praised for his “clear strategic thinking...that was executed by short term actions that aligned with *his long-term vision*”. Dissanayake’s greatest asset was his ability to assess the situation, see into the future and sense the right direction to go in. Another previous board president stated what he admired most about Dissanayake’s legacy was that “his vision superseded his accomplishments”, suggesting that Dissanayake’s vision was seen as his primary strength. This emphasis on vision is seen elsewhere. Roshan told me his father was curator of the SSC, and “had the vision to make this a test venue”.¹¹⁸ The improvements he made to the ground in the 1970s were fundamental in securing its current legacy as a premier club in Sri Lanka. Similarly, the head of SLU told me his first step towards reconciliation was to establish a “vision for the nation”, without which progress was unlikely. Conversely, Sangakkara bemoaned that the ’96 world cup winning team later fell apart due to political issues, becoming a disparate bunch with ‘no shared vision’ (Sangakkara 2011). Vision means being able to assess a situation, but also having foresight and understanding where to go. Furthermore, while having a vision is good, sharing it is clearly better.

Success also requires *purpose*, which similarly to vision, means understanding the direction in which to travel. Arief often told his students that they needed to train with purpose. At one

¹¹⁸ Roshan’s father was also president of the SLC for a short spell.

session he asked them “What is purpose? Doing things with intention and doing *things with a goal in mind*.” While Arief also employed the idiom of a journey, emphasising how important it was to overcome ‘roadblocks’ and make steady progress, it is clear this must be directed appropriately. When I asked him to expand on ‘purpose’ in an interview, he told me that the best players seek to address their shortcomings and will continually strive to better themselves. This was why Arief often said “excellence doesn’t have boundaries”. By focusing on promoting excellence rather than success he encourages a continual progression. This desire to keep moving highlights the general importance of movement. While the director of the FoG might not always know the exact route forward, he is constantly trying to make things happen and is certainly moving them *somewhere*. Conversely, standing still is seen as the worst thing that can happen to someone. One reason Fakhir pushed his children so hard was because of how bad it was to be “stuck in the comfort zone”. Likewise, numerous people from the north told me “their life is stopped” because of the war. It was apparent that being stationary or suffering stagnation is possibly the worst thing to happen to a person.

If a formulaic approach to change functions by re-modelling previous examples of success, there remains little suggestion about how to modify these examples into the future. Leaders provide the vision and purpose that makes this modelling work. Gamini Dissanayake was praised not only for his vision, but for being “far thinking” and “far ahead”, for the impact his vision had beyond his death. One colleague noted that by providing facilities and equipment to rural schools, Dissanayake’s cricket foundation established some of the infrastructure that functions to this day. As such, “his character, *vision*, effectiveness, impacted the many generations after him”. In a sense, Dissanayake’s greatest accomplishment was the legacy his vision had, not what he achieved in his lifetime. Vision is so highly sought after because if change is formulaic, then true leaders can have a greater impact over the multiple iterations of any re-modelling process. By having vision and providing direction, leaders propel things into the future. As noted, at the SDG workshop, several people mentioned their desire for a “road map”. One of the most comment complaints was that the government lacked leadership, and ministries needed to work together. Political stability was needed for ensuring continuity of policy, but the main request was that one of the parties “take the reins of sport” and move it forward. In sum, in a formulaic approach people tend to focus not on the problems of the

present, but on the direction to take into the future. Hence, they look for leaders to come in and try and provide that direction.

One consequence of this focus on individuals is that they tend to be excessively blamed for failure, and this perpetuates something of a vicious cycle. For example, the shift to data-driven coaching likely informs the culture of blame that permeates in professional cricket. Shantha suggested that people laid a lot of blame, but most was misplaced. He suggested that analysts and coaches are far more likely to be replaced than the players who were incapable of acting on their advice. As a consequence, coaches maintain increasingly tighter hold over their charges, fearing failure. This fear may be what leads coaches to try control the game from the side-lines, like Roshan's 'policeman'. Just like the visionaries, they seek to provide direction. Indeed, strong discipline and control work well for developing children. They argue and do not do as they are told, so being rigid in instruction is incredibly useful. However, the sum effect appeared to be that as adults, players do not think about their own games too much. It may also contribute to the idea that coaches 'hold' knowledge, and informs players' desire to be merely 'given' the right information for success. This is illustrated by the words of a former Sri Lankan national player, who stated he was about 30 before he realised he had agency over his game and could change parts of it as he liked (Brookes, *personal communication*). It seems that this is quite consistent across international players; they rarely know how to work things out for themselves because they are invariably told what to do (*ibid*). In the formulaic model, players need to think less. Yet it is precisely this lack of thinking which frustrates some. Despite Shantha's own move towards plans, he blamed individuals for not understanding themselves and bemoaned the lack of independence they exhibited. Altogether, this shows how ultimately contradictory the formulaic approach to change can be. Just as greater expectation is held of individuals, their agency is taken away. This shows a problem with the formulaic approach and leaving change to a purely individual level.

Doing the Same to Do Change

This survey of SDP practitioners and ideas about change more broadly suggests that the focus on individuals has ramifications when it comes to doing change through cricket. I contend that an individualist focus which assumes sport will automatically induce change perpetuates an overly formulaic approach to social change, particularly within SDP. In the formulaic

approach, there is a tendency to ‘put things in place’, establishing a foundation upon which it is expected individuals will simply make positive changes automatically. There is also a search for ‘success stories’ where groups can emulate previous examples of positive change. This emphasis on learning from previously successful examples highlights a cyclical approach to change based on utilising older models. Change is perceived as the (re-)modelling of previous successes. The formulaic approach builds on this re-modelling process by providing space for a particularly vague last step, where persons can gain ‘exposure’ and then ‘go beyond’. As the final piece of the formula, exposure is the additional ingredient which builds on the previous models. This also absolves the organisers of any responsibility if positive changes do not happen, as the parameters were never truly defined. This formulaic approach suggests why SDP practitioners in Sri Lanka often place emphasis on simply providing more cricket, as it appears the logical solution to enacting further social change.

Generally speaking, ideas about change place a great emphasis on individual decision making. Vision is seen as vital for understanding the correct route to take, while balance is equally integral for making decisions appropriately. Consequently, the focus is on individuals and the choices they make, with individuals being held to account if they fail to build on the foundation put in place. People tend to focus on how individuals aren’t thinking or being independent, rather than critiquing the formulaic model itself. Despite having only previous examples to emulate, individuals are held responsible for not embarking on a journey or attempting to change. Overall, this formulaic approach to change is essentially repetitive, seeking to replicate successful conditions in the hope that positive change will follow. There is greater focus on (re)modelling the past, rather than true innovation. Within this approach, any change is therefore incremental and often slow, and this approach also suggests that such change is likely to be individual based, rather than structural or systemic. Consequently, this further reflects that cricket is probably more useful for *conciliation* rather than reconciliation. This approach might make ‘better’ individuals who learn how to get on better with others and do sociality well, but this approach also tends to perpetuate the status quo, rather than tackling structural problems which might address reconciliation.

SECTION IV CONCLUSION

INDIVIDUAL RESPONSIBILITY

In Section IV I have looked at how people manage the tensions that emerge during cricket and attempt to do sociality well. In the process, I have examined some of the concepts of change that emerged, and considered the ramifications these have when using cricket as a tool for social change. In Chapter 8 I suggested that cricketers rhetorically deploy cricketing discourse in an attempt to change their social position within the cricket team. In doing so cricketers learn how to balance their individual desires and their assigned role against the requirements of their team. In Chapter 9, I suggested that cricketers are taught to establish *control* over themselves in order to succeed in cricket. As cricket presents various contradictions that need to be resolved, the individual is encouraged to deal with this themselves. Thus, in both chapters I showed that the idea of social constraint is internalised. Cricketers begin to understand the social constraints placed upon them, know that the scope of their personal change can be limited by others, and therefore learn to bear these constraints, developing individual resilience in the process. Although cricketers use the same discourses that constrain them for their own purposes, the effect of this can be limited. Both these chapters also show that cricketers are encouraged to take individual responsibility for their actions and change themselves. By focusing on navigating constraints, cricketers rarely question them. It can therefore be argued that cricket enculturates the personal responsibility to the wider whole I described in Section III. In Chapter 10, I consequently showed how this individual focus manifested in the way my interlocutors conceived of their own life narratives. I contended that my interlocutors prefer to control their own journey and find the right path through life than try to change the system around them. In Chapter 11, I showed the implications this individual-heavy focus has for doing change with cricket more broadly. SDP practitioners employ a very formulaic approach to change, which focuses on repetition and incremental change rather than true innovation.

Thus, in cricket there is a heavy emphasis on individual change and very limited emphasis on changing social structures at any point. Although this idea that sports place excessive focus on the individual is not new within the SDP literature, I have provided greater detail here about *why* this happens in a particular sport. In light of my findings, it remains increasingly hard to

justify the interpretation that cricket does much to promote systemic social change. This in essence highlights that if people desire to use mainstream sport for positive change, then it is the terms of *sport itself that has to change*. In the final section of this ethnography, I zoom out to explore what it is about mainstream sport that makes it flawed for the task of doing social change, and the implications this has for interventions which attempt to use unmodified sport for social change and reconciliation.

SECTION V
SYNTHESIS

INTRODUCTION

SYNTHESIS

In this final section, I draw together various threads to make greater sense of my ethnographic material. First, I explore ‘The Big Match’, an archetypal example of cricket that encapsulates numerous concepts raised thus far, including space, ritual, cricketing discourses and the formulaic approach. By showing how these various ideas intersect in this single event, I contend that this particularly influential match says a great deal about cricket and ideas of change in Sri Lanka more broadly. Then, I examine these various threads together, discussing theoretical ideas that can reflect on the potential and limits of any relationship between cricket and reconciliation. In turn, this says much about how sport might be used for social change in general. Finally, I reflect on the implications these findings have for using cricket as an intervention in post-conflict states, and offer some avenues for further exploration.

CHAPTER 12

THE BIG MATCH

Scenes: The Royal-Thomian



Figure 31. Our view of the SSC from inside the invitee's box.

Nick and I arrived just in time for the start of the Royal-Thomian. As fellow researchers of Sri Lankan cricket, we were excited to finally see Sri Lanka's most famous cricket fixture in person.¹¹⁹ The journey certainly raised our anticipation. We fought through the traffic and the crowds streaming towards the Sinhalese Sports Club. Inside, we passed through three security gates, showing our tickets each time. We navigated the extensive member's area and finally reached the cool confines of the invitee box, overlooking the ground. Inside, various luminaries chatted to each other in hushed tones. Former international players, politicians and famous singers all rubbed shoulders. Some thumbed through the national *Daily News*, reading their extensive preview of the match.

¹¹⁹ An Englishman and teacher at St Thomas's for the year, Nick had secured us some invitee tickets courtesy of school management.

The sight of the ground certainly did not disappoint. The SSC had been completely transformed since I last saw it during an England game. Now, every inch of green space on the banks was filled with tents, while others were squeezed into and between the existing stands. I counted at least 26 different ‘tents’ rising up around us, making the ground feel more like an amphitheatre. Unlike other games where fans might simply be arranged in home and away sections, distinctive little segments were created. Each tent was a self-contained unit, with its own gated entrance, enormous logo, and character. While some of the smaller tents were not much more than seating, the larger ones were vast complexes, including eateries, bars, and sometimes even a dance floor. The wide schoolboys’ tents stretched around one quarter of the ground, hosting the current Royal and Thomian cohort. Confusingly, many smaller tents were named after horses, including Mustangs, Broncos and Colts. Others, like the ‘class of 88’ were more intuitively named. The ground was awash with the school colours of blue, black and gold. Blue – the shared colour of both colleges – dominated, providing a sense of cohesion. Gold and black punctuated, marking out certain areas for each school. So, while some tents were mixed, many were designated, like the Thomian Saddlebreds.

In the middle, the St Thomas’s team were warming up. The sight of players taking catches and bowling amidst this carnivalesque atmosphere was striking. This was far from an amateur game. Around them, prefects in their white uniforms, wearing hats decked in ribbons wandered around the ground with their respective flags of blue/black or blue/gold. The Thomians were first to bring out their enormous blue/black banner, a host of boys holding it aloft. They were quickly chased by their Royal counterparts, and soon the ground was swamped by fluttering flags. Anticipation rising, so too did the noise, a cacophony of horns, percussion, shouting and singing. The *Papare* bands competed with *Baila* pumped out of speakers, intermingled with western dance music.¹²⁰ Inside the box the sound was deafened, merging into a dull drone. It seemed impossible to distinguish anything other than what was nearest. Suffering sensory overload, we stared as the atmosphere seemed to reach fever pitch.

At about 10am, the teams emerged. Boys formed separate guards of honour, hoisting flags to create a long tunnel for each team. The Thomian captain emerged first, running out onto the

¹²⁰ *Papare* is a low-tech relation of *Baila*, which is very popular at cricket matches. *Papare* features instruments that can be taken into venues, primarily brass of some kind and drums.

pitch to roars from the crowd. The *Papare* bands started up in earnest, their drums establishing the familiar rhythm of the Sri Lankan game. Arrayed in the field, the game was ready. Kalana Perera, the tall and strong left-arm pacer stood ready to bowl. The crowd hushed momentarily, as though taking in a collective breath. With long, languid strides, Kalana charged in. The first ball was a brute, whistling past the batsman's outside edge. Running up almost towards them, Kalana exchanged a few choice words. The noise instantly returned. The cauldron ready, the atmosphere pumping, the game was on.



Figure 32. We watch on as the first ball is bowled.

Big Matches and 'The Big Match'

In this penultimate chapter, I examine 'The Big Match', one of the longest running annual cricket matches in the world. In this single example, many of the numerous themes I have covered in my thesis appear together, intersecting in interesting and important ways. While I have described an overt focus on the individual within cricket for much of this ethnographic work, by depicting 'The Big Match' I intentionally think 'up' to the systemic, social level. In doing so, I graft the ideas of space, ritual, and cricketing discourses, to the formulaic approach and iterative models of change, in order to explore what this influential match can say about this broader level of change. In particular, The Big Match acts as a scaling point, a place where ideas of groups and wholes are negotiated. It is clear that these ideas often operate at the level

of the ‘Sri Lankan’. The Big Match provides a clear example of how cricket is more suited to social regulation and maintaining the status quo than it is to systemic change. Though sports can help individuals deal with their own problems and get along together, they do not necessarily affect social systems. Any change gleaned by individuals and deployed at a social level will therefore only ever be incremental.

The annual cricket match between Royal College and St Thomas’s College is so prominent in Sri Lankan society that it is simply known as ‘The Big Match’. The central fixture in the sporting calendar, each year excitement builds towards a crescendo in March, when tens of thousands of people descend on the SSC for a three-day contest. Known officially as the ‘Royal-Thomian’, The Big Match has been held since 1879, making it one of the world’s longest continually running inter-school cricket matches.¹²¹ A typical ‘varsity’ encounter between two of Sri Lanka’s oldest and most prestigious schools, the original game was conceived as a method of establishing networks across the two colleges (Brookes 2022). I was told by St Thomas’s staff that The Big Match still exists ostensibly to ‘foster relations’, but recognise it has outgrown these origins. Now, numerous committees spend almost the entire year organising the game, spending huge figures of money on an enormous festival which nets astronomical profit. So, while Royal and Thomian ‘old boys’ come together primarily to celebrate their schools’ existence and their collective fortune in attending it, in doing so they generate vast amounts of money for the schools. ‘The Big Match’ has become a template for school sports across the country. Other schools have now established similar rivalries, known also as ‘Big Matches’. The ‘Big Match’ season runs for most of February and March, as the numerous rival schools take on one another in their own varsity games.¹²² Such encounters are marquee events in the regular sporting calendar, held in addition to regular league games. These are often equally elaborate and enormous events. The ‘Big Match’ template has now extended to a variety of sports, including football, rugby, table tennis, and even chess. Big Matches have therefore become a widespread phenomenon in Sri Lanka, with huge cultural sway.

¹²¹ For clarity, ‘The Big Match’ refers to the Royal Thomian, while ‘Big Match’ means any traditional schoolboy encounter.

¹²² Due to the climate, this is typically the best time for cricket on the island.

As a phenomenon, the Big Matches project a certain view of cricket. Much of the discourse surrounding these games evokes brotherhood, camaraderie, fair play, gentlemanly values, and a host of other modernist values commonly associated with sports, primarily promoting a close bond between schools. The ideal that Big Matches present is an inclusive one, ignoring the apparent privilege of participants. Many of these schools have predominantly elite, yet diverse student populations, incorporating many of Sri Lanka's ethnic and religious minorities. As such, many of my informants from these schools claimed this showed their inclusivity, suggesting they rarely recognised ethnic or religious division and were together as one. Given the massive cultural significance of Big Matches, these values very much reflect and perpetuate the middle-class discourse of equality that surrounds cricket in Sri Lanka. My interlocutors also told me that many old boys frame their identity in terms of their school, and The Big Match is integral to this framing. These values also hark back to a glorious past (of gentlemanly conduct), reifying each school's identity, and the old boys' sense of inclusion within that. Thus, Big Matches have a huge part to play in establishing a sense of what cricket can be in Sri Lanka.

While the idea of a 'Big Match' has been a part of sporting lexicon in the country for decades, such is the lore and stock held in the cricketing encounter between St Thomas's and Royal, that if someone mentions '*The Big Match*', they will invariably be referring to the Royal-Thomian. Because of its long history and centrality in the cricketing calendar, The Big Match remains a big cultural touchstone, and retains real – some might say disproportionate – rhetorical importance for cricket in Sri Lanka. That many of the Roy-Tho alumni include not only prime ministers and presidents, but many of Sri Lanka's former cricket internationals and several captains, tends to exacerbate this sense of centrality and importance. While there have been many criticisms of the game in recent years, it is undeniably visible every March.¹²³ As a cultural phenomenon, The Big Match is the archetypal example of cricket in Sri Lanka, within which one can see all of the themes I have raised in this thesis. As such, The Big Match is also an archetypal model of change.

¹²³ Controversy surrounded the 141st edition, which took place in March 2020 despite the quickly developing threat of Covid-19.



Figure 33. View from the grandstand, showing Royal and Thomian students' tents in the background.

Several features of The Big Match mark it out as an exceptional kind of liminal space, much like the ones I explored in Section II. The Big Match currently takes place at one of the biggest grounds in the country, the Sinhalese Sports Club (SSC), which is a neutral venue.¹²⁴ Each morning of the '140th Encounter', a pilgrimage occurred as fans of both schools flocked to the SSC, the streets of Cinnamon Gardens awash with blue, gold and black. The boundedness of the arena was also incredibly apparent as one passed through multiple gates to enter the ground. The visual shock of colour, the noise, the carnivalesque atmosphere reinforced the exceptional, liminal nature of the space. The Big Match occurs in a strongly bounded space, demarcated for a very specific purpose. Like the other grounds, this space was also populated by distinct containers. One might assume that if the purpose of The Big Match is ostensibly 'to promote relations between the schools', that one large mixed area would facilitate this. However, the SSC was broken up into a large number of 'tents' of varying shapes and sizes, which demarcate space for a variety of groups. Each tent is in essence a discrete unit, with its own character. One does not buy a ticket for the match, instead, one buys a ticket for a tent. Unless one has multiple tickets or was part of the organising committee, then experience of the match is limited to the single tent you can access. Crossing between tents was kept to a

¹²⁴ Despite this, the 'Mini-Battle' between the two team's Second XIs is played at either school on an alternating basis.

minimum, and the main space for mixing was the cricket pitch itself, which remained open for spectators to walk on at breaks in play (Lunch and Tea). Thus, the ground is broken down into discrete containers, which reinforce the sense of separate and opposing groups.

The groups these tents represent also appeared to be similarly manufactured. Some of the tents did refer to a distinct, pre-existing group, such as the Old Thomians Swimming Club. Others were designated for the Royal or Thomian schoolboys. Many referred to a certain school cohort (known as a 'batch'), a more nebulous concept which becomes reified at the tournament. These batch tents were together at one end of the ground, such as the class of '88, '89, or '04/'05. The dates were common landmarks to celebrate. '88 was 30 years, '04, 15 years, and so on. From conversations with people, it seems there is a level of organisation here, as people often told me "we were given our [tent]" or "this is our landmark year, our 30-year anniversary". Most of the tents had overtly manufactured, somewhat arbitrary characters. Many were named after kinds of horse, or had equine related names, such as Stables and the Turf Club. As much as I asked, no one could give me a straight answer as to why this naming came into being. All I could work out is that age matters, as the Mustangs tent was for over 50s only, Stallions for over 40, and so on. To go along a presumed lineage, there were Mustangs, Stallions, Colts, Broncos, Thoroughbreds, Saddlebreds, and Brumbies. While this naming seemed arbitrary and manufactured, the effort that went into reifying these groupings and creating a distinct identity was extensive. The tents were visually striking, and clearly a lot of money had been spent on establishing and decorating these tents. Every tent had an enormous logo, often intricate and clearly costly, designating who the tent was for. Some tents were huge and formed miniature complexes within the ground itself. Throughout, it seemed apparent that these kinds of divisions and collective identities must be desired in Sri Lanka, because everyone had gone to great lengths to carve out space for and create these separate tents.

While the nature of their grouping and naming seemed somewhat manufactured, such identity creation was clearly effective, as all of the tents were said to have a distinct character. I was told people chose which tent to attend based on these characters. Those on the western bank (e.g., Thoroughbreds, Saddlebreds) were known more as 'party' tents, being men only and seen as rowdier. One female teacher half-jokingly said that there were probably strippers hiding in

the back of the tents there. Others, like the OTSC tent which occupied the grandstand, were supposedly for people who care more about watching the cricket. In addition to many of his friends there being batch-mates, one man told me he attended OTSC because he really wanted to concentrate on the game. The larger tents on the east bank like the Stables, were known as ‘family’ tents, and were more welcoming and relaxed, with a lesser focus on the cricket. The Stables was one of the biggest tents, including a huge dance floor, and in much of that tent, one could hardly see the game, indicating it was of lesser importance to the overall experience. Most importantly, people travel back to Colombo from all over the world to watch the match, and many seemed to fall back into these categories very easily. Despite their apparently manufactured nature, many of my informants mobilised and defended these identities, claiming to be proud of ‘being a Stallion’ or ‘being a Brumbie’. Almost all seemed to have a tent they regularly went to, which contributed to the formation of their experience as an old boy of Royal or St Thomas’s.



Figure 34. Wandering on the ground during the lunch interval, one gets a better sense of the tents that divide the outer portion of the ground.



Figure 35. The St Thomas's and Royal schoolboy tents flank either side of the Singer scoreboard.

Figure 36 illustrates in detail the arrangement of these tents and their affiliation at The Big Match in 2019. As is immediately evident, the ground is not simply split into two halves which represent the two schools. Instead, there are a great number of distinct segments, of varying shapes and sizes. Some tents are completely fabricated, erected from scaffolding and taking up previously free space on the SSC's two main banks, while others are fashioned from the pre-existing stands that can be cordoned off in some way. The discrepancy in size of each tent is huge. The largest (The Stables) was an enormous marquee fit for hundreds of people, while the smallest 'tent' was actually used as a luxury box at normal matches, and fit less than 50 people all told. Each 'tent' was either designated for people from St Thomas's, from Royal, or were mixed. As I've indicated, many of these tents had distinct characters, and invariably the mixed tents were exclusive in the sense that they were for people of a certain age bracket. 'Mixed' in a sense does not mean strictly egalitarian. Where there was freedom, there is again division. These divisions are enforced by the issuing of tickets for a specific tent, and by the large barriers between tents. It may not seem evident from the photos, but the tents on the banks were well marked out and did not enable one to easily hop between them. While it was possible to circulate through the ground behind the tents, it was not possible to enter any without a ticket, or a favour from someone higher up.¹²⁵

¹²⁵ My friend Nick and I were able to access certain tents as invitees of STC, and we were connected enough to get into other tents through a few favours. People generally knew we were going to write

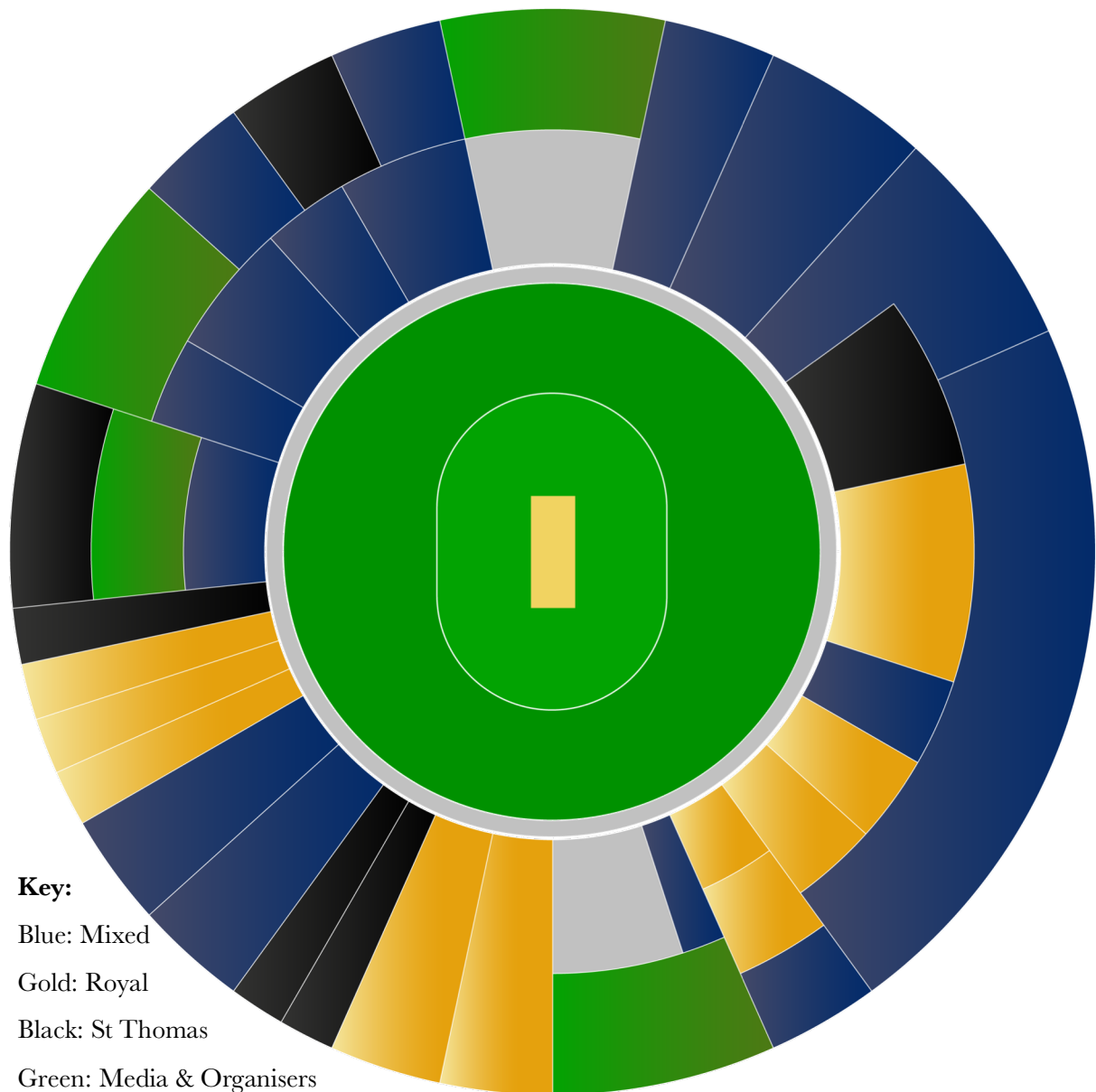


Figure 36. Tents and their affiliation at The Big Match in 2019. Diagram courtesy Alanna Gow.

The strict division of the SSC into smaller sub-units invites one to consider what purpose this holds, especially in light of the claim that The Big Match exists to ‘foster relations between schools’. The apparently counter-intuitive practices of division and sub-division suggests a specific approach to fostering relations at The Big Match, a particular idea of groups and wholes. Firstly, the cricket ground reinforces the sense of an abstract individual within a wider whole, as it evokes the sense of a much broader collective identity that joins all participants

about the match and let us in to have a look around. I do not think this same courtesy is extended to other attendees, and we were occasionally closely inspected on entry to our own tent (OTSC).

together. Here, the cricketing space acts a ‘scaling up point’. When persons attend the game, they can more easily imagine being part of the abstract, previously ‘imagined’ community. Yet division is integral to this process. Older logics akin to those I described in Chapter 5 regarding segmenting and separating supposedly liminal, egalitarian space come into play.¹²⁶ Thus at The Big Match, it is not only school identity that is mobilised, but also the various other groups present, the broader identity of the cricket community more generally, all the way up to the Sri Lankan nation. Given the prominence of The Big Match in Sri Lankan society, I suggest that any division present here is emblematic of notions about Sri Lankan unity more generally.

With this in mind, the division of the SSC into a huge number of distinct, manufactured and arbitrary containers is not at all surprising. It may highlight the individual’s need to define oneself as member of a certain group. In an incredibly diverse country like Sri Lanka, there are a huge number of categories within which to place oneself, and this can be disorienting. It is no surprise that when meeting someone new, people spend so much time ‘locating’ one another. The confluence of arbitrary containers may facilitate this joining. One becomes not only a Royalist but also a Stallion. One is not just a Thomian, but a member of the batch of ’88. It aids the general locating that occurs within an incredibly complex social matrix. This may highlight why there are many more smaller units that can come together, as this improves the capacity to define oneself in opposition to perceived ‘others’. This increasing division and sub-division is also acceptable as the sense of ‘proximity’ within the ground and the strengthening of relations this entails is assumed to be what brings people together. So, being ‘close’ to each other is seen as acceptable in this scenario. Conviviality is fostered by mere proximity. Taken altogether, the arrangement and use of space at The Big Match suggests a pre-occupation not with division but with the creation of wholes. Being separate, yet close together within the bounds the cricket ground is an example of *safe enactments of difference*. Taking the ground as the ‘whole’ in this scenario, it is possible to see how the manufacturing of discrete units within a greater whole could act as a model for Sri Lankan society. The arrangement of tents at The Big Match suggests segmentation is acceptable, so long as these segments are proximal within a wider whole. The Big Match therefore evokes ideas about what it means to be Sri Lankan, but also presents an alternative example of how Sri Lankan society

¹²⁶ The Big Match echoes the use of space at the Pattini rituals, and the invocation of a new, arbitrary hierarchy in the Sri Pāda pilgrimages.

might safely be. Thus, cricket aids in envisaging a wider whole, wherein safe enactments of difference can happen. This is perhaps why so many claims have been made for cricket being reconciliatory.

The Big Match as Model of Change

If The Big Match is a model of society, a space wherein safe enactments of difference can happen, then it is the ritualistic aspects of the event that facilitate these enactments. Thus, within the context of a formulaic approach and modelling change, The Big Match also reflects ideas about change at the broader social level. The Big Match also becomes a suitable model for change. The nature of movement at The Big Match is akin to the interplay of fission and fusion I described in Chapter 5. People are separated out, only to come back together again at certain points during the event. While the participants of the cricket match were separated around the outside of the venue for the passages of play, during the breaks and at the end of each day, fans were given freedom to go onto the pitch and roam around the ground. Taking a leisurely stroll onto the grass during an interval allowed fans to meet one another. Often people organised to see their friends from different tents, take group photos, gossip, and so on. In this sense, the middle of the ground existed as a safe, totally neutral space that people could move into to see others, before then returning to the delimited outer spaces. One of the amateur teams I played for had their club photo in the middle of the ground at the tea interval on the second day. They all met together for this marker of their club unity, despite coming to it from numerous different tents. Especially at the end of each day, the middle of the ground became a hive of activity. Particularly at the end of the second day (a Friday), many parties spilled out from the tents and into the middle.

More importantly, one particular practice suggests a kind of ritualistic aggregation in the Gennepian sense, or fusion in the mode of the rituals I earlier described for the goddess Pattini. Most editions of The Big Match end in a draw. When I attended in 2019, St Thomas's had not won the game since 2007, and lost to Royal in 2013, meaning Royal had held the trophy for 6 years.¹²⁷ St Thomas's eventually won the 2019 match. Once it was clear that STC were going to win the game, men from Royal turned up in the OTSC tent to congratulate their

¹²⁷ Royal also won in 2016, but otherwise every edition after was a draw.

friends from St Thomas's.¹²⁸ I was told it is good form for members of the losing school to visit their friends in the tents of the winning school, to congratulate them on their team's success. This helps to draw proceedings to a close, allowing both groups to come back together at the end. Boundaries start to break down and are crossed as the game's outcome becomes clear, ritualistic markers of the end of the event, a sign of the status quo returning. This sense is exacerbated by the final ceremony once the game is over, where the members of the crowd flood the pitch and join together. Standing on the grass surrounding the small stage, the trophy is ceremonially transferred from losing to winning team via their school principals. Much like in the Pattini rituals, the previously divided groups of people become reunited in a mass celebration at the end of the event. While the supporters of Royal College and St Thomas's are divided for the length of the match, they are then reunited at the end. There is fission, but then fusion. Though this ceremonial return to the status quo is evident in many sports, I suggest that this ritualistic division and aggregation may make for stronger bonds between people in the Sri Lankan context. The idea of *safe enactments of difference* suggests that positive change occurs within the event, (or at the very least there is an absence of negative change) as persons understand how to get along well with different others.



Figure 37. Attendees gather in the middle of the ground during the lunch interval.

However, when examining the wider context of The Big Match as a model of change, these ritualistic aspects suggest change occurs less substantially at the broader social level. Fission indicates there is experimentation within the liminal space of the event, but fusion shows the status quo returns at the end. If return to the status quo happens *within* the event, then change

¹²⁸ STC had not exactly dominated the match, but they were set a small target to win the game and it soon became clear they would pass it comfortably.

between each event will be minimal. Much like the model of change I discussed in Chapter 11, any change at The Big Match is similarly incremental. There was a sense of circularity, which resonates with the more general ideal of invariant repetition in Sri Lanka, wherein invariance is a 'performative illusion' that reinforces a sense of ongoing tradition (Simpson 2004). Interviews with my interlocutors suggest this may indeed be intentional. One in particular mentioned that the main reason for keeping Big Matches similar year on year is to forge a sense of continuity. If the schools are an integral part of how these old boys frame their identity, then they have a vested interest in ensuring this identity carries on into the future. Furthermore, as fathers usually want to enrol their own children in the schools they attended, they also have a greater sense of lineage to preserve. So, while much of the discourse surrounding cricket promotes progress and continual improvement, the strong sense of continuity embedded within the Big Matches serves an ulterior purpose. Each Big Match harks back to a glorious past in order to perpetuate an identity into the future. Therefore, while the Big Matches appear to be about change, in reality they function towards maintaining the status quo. This is even clearer when one considers that the encounters are essentially endless, with all to play for again in the next year. While each Big Match is purportedly different, the outcome remains the same. Thus, the biggest game of cricket in the country hardly ever changes. Ultimately, if The Big Match entails safe enactments of difference, then those enactments carefully end once the event is done. Thus, while there is some individual change for those involved, these safe enactments rarely extend beyond the event. Ultimately, it may be that social events based on ritual can only ever facilitate systemic regulation, not systemic change.



Figure 38. The huge flags come out again during the Tea break.

The Problem of Change

The Big Match encapsulates many different issues covered in this thesis. In the context of space and fission and fusion, The Big Match appears as a model for society. In this model, the greater whole becomes an idea of what is ‘Sri Lankan’, and within that whole, discrete units come together to do safe enactments of difference. The various aspects of the game enable a variety of ideas to be experimented with. As such, The Big Match is a model of what Sri Lanka could be, or hopes to be. It represents what people desire togetherness and unity to look like. Yet when considering the ideas about change, the formulaic approach and the notion of modelling, The Big Match indicates something specific about cricket. With each successive iteration, The Big Match implies that change is afoot, with the limitless potential each new encounter offers. Yet by changing only incrementally each time, The Big Match also retains its sense of continuity and tradition. The Big Match manages to appear both a reliable constant *and* constantly evolving. This is crucial for understanding the change sport could possibly enact. In this light, The Big Match conveys that sports are far better at social regulation and maintaining the status quo rather than enacting systemic change. Cricket might help envisage a wider whole and enable safe enactments of difference, but these enactments rarely extend beyond the event. Persons may indeed take individual learnings out of the sporting event, but the social structures do not change, and individuals remain constrained despite such learnings. People change as

individuals, but the system does not. Cricket is akin to a social lubricant, something that allows people to get along and understand one another, but it doesn't change the parameters of these relationships. Thus, *The Big Match* shows how cricket does individual change, not systemic change.

Scenes: Big Match Ending

It's mid-afternoon on the final day of *The Big Match*. I am not sure I have ever been anywhere so loud. The *Papare* bands, the dance music, the live rock band, the shouting and screaming have merged into one relentless rhythm. Saturday is party day, people told me. We came to the ground this morning expecting a Thomian win, which hasn't happened for 14 years. The day has slowly but steadily progressed towards confirming that fact.

In the OTSC tent, the mood has been jubilant all day. From our vantage point overlooking the rest of the ground, we can see the crowd getting increasingly excited too. Right now, St Thomas's need only a few runs more to secure a worthy victory over Royal. The issue of St Thomas's finishing their losing streak has changed from a matter of if, to when.

As we watch, cheering every run, I suddenly notice a number of men from Royal have arrived in the tent. One middle aged man, dressed head to foot in bright yellow, stands out among the sea of blue and black. He is surrounded by several Thomians, who he is eagerly chatting and gesticulating to, clearly in the full flow of conversation. Amused by the sight, I elbow my friend Rohan and point him out.

"Oh, that's one of our friends, he's come to congratulate us," he tells me. "He's a good judge. He knows the game is done now." This, Rohan told me, was evidence of the sort of good nature the match can foster. "He's as proud a royalist as any but is happy to admit defeat, to say 'But you were better than us today'". It seems it is good practice to come and offer congratulations like this, once the game is clearly decided. As the game winds towards its conclusion, a few more men from Royal turn up and offer their congratulations, too.

About twenty minutes later, St Thomas's are one hit away from winning the match. Suddenly, Shalin de Mel rocks back, hitting the ball powerfully through mid-wicket for four. Before the

ball even reaches the boundary, hundreds of schoolboys flood the pitch. A thrill rushes through me as I see them run en masse, mobbing the winners and taunting the losers. The crowd erupts around me, the noise reaching levels I barely imagined possible. We are all shouting and cheering, hugging and high fiving as St Thomas's register their first win in over a decade.



Figure 39. Fans of the victorious St Thomas's team wait patiently for the post-match presentation to begin.

When the celebrations eventually die down, a space is made and a platform is brought out for the closing ceremony. We go out onto the pitch ourselves to join the gathering crowd. We ease our way between people, eager to get a good view of the stage, on which various dignitaries stand ready. They patiently wait while the TV commentator introduces everyone, calling the game to a close. The two school principals come out and are then handed the enormous D. S. Senanayake Shield. They are photographed completing the honorary transferral of the shield from Royal to St Thomas's. St Thomas's principal, who by his own admittance, is not the biggest cricket fan, still looks gleeful as he receives the trophy from their rivals. He then has the pleasure of presenting it to his school's captain, whose resolute face finally breaks into a smile. Suddenly, the rest of the team mob the stage, hoisting the trophy aloft and jumping around in celebration.

As we are reminded by the TV commentator, all is to play for again next year.



Figure 40. The gleeful St Thomas's team hold the D. S. Senanayake Memorial Shield aloft.

CHAPTER 13

DISCUSSION

In this final chapter, I offer reflection on the potential and limits of a relationship between cricket and reconciliation. In doing so, I also suggest what cricket in Sri Lanka can say about the idea of using sport for social change more widely. I have argued that in Sri Lanka cricketing spaces provide a place for the *safe enactments of difference*, an arena where individuals can come together to experiment with social values and imagine new collective possibilities. I have illustrated how the social structures of cricket dictate this experimentation, raising fundamental social ideas and forcing a particular version of social reality onto participants. By focusing on individual agency, this version of reality curtails and constrains the kinds of social change that might be possible through cricket. Furthermore, cricketing discourses promote a certain ideal of individual change which reduces the scope for positive social change further. These two points have influenced how SDP is practiced in Sri Lanka, through a very formulaic approach which has limited outcomes. While some of these findings are not individually novel within the anthropology of sport or the broader SDP literature, in tying these findings together I have established *why* this limited scope for change is a result of the structures of sport itself. I have not merely illustrated that cricket engenders mostly individual change, but shown *why* this is mostly individual change. Here, I flesh out this summarising argument and make it clear that sport must be modified if stakeholders wish to use sport to truly enact positive social change into the future.

Safe Enactments of Difference

Cricket appears to be a promising tool for addressing the ‘national question’ I raised in the introduction. In Section II, I showed how the management of space at the cricket ground expresses underlying social concerns, while an analysis of ritual conveyed how these concerns might be experimented with. The cricket space itself is often presented as ‘Sri Lankan’, with nationalist symbols present at all kinds of sporting events, and other iconography conspicuously absent. It was apparent that in the liminal space of the cricket ground, norms were suspended and a secular Sri Lankan space was created. Despite the distance between different groups within the cricket ground, the notion of *proximity* confers a feeling of togetherness through

cricket. Furthermore, the idea of containers and arbitrary identities conveyed the sense of segmentation of a whole, rather than of separation. Understandings of older Sri Lankan rituals supported this interpretation, as they revealed that persons are often split in such events, only to be brought back together again at their conclusion. In the previous chapter, The Big Match was an exemplar of this fission and fusion in action at cricket. In conclusion, the cricket ground in Sri Lanka is often understood to be an arena of experimentation, a place where social norms can be negotiated in a controlled way. Cricket spaces are therefore a place for the *safe enactments of difference*.

This use of space at cricket raises an important question. If the ground is split into containers, what is understood to be the biggest container? If the largest container is the ground, then perhaps the cricketing space is a model of society. Being made up of discrete groups yet conceived of as a whole, in the previous chapter I showed how this segmentary system at cricket indicates this potential to 'scale up' to the nation. As a scaling point, the cricket space can generate meaning about Sri Lanka as a country, or even Sri Lanka's place in the wider world. This concept of safe enactments of difference is therefore critical for thinking about reconciliation, because the cricket space is a potential model for society where people come together in larger groupings in a low-risk manner. As it is framed as a 'Sri Lankan' space, cricket can be used to process some of the biggest issues in Sri Lankan life during this post-war aftermath: ideas about the nation and the minimisation of conflict. What is being enacted and experimented with in the post-war period are ideas about what Sri Lankan society is and what it could become. Indeed, the idea of safe enactments suggests it may be experimentation itself that appeals to Sri Lankans most about cricket. In summary, these points evoke that there is a uniquely local understanding of reconciliation at play here, one which differs from the high-flown rhetoric often associated with SDP and is far more nuanced. It should not be taken for granted that such experimentations and enactments are homogenous. Although cricket enables the safe enactments of difference, it is important to then ascertain what exactly this means for participants. Though the argument that sporting spaces are liminal realms for the negotiation of social ideas is not a new one, this remains a vital foundation for then understanding what is experimented with, and how such experimentations play out.

A Sporting Cosmology

In Section III I argued there exist a number of tensions between individuals and collectives, whose mediation is influenced by cricketing discourses. As such, the experimentation that cricket enables is with fundamental concerns about the world and one's position in it. Here, I argue that this experimentation is ultimately mediated by a 'sporting cosmology', an alternative social reality that cricketing discourses help produce and maintain. This social reality is appealing as it presents players with greater freedom to experiment with such fundamental concerns, but equally contains hidden limitations. To frame this argument, I return to Harry Walker's notion of 'political ontology', which I raised in Chapter 1 (2013). For Walker, the modernist values which characterise many global sports actively change the political consciousness of participants as they enshrine a particular 'moral and political order' (*ibid*). Thus, modernist team sports like football and cricket, which promote 'abstract communal identities and loyalties' (*ibid*:385) tend to valorise the individual and promote equal opportunity (*ibid*), and this may change participants' ideas of what it means to be part of a group (*ibid*). Sporting discourses therefore describe the relationship between an individual and his team, and are less specific about the relations between these individuals. For example, Walker illustrates the impact of football on the *Urarina* people of Peruvian Amazonia, who had a drastically different political ontology before football (*ibid*).¹²⁹ He explains how the sport, with its emphasis on 'roles, rules, and the abstract individual' (*ibid*) became an effective tool in changing and then cementing a political consciousness that promotes the primacy of the Peruvian nation state. It should be clear by now that cricket operates in a similar manner. Like other team sports, cricket incorporates a strong sense of *role*, exacerbated by the variety of disciplines involved in the game. Equally, the emphasis in cricketing discourses on fair play, team spirit and deference to the greater whole all promote the sense of an abstract individual and a responsibility to the wider collective.

My ethnographic material supports Walker's idea of the 'political ontology', particularly his contention that by allocating individuals into roles, modernist sports promote 'equality in theory', but never in practice (2013:395). Cricket, through promoting the abstract individual

¹²⁹ "The Urarina are typical of a number of Amazonian peoples whose "traditional" sociality is highly individualistic and for whom the notion of "the collectivity"—and the formation of bounded, categorical identities—is most quintessentially "modern." (Walker, 2013:383)

and the primacy of the greater whole, presents people with a particular way of understanding themselves within a group. However, this argument can be pushed a step further, and I argue that sports like cricket also present and shape their own *cosmology*. The rootedness of cricketing discourses in Sri Lanka and their aforementioned ‘mythopoeic’ quality (Coalter 2010) already suggest that cricket has something to say about the nature of the world. The precepts of Muscular Christianity for example are very much alive and well in the coaching of young men across Colombo. Yet I also found that local ideas about personhood were prevalent in the way people talked about cricketers and their capacity for success. In particular, I suggested that local ways of discussing ‘talent’ suggested the existence of a ‘potential system’, a way of ensuring that persons occupy roles in society that fit their innate potential. So as much as cricket produced certain political understandings, it was also woven into local cosmological concepts. Thus, cricket not only provided a medium for reflecting on the political standing of persons within groups, but also on the nature of those persons themselves. The understandings my interlocutors garnered about themselves and others through cricket provide lessons which can be taken ‘outside’ the game towards the wider world. In summary, the political ontology of (global) cricket can be seen in the local context as a *sporting cosmology* of Sri Lankan cricket, with the two being mutually sustaining. On some level, cricket has something to say about how persons are conceived, what agencies are possible within society, and so forth. This means that participating in cricket can fundamentally change the way people see their world. Understanding both the political ontology cricket promotes, and how this is incorporated into a sporting cosmology is critical for understanding the kinds of social change that might be possible through cricket.

The Sporting Cosmology and Change

In examining the impact of this sporting cosmology on change, I shy away from previous approaches to cosmology and personhood which assess the impact of individual agency over society or vice versa (Howell 2002, Carrithers 2002). In many ways, I take an ‘anti-Durkheimian’ approach in that I perceive individuals to be socially creative *in spite of* societal constraints (Rapport 2002). Generally, I avoid a genealogical approach. I am not interested in whether cricket has imposed a ‘new’ political ontology on Sri Lanka, nor whether individuals resist or accept this ontology, as my ethnographic findings suggest the distinction is superfluous. Cricket as a sport *does* operate from a western individualist paradigm, having sprung from a

particular modernist historical moment. The ‘moral and political order’ of cricket promotes the idea of an abstract individual and enshrines their right to equality. Notwithstanding, this does not mean that cricket has *imposed* (somehow from elsewhere) a new set of values on Sri Lankan lives. The sporting cosmology of cricket in Sri Lanka is clearly a combination of modernist cricketing discourses *and* local ideas that are intricately woven.

Mauss’s approach to personhood which identifies *moi* (the self) and *personnage* (‘role’) is useful for tracing the way these two modes of thought are woven together (Mauss 1985, Carrithers 2002). The distinction between *moi*, an awareness of one’s mind and consciousness and *personnage*, the person as socially active and impinged upon highlights the dual consciousness at play in many ethnographic contexts. As Appuhamilage notes, in Sri Lanka persons are constantly caught in a balancing act, between ‘individual desires and dividual commitments’ (Appuhamilage 2017:13). The political ontology of cricket is no different in balancing individuals against the greater whole, which is then further complicated by the potential system. Drawing from GH Mead, Walker notes that play makes persons both subject and object, and thereby aware of the others they can affect, usually through the concept of the ‘generalized other’ (Walker 2013). Games and sports expand upon play through the use of *roles*, which ‘have a definite relationship to one another; they are organized and rule governed’ (*ibid*:387). Games and sports, unlike pure play, therefore define how persons should behave in various settings, and the number of roles involved means the best hope for sporting success is to internalise and understand all potential roles (*ibid*). Thus, this corpus of knowledge exerts greater influence on the actions of participants than pure play. Walker suggests this encourages ‘an implicit understanding of, and complicity with, the control exerted by society on the individual’ (*Ibid*:387), therefore suggesting that sports teams constrain the individual. This is achieved because roles are perceived as different from the persons themselves, and thus ‘the very idea of taking up a role or occupation that renders one qualitatively different from others presupposes a sense that we are all, on some basic level, “the same.”’ (*Ibid*:393). The greater the emphasis that is placed on ‘playing’ or ‘acting’ a role, as in sport, the more the idea of the abstract individual becomes established. The political ontology of sport therefore allows an ideal of equality to be promoted.

This sense of equality is important because in Sri Lankan cricket, one therefore starts not from a position of difference (ethnicity/religion/caste/class/etc) but a position of sameness (modern citizenship). I suggest that if inequality in cricket is presented ‘based not on biology but on merit’ and therefore that ‘everyone has the same inalienable rights and same basic potential’ (Walker 2013:393) then this is why cricket appeals in a Sri Lankan society which often remains hierarchical and divided. Role becomes not a marker of one’s innate difference, but one’s innate potential. However, as I showed in Chapters 6 and 7, the way role is managed in relation to the team usually minimises individuals, and suggests this emic understanding of ‘potential’ is not necessarily successfully deployed, and cricket cannot provide truly equal agency. The continued *appearance* of this equal agency is what makes cricket problematic. Though persons are conceived of as equal members of a wider whole, it is this ‘supposed equality of opportunity’ (*ibid*:389), which masks true social inequalities. In other words, ‘unequal outcomes are tolerable so long as the fiction of the level playing field is maintained’ (*Ibid*:393). The construction of roles therefore solidifies this understanding and prevents persons from trying to destabilise the system. Essentially, sports provide a sense of agency and opportunity, yet equally encourage participants to anticipate ‘the responses of diversely situated others in a way that generates a sense of the collectivity as constraining’ (*ibid*). Thus, persons come to understand their constraints when deferring to the greater good. In a sense, sport bestows a sense of individual agency while simultaneously erasing it, suggesting it is in many ways a form of neoliberal thought *par excellence*.

This assessment of a ‘sporting cosmology’ suggests that the structures of cricket promote an emphasis on individual responsibility to maintain the needs of the group. As role is the dominant descriptor of relations *between* persons in this sporting cosmology, this shows how individual responsibility to the broader whole is enforced. Roles depend on ‘collective intentionality’ for their very existence (Walker 2013:394), and therefore role is only conceived in terms of fulfilling the collective need. Thus, while the idea of roles enables theoretical equality and therefore appeals in a previously hierarchical society, this comes at the price of excessive focus on individual responsibility. If sports supposedly enable equality yet impose constraint, this suggests why I found such strong tensions between individual desires and group concerns among my interlocutors. Balancing individual desires in a team scenario requires delicate management, as I explored in Chapters 6 and 8. Thus, the cosmology of cricket in Sri

Lanka is affected by the political ontology of modernist sport and the local ideas of a ‘potential system’, both of which suggest change is limited to individual terms. Rather than changing social norms, the emphasis is on the individual to change instead. This has implications for the kinds of social change that cricket might encourage.

Individuals Constrained

I outlined this political ontology at TCC in Section III, explaining how cricketers staunchly encourage individual responsibility to the team, promoting individualism while equally moderating individuality. In Section IV, I illustrated that cricketing discourses reinforce this message. In Chapter 9, I argued that these discourses affect how cricketers approach playing the game. I suggested that players are often caught in a web of contradictions, between the need to play their assigned role, to show the virtues of risk-aversion often associated with cricket, and also be adaptable in order to do their duty for the team. These contradictions put players in a difficult position, and therefore in dealing with them the idea of *control* becomes a valuable tool. Individuals are taught to focus inwards on themselves, to make good decisions and therefore do their best for the group. Thinking with Brownell’s idea of ‘embodied responses’ (1995), it becomes clear that my interlocutors’ own responses in the face of such contradictions was to *control* themselves by limiting their bodily action and therefore some of their own agency. The prominence of control as a response to the conflicting requirements of role and adaptability highlights that dealing with contradiction is often an individual endeavour, and the onus remains on individuals to carry the burden of the wider unit and bear responsibility for any failures. It is no surprise that players sometimes take up their responsibility to the team with reluctance. The sporting cosmology of cricket reinforces that individuals must learn to manage themselves. The combination of political ontology and cricketing discourses suggests that the idea of individual responsibility is therefore constantly internalised.

How players tried to manage these tensions and contradictions suggests that cricketers learn the limits of their own agency. Players knew they may have to submerge individual desires and sacrifice personal gain for the greater good of the team. They also knew of the expectations that cricketing discourses put upon them. As I showed in Chapter 8, cricketers often rhetorically deploy the same cricketing discourses that constrain them for their own purposes,

trying to win better social position through testing. However, such change is often hard won, if achieved at all. The meshing of cricketing discourses and local concepts of role in Sri Lanka sees people given the apparent agency to change their social position, only to be then held in place by others around them. Furthermore, the various contradictory ideas at play mean that individuals are only able to make very small moves in a largely responsive mode, and exert great effort when trying to navigate these social settings. Finally, where social relations did break down, people more instinctively relied on an arbiter for direction than question those relations themselves. People therefore appear to focus more on navigating the social structures they find themselves within. They explore their own social positioning and attempt to manipulate this, but ‘the way things are done’ is rarely questioned. Essentially, within cricket there is excessive emphasis on the individual, yet that individual is often held in place. Therefore, individuals begin to learn the limits of personal change. In sum, through cricket the idea of social constraint was also internalised by my interlocutors.

While this emphasis on social constraint sounds excessively Durkheimian, my point is not that cricketers cannot respond to their constraints, but that these responses remain somewhat limited. Just as Brownell’s ‘embodied responses’ suggests that players draw from a body culture to respond appropriately to action (1995), my interlocutors found creative ways to manage themselves and others, but these often took on similar forms. In Chapter 10 I detailed the life lessons my interlocutors took from cricket. In particular, I showed that as constraint is internalised, my interlocutors focused on navigating social constraints and developing resilience. They focused again inwards onto making better decisions in their lives outside cricket. This can of course be beneficial for social cohesion. If cricket is a space for the safe enactments of difference, then through cricket participants learn how to co-exist with diverse others, forming better responses to the prospect of conflict. In cricket players learn to respond better and more appropriately to tough situations, and this will have benefits for Sri Lankan relations among groups in the post-conflict period. Overall, this understanding of cricket shows why sport is appealing for SDP, and for inculcating a broader sense of change. The cricket arena is a ‘safe’ environment where good values are developed by individuals and life lessons are learned. Sport is usually beneficial, and people can and do change.¹³⁰

¹³⁰ This chimes with the findings of Spaaij & Schulenkorf regarding ‘safe spaces’ (2014).

However, while it is obviously somewhat beneficial, the sense of control that cricket offers over people's lives may simply be an illusion. The tension between individual and collective which has marked so much of my ethnography highlights that individuals tend *only* to focus on what they themselves can do. The kinds of change possible are therefore constrained within the terms of sport. Control becomes 'self' control, leading people to focus inwards on themselves, to focus on navigating life, on changing the self. People focus on the choices they make, whether they chose the right path or were able to stick to it. Failures become framed in terms of an individual's inability to control the situation, on their lack of ability to decide well. Cricket encourages persons to deal with structural constraint by focusing on their own agency, and persons are therefore pushed towards a responsive mode of thinking. In response to their minimisation as individuals, people focus on controlling themselves. So, while rhetorically deployed sporting discourses help individuals change themselves, they do not prompt individuals to question the social system they find themselves within. When questions are asked, these focus on individual agency, rather than structural change. This again shows that cricket is adept at conciliation rather than reconciliation. Lessons learned through cricket help individuals avoid conflict, but do not focus on nor challenge the reasons these conflicts might exist, and therefore do little to prevent the opportunity of future conflict.

There remains excessive focus on individual responsibility in cricket in Sri Lanka, on improving individual responses to constraints rather than challenging those constraints directly. The limits this excessively individual approach can have for enacting structural change is clear in the formulaic approach to cricket within the SDP sphere. In Chapter 11, I outlined that because individuals are believed to do change themselves, emphasis is placed on simply providing more cricket, in the understanding that positive change will happen as a consequence. The ideas of change that are promoted, about journeys, vision and balance are themselves individual focused, with more emphasis on encouraging appropriate navigation and responsibility, rather than changing the terms of social structures. Much like how individuals are understood to be constrained, there was an emphasis on incremental change through a process of re-modelling, rather than true innovation. This tendency towards a formulaic approach and the idea of modelling is problematic in the context of reconciliation. If reconciliation is conceptualised as a journey to be undertaken, then steps to reconciliation may not have been taken more widely in Sri Lanka because the route remains unclear. There

is no past journey which people can copy. So, while the FoG might look for the success stories of individuals, there are limited success stories of reconciliation to find. Importantly, in any formulaic approach to change that attempts (re)modelling change in a slow, iterative manner, keeping things largely the same would have minimal impact on reconciliation. By changing individuals and not the system, change can only ever be incremental. In summary, while I have shown that individuals learn how to change, the social structures individuals interact with are not changed. At present, it is harder to conceive of collective change because of the individual focus of cricket, and ergo the potential of sport for social change is limited. The kinds of thinking that cricket enables tend to maintain social systems rather than change them. Thus far, cricket deployed in this fashion has had limited impact on structural change in Sri Lanka. What is needed is a more imaginative approach to social change, which I explore in the conclusion to this thesis.

Change Constrained

These findings are not necessarily novel. My contention that cricket entails the *safe enactments of difference* is similar to one often argued within the anthropology of sport, that sports support the negotiation of social meaning (Lithman 2004, Besnier et al. 2018). My assertion that a modernist sport like cricket reinforces individual responsibility in a manner akin to how neoliberalism advocates individualism is not radical either. In the context of SDP literature, my findings resonate with the arguments that suggest SDP initiatives tend to promote change at the individual level rather than the social or communal level. However, in bringing these things together, I have shown how this excessive individual focus is largely due to the political ontology of sport itself. I have not merely shown that sports encourage an individual focus, but highlighted why this is so. Rather than merely reconfirm findings that SDP activities centred on utilising mainstream sports tend only to promote personal change, I have highlighted why these limits exist. I have therefore responded to the various calls by scholars that SDP contexts must be analysed at a more granular level (Lindsey et al. 2017, Spaaij & Schulenkorf 2021). Yet in doing this I have remained aware this granular level must incorporate an appropriate sense of scale, and used a framework inspired by MacIntyre's Virtue Ethics to link together practice, narration and moral tradition (2007[1981]). I have assessed how sporting discourses are employed at this granular level by individuals, then tied the subsequent negotiation of these concepts back 'up' to the level of grand ideas, thereby showing how sporting discourse and

sporting practice are intertwined. Thus, this has illustrated more abstract theoretical ideas about sport like the political ontology in action, thereby elucidating concepts that are rarely interrogated by the persons who employ them. By situating the deployment of sporting discourses within social relations themselves, I have been able show how these concepts play out in the everyday, enabling me to assess how the structures of sport constrain such relations.

A key finding of this thesis is therefore that sports constrain the terms of the change that they make possible. The political ontology of cricket contains the idea of the abstract individual. This promotes an ideal of equality and individual agency that sees cricketers believe in their own capacity to change their lives. However, in my ethnography I have shown that such positive cricketing discourses are used to constrain and limit as much as they empower. As the sporting cosmology of cricket sees the relationship between the abstract individual and the abstract whole prioritised, it has little to say about the relations between people. In the context of the team, ideas of equality and meritocracy are then mobilised to present a unified whole, in the process requiring individuals to limit their own agency for the greater good. The idea of the team is managed, and so too the individuals within them. As players feel constrained by others, they focus on the change they can make in themselves, and thus change itself is constrained. Because sport creates abstract individuals, while it enables change, this is usually on a personal level. Individuals are minimised by the same logics by which they receive greater agency. Though sports contribute to ideas about change, these ideas tend not to promote structural change. Cricketers are encouraged to focus on navigating their constraints and do learn valuable things, like searching for opportunities to test themselves, to focus on making good decisions, and that sometimes things remain outside of their control. Because cricket promotes personal development and makes good persons, people consequently think cricket is good for social change. Furthermore, because it is clearly good for conciliation, enabling people to get along with each other, the overall picture of sport seems positive. And yet, while cricketing discourses promote individual agency and change, these discourses essentially ensure things stay largely the same. Thinking about the cricket team purely as a social institution, sports are used for social regulation as much as they are for individual change. As people think about navigating their social constraints rather than challenging them, cricket perpetuates the status quo.

In a sense, sports are hegemonic. By perpetuating a discourse that emphasises the primacy of the group over the individual, sport reduces the capacity for changing social structures. In essence, if one tries to change society with a phenomenon such as sport, change is only made in the terms of that form of sport, and the capacity for change is drastically limited. So, while people think cricket is good, it is merely promoting neoliberal discourses about individualism and self-modification, and a personal responsibility to the wider whole. This is what makes sport flawed as a tool of ‘doing’ social change. For as long as sport focuses on individual sameness, it will still practice inequality. This shows the constraints of modernist and neoliberal thought more broadly, and the issue of trying to use phenomena like cricket to enact social change in the present moment. This individual focus suggests quite explicitly that sport cannot automatically do social change at a systemic level. But perhaps it is impossible – within the terms of sport – to even envisage systemic change. Sports are not intrinsically bad, but it remains hard to use them for change when they are so hegemonic. All of these points suggest that while team sports predominate in SDP scenarios, presumably because of their promotion of collective values, they realistically have little utility in fostering collective change. Ergo – and this is extremely important for SDP and reconciliation – the kinds of change that cricket might promote are largely constrained.

To summarise, by providing persons the capacity for individual change, cricket seems also to negate the possibility of structural change. Positive change does happen on an individual level, but to make better use of Sport for Development and Peace, to encourage true structural change, one would have to change sports, particularly team sports. As Carter et al. suggest, taking an active political stance and transforming sport is the critical next step (2018). As scholars we must avoid reproducing hegemonic modes of thinking within sport, and challenge the power dynamics present in order to change them (*ibid*). In a similar vein, many in the SDP sphere globally have modified sport in their activities to focus on structural change (Coalter 2010, Darnell et al. 2019), but I argue that mainstream sport could have far greater impact if it is transformed, and will remain hegemonic unless challenged. If one wanted to truly improve the impact of SDP, then one should change the very terms of sport itself. If it remains the same, the political cosmology of sport will ensure change is constrained and only happens on individual terms. If sports do indeed drastically limit the scope of change, then future analysis must rest on working with the terms of sports, if not shifting the paradigms altogether.

SECTION V CONCLUSION

REFLECTIONS ON CRICKET AS INTERVENTION

In this thesis I have shown that cricket is flawed as a potential intervention in post-conflict states. The hegemonic force of sport as a social phenomenon tends to perpetuate social stasis rather than encourage social change. Sports reduce the capacity to fully envisage new futures. In terms of the relationship between cricket and reconciliation, it is clear that cricket can be useful for conciliation, but does not provide an environment to challenge social systems and inequalities, thereby promoting reconciliation. If my conclusion is that sport must be transformed, then the question remains: is it possible to transform sport? In my ethnography, I have shown that ritual phenomena like cricket often constrain our thinking. By opening things up for social experimentation, only to close them down again at the end, rituals provide lessons and change the status of individuals, but also regulate and reinforce the social structure. In terms of change more broadly, this suggests attempting to use a ritual-based phenomenon to try and enact change is problematic. If our thinking becomes ritualistic in form, with opening up and closing down, this doesn't necessarily enable social change. My findings about cricket also highlight the issue of trying to make change in the neoliberal age. While these kinds of social phenomena are enticing to those hoping for change precisely because they fit the individual focus of neoliberalism, they then constrain the ability to change that system. Essentially, ritualistic social phenomena inform people how to deal with society, not change it. Simply put, it is hard to imagine the terms of change through these ritualistic phenomena, especially sport. Transforming sport going forward will therefore require a greater reflexivity, and awareness of how sporting ideas are constructed. These findings may also have ramifications for anthropology as a discipline, as it continues to wrestle with the complexities of presentation, the problem of prediction and the desire to decolonise thought. Such efforts will stall unless the terms of change are challenged. Sport reflects a broader problem: how to escape hegemonic modes of thinking.

The issue with transforming sports is that their power to enact change is derived from their false position. Much anthropological critique – including my own – has shown how sports are social phenomena tightly situated in their local contexts. Yet, it is precisely the characterisation

of being ‘outside’ society that gives sport its apparent agency for change. It appears better equipped to comment on society as it is often conceived in opposition to it. It is precisely the myth of sport, the veneer of egalitarianism, and fair play that gives sport a capacity to do change. So, while this ‘outside’ position is erroneously conceived, it is this idea along with the myth of sanctity that makes sport an enticing social institution. As I illustrated earlier, persons do become adept at deploying cricketing discourse for their own means. Then, it became obvious that the restriction of individuals is part of what improves them. Persons became better through the constraints they experienced playing cricket. The idea of testing and the development of resistance is part of the power of sport to make individual change happen. The greater the structural constraints, the greater the individual agency. Sport at least provides the tools to develop this agency. So, while these cricketing discourses promote the ‘myth of cricket’, this extended metaphorical complex still seems to engender personal change. Essentially, though sport limits the kinds of change possible, it would not have much power or appeal without this outside orientation or mythic ideals.

Without seeking to reify the modernist perspective I have critiqued throughout this thesis, I argue that this broader comment on structure and agency suggests why sport has such persuasive power in a neoliberal world, for it provides the means for individuals to develop their agency. If change is mostly individual, then structural change will happen, at a slow and almost imperceptible scale. But does this have to be the case? Taking the idea that sports cannot envisage their own change, I argue the next move is to think seriously about how the ideas ‘outside’ society move back to the ‘inside’. The key to modifying sport to do structural change may lay in assessing the relationship between structure and agency. If ideas cycle between ‘inside’ and ‘outside’ society, then can we change sport to affect this loop? Can we use sports to make regular persons aware of the constructedness of their social conditions? In other words: how might ritual phenomena be modified to inculcate more critical human beings? This will require even greater assessment of how sporting ideas are developed and transmitted at a variety of scales. In a similar yet more radical vein, an alternative solution to the problem of change would be to take an approach which actively challenges the status quo. The concept of ‘irreconciliation’ (Mookherjee 2022) for example provides a different approach to reconciliation, a refusal to close down things and end the encounter, a striving for reducing inequalities and not settling. Such an idea is similar to both ‘multi-modality’ and ‘negative’

anthropology, approaches which seek to destabilise the production of anthropological knowledge. In multi-modality various media are juxtaposed to introduce resonances that are greater than the sum of their parts (Dattatreyan & Marrero-Guillamón 2019), while ‘negative’ anthropology involves an anti-positivist stance whereby one examines ‘traces’, which convey a sense of trajectory over time (Navaro 2020). All three provide a more nuanced way of exploring change over time and establish a sense of the future which is less constrained. In summary, further analysis of sport, including the modes of thinking it generates is needed in order to appropriately transform it.

If sport cannot be transformed, is there an alternative? In my epigraph, O’Neill’s narrator Hans suggests ‘I cannot be the first to wonder if what we see, when we see men in white take to a cricket field, is men imagining an environment of justice’ (O’Neill 2009). Throughout this thesis, I have highlighted the moral imagination at work in sporting encounters. When considering cricket and reconciliation, I have illustrated that although players may not think of reconciliation per se, they do imagine a broader spirit of collectivity, along with something that resembles this ‘environment of justice’. Yet also thinking in these terms, if men imagine justice, then I have shown that this justice is rarely delivered. Though equality and meritocracy is promised, this is often hard won, if gained at all. Furthermore, true justice would involve breaking down social systems, yet equally cricket does not do this. If it is not possible to change the ontological premises of sport and transform it, then perhaps considering the moral imagination of cricket I have described, the question might be: how do we fully realise an ‘environment of justice’? Similar to transforming sport, this also requires careful examination of the structures of sport and the social organisation they promote. Making people more aware of the relations sports enable could prompt them to challenge the ideals of sport and fight for a more just system. Though cricket might only really enable conciliation, not reconciliation, perhaps through sport an environment can be created that is truly just; an environment where persons realise the constraints that hold them ought to be challenged. Though it might be hard to currently envisage change through sport, the first step can and should be to educate people about how problematic and restrictive sport can be. In doing so, those same people might learn just how constrictive everyday society is too. Though at present cricket has limited effect on reconciliation in Sri Lanka, highlighting these inadequacies may encourage cricketers to fight so that an environment of justice is truly realised.

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