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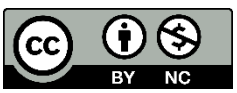

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A Critical Discourse Analysis of Ethnographic Fictions on Sri Lankan Cricket with Reference to Nationalism and Neoliberalism

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Abstract

This paper is based on a Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) of two popular books published on Sri Lankan cricket. The two books studied are Shehan Karunatilaka's Chinaman (2011) and Roshan Mahanama's My Innings (2021). This paper aims to examine the representation of cricket with reference to nationalism and neoliberalism in Chinaman and My Innings. We argue that a comparative reading of Chinaman and My Innings as text, discursive practice, and social practice illustrates the mutual entanglement of nationalism and neoliberalism in the sociological fabric of cricket. The two texts illustrate that the entwining of nationalism and neoliberalism functions as an an 'Ideological-Discursive Formation' which has predominant meaning making potential in the discourse on cricket. Our analysis reveals that the representation of this 'Ideological-Discursive Formation' serves distinct purposes in each text. The intermingling of neoliberalism and nationalism is naturalised in My Innings, whereas it is deconstructed and critiqued in Chinaman. Moreover, this paper demonstrates the manner in which sociological issues can be analysed and researched through "sports" as well as through literary works based on sports.

Keywords: chinaman, cricket, karunatilaka, mahanama, nationalism, neoliberalism

Introduction

Cricket is a popular cultural activity in Sri Lanka. Sri Lanka has earned international accolades in cricket in two major global events, namely, the 1996 One Day International World cup and the 2014 Twenty 20 World Cup, both of which events the country won. Apart from these two achievements, Sri Lanka has been one of the dominant countries in Asian cricket, winning the Asian Championship six times as well as many bilateral and triangular series. This paper is an amalgamation of sociology, critical discourse studies and sports literature and aims to evaluate cricket from a decolonial perspective in alignment with the theoretical view that decolonisation is a dialogue with the colonial past where complexities and ambiguities are nowhere more evident than in the vicissitudes of cricket in the former colonies (Appadurai cited in Perera, 2007, p.83). Its textual basis stems from two ethnographic literary works that belong to the genres of fiction and non-fiction. The books selected are Shehan Karunatilaka's *Chinaman: The Legend of Pradeep Mathew* (2011) (hereinafter referred to as *Chinaman*) and Roshan Mahanama's *My Innings: Roshan Mahanama Retired Hurt to the Best View of the Game* (2021) (hereinafter referred to as *My Innings*). We argue that decolonised cricket is in dialogue with its colonial past, specifically in its transformation from an elitist amateur pastime to a paid profession. In critiquing the two books, we observe a strong nexus between nationalism and neoliberalism, which is naturalised in *My Innings* but deconstructed in *Chinaman*. Cricket was introduced to Ceylon by British colonial administrators in the 19th century. As a result of its colonial legacy, before the 1980s or 1970s, cricket was considered a cultural practice that belonged to the elites. The selection of a team and the performance of cricketers, therefore, were associated with elitism. However, in the mid-1980s, cricket was attributed with a sense of

professionalism and commercialism (Biyanwila, 2007, p.141). In 1982, Sri Lanka received Test cricket status. Thereafter, Sri Lankan cricket reached its pinnacle of success with the 1996 World Cup victory. It became a historical cricket match played in the eyes of the world. There were more international cricket spectacles where victories were won, for example when Sri Lanka emerged as joint winners of the Champions Trophy (2002), semifinalists in the Cricket World Cup (2003), runners up in the Cricket World Cup (2007) and (2011), and champions in the Twenty20 World Cup (2014). As a result of the recognition received as a cricketing giant, Sri Lanka produced cricket stars like Ranjan Madugalle, Roshan Mahanama, Aravinda de Silva, Arjuna Ranatunga, Muttiah Muralitharan, Sanath Jayasuriya, Kumar Sangakkara, Chaminda Vass, Kumar Dharmasena, Mahela Jayawardene and Rangana Herath who became highly popular among global cricket fans.

Roshan Mahanama's autobiography published in 2021 is a new version of the book entitled *Mahanama Retired Hurt* (2001) which he co-authored with the Australian sportswriter Ken Piesse. The new edition in 2021 was published incorporating his experiences as an International Cricket Council (ICC) match referee. *Chinaman* was the first novel written by Shehan Karunatilaka who won multiple international awards for the book, including the Commonwealth Literature Prize for the best book in 2011. Furthermore, both books have been translated into Sinhala for the Sri Lankan wider readership.

Ethnographic Fictions

Our point of departure in this paper is to consider the two selected texts as ethnographic fictions embedded with the ethnographic impulses and social realities documented in them. This theorisation is borrowed from

Perera-Rajasingham's seminal work *Assembling Ethnicities in Neoliberal Times: Ethnographic Fictions and Sri Lanka's War* (2022). By framing the two texts as ethnographic fictions, the study positions them at contrasting points along the continuum of ethnographic fiction. *Chinaman*, as an ethnographic fiction, showcases creative writing as a medium of representation and mimesis. *My Innings* represents memoir/impressionistic writing where the protagonist, Roshan Mahananama, cognizes social reality as a travel writer. According to Perera-Rajasingham, coupling ethnography with fiction is a way of arguing that the truth is presented 'through the use of imagination and within specific historical contexts' (Perera-Rajasignham, 2022, p.10). She also theorises that:

> Ethnographic fictions can and do function as regulating apparatuses, as dream machines that participate in nationalist patriotic projects or sell neoliberalism as the good life. Yet, in other instances, such fictions function to critically interrogate, bear witness, and make meaning of otherwise terrifying and confounding forces such as war, nationalism, racism, race and global capitalism (Perera-Rajasingham, 2022, p.10).

We identify that neoliberalism and nationalism reinforce each other in discourses on cricket in Sri Lanka and we read this entwinement as an Ideological Discursive Formation (IDF) (Fairclough, 2013). Ideological Discursive Formations could be understood as a critical element in a discourse which contain language, power and ideologies within a certain societal structure that, over the passage of time, would be 'normalised' through the intervention of oppressive forces that disadvantage minority and oppressed groups. These Ideological Discursive Formations would

eventually help realise and shape social realities. A key characteristic of an IDF is its capacity to naturalise ideologies by representing them as 'common sense,' which hides their ideological power (Fairclough, 2013, p.30).

Chinaman as a work of imaginative literature functions as a regulating apparatus that deconstructs the mutual entanglement of nationalism and neoliberalism, whereas *My Innings* naturalises it. The naturalisation of social realities which takes place in *My Innings* is viewed critically in *Chinaman.* This helps the reader to further engage with the novel in the critical space available in order to interpret it freely. Thus, room is created for further negotiations in the illusionary /imaginative space of the fiction, as opposed to the realistic narrative space of the former work of non-fiction. Even though these two books are located at distinct positions on the broader spectrum of ethnographic fiction, they become key reference points in researching the literature on Sri Lankan cricket, covering a crucial era when it was transformed from a non-commodity to a commodity. As Mahanama elaborates in *My Innings*, 'there was hardly any money in the game to the time when payments increased substantially' (Mahanama, 2021, p.61). Memory becomes a key mode of communication that enables the characters /readers to engage in a more rational dialogue to interpret the nexus between nationalism and neoliberalism meaningfully. This reflects one of the key characteristics of ethnographic fiction; that they can be read as dialogic texts rather than as closed systems of knowledge (Perera-Rajasingham, 2022, p.12).

> Remembering is active and continual; it is personal, political, emotional and relational. Memory is also a destination, a place we inhabit or revisit in order to question or reflect the

> meaning of the past. Thus, memory is inquiry (Bochner cited in Davis and Ellis, 2008 p.114).

Mahanama's autobiography is an inquiry which cross-examines the past based on his sociological perspectives on cricket, which consolidates its function as an ethnographic quest. Furthermore, ethnographic narrative is an approach used in sociology in which stories let the reader or researcher understand life from a human point of view and help the readers see people as human beings and their lives within a framework they value as meaning or significance (Bochner and Freeman cited in Davis and Ellis, 2008, p.102) *Chinaman* can also be identified as an ethnographic fiction since Karunatilaka's work is a re-imagination of the history of Sri Lankan cricket within the larger postcolonial history of Sri Lanka/Ceylon through the narratorial voice of W.G. Karunasena, an alcoholic sports journalist. Karunasena is engaged in fieldwork to find the 'greatest cricketer this country has ever produced' (Karunatilaka, 2011, p.163). A researcher who engages in ethnographic fiction writes fictional episodes from the third point of view based solely on his/her experiences through fieldwork or personal experiences, creating introspective emotions shared between the researcher, the study participants and characters in his/her story (Davis and Ellis, 2008, p.104). Similarly, Karunatilaka conducts the reader through W.G. Karunasena's ethnographic quest and it is this alcoholic journalist's voice that validates Karunatilaka's criticism of the mutual entanglement of nationalism and neoliberalism within the sociological fabric of cricket. There is a pun based on the similarity between the name of the narrator and the author, where the familiarity between the authorial quest and the narratorial inquiry to find the truth also becomes a literary technique used by the writer to fuse truth with fiction. Unlike *Chinaman*, *My Innings* does

not criticise nationalism overtly, and it fails to acknowledge that ethnonationalism often masquerades as nationalism. It soft-pedals the consequences of neoliberalism, specifically of the 1977 neoliberal economic policies. Mahanama identifies himself as a key cricket player whose career was cut short by 'premature retirement' due to party-political inference in cricket administration, particularly after the 1999 World Cup. However, his critique remains limited to institutional dysfunction as he does not question how broader, national-level political structures or ethnonationalist agendas influence the sociology of cricket.

Research Method

This study utilises Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) both as an approach as well as a method to evaluate power and knowledge in modes of ideological representation of cricket within the context of ethnographic fictions. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) is employed as the method of analysis in this paper since the language used in the two selected texts is analysed according to Fairclough's three-dimensional approach. This approach focuses on language as text, discursive practice and social practice (Statham, 2022, p.22). Statham posits that these three levels correspond with description, interpretation and explanation. Description refers to certain text level characteristics such as lexical choices, pronouns and metaphors and grammatical features. Interpretation specifies the way texts are produced, distributed and consumed. Explanation refers to the social context of the text and how the text interacts with ideologies and power relations in society (Statham, 2022, pp. 21-22). The theoretical perspectives on the nexus between neoliberalism and nationalism are taken from Nimanthi Perera-Rajasingham's seminal work *Assembling Ethnicities in Neoliberal Times: Ethnographic Fictions and Sri Lanka's War* (2022),

which argues that a new racial order or racial discrimination was triggered with the introduction of neoliberal economic policies in Sri Lanka. The selection of texts, *Chinaman* as a creative fiction and *My Innings* as a memoir, do not jeopardise the validity of CDA, traditionally and predominantly used to analyse authentic texts. Literary theories such as 'Russian Formalism' argue that discourse studies should not be limited exclusively to the analysis of authentic texts. For example, van Dijk argues that even though there are important differences in the methods used by scholars who study forms of language, literature, and discourse, a rich tradition originated around 1965 which challenged the classical boundaries between literary and non-literary genres of discourse (van Dijk, 1985, pp.2-3). Epistemologically, this study aligns with such an interdisciplinary CDA approach.

Neoliberalism

Sports and the 'spirit' of competition have been identified as a major carrier of neoliberal ideology (Maquesee cited in Westall, 2019, p.114). Researchers who have studied cricket from a sociological perspective argue that cricket has always had a commercial affiliation to it (Dunham and Jayasuriya, 2007, p.33). This must also be analysed against the functions of neoliberalism. For example, Harvey theorises that neoliberal economic policies aim to restore and reconstruct the power of economic elites (Harvey cited in Perea-Rajasingham, 2022, p.19). Neoliberal economic policies are reflected in the two texts with their references to the discourse on the popularisation of one-day cricket, specifically with the introduction of the 50 over format by the Australian media owner Kerry Packer in the late 1970s (Dunham and Jayasuriya, 2007, p.33). According to Dunham and Jayasuriya, what interested the

public, who later became ardent cricket fans, was its 'product marketability' (2007, p.33). This paper will demonstrate how this 'product marketability' is systematically constructed using nationalism (more pointedly, ethnonationalism) as a legitimising instrument. Similarly, Dunham and Jayasuriya argue that cricket became one of the best commodities that functioned as 'packaged mass entertainment' in a period when the world was looking for a huge boost in consumer demands (Dunham and Jayasuriya, 2007, p.33).Therefore, the two texts become iconic ethnographic fictions, each examining the introduction and consequences of Sri Lanka's 1977 neoliberal economic reforms through the lens of cricket. The transformation of cricket from an elite amateur activity into a neoliberal commodity also mirrors how the fabric of sociology, not just cricket, was reshaped under a new economic order. The two texts as social practice explain the saturation of the social fabric of cricket with neoliberal practices. As an ethnographic fiction, *Chinaman* exemplifies the intersection between illegal markets and cricket that took place on multiple occasions. One of the best illustrations in the text is the fictitious character called Innocent Emmanuel Kugarajah, the notorious prisoner who is represented as a mediator between the L.T.T.E. and the Sri Lankan government. Kugarajah is the best example of 'shadow activities' as exemplified by Perera-Rajasingham in her book. She cites Manuel Castells's argument on shadow economic activities in the article entitled 'Global Criminal Economy' in his book *End of Millennium* (2010). Castells argues that such shadow activities include the adaptation of 'IMF-inspired export-oriented, growth policies', and earning money through such illicit activities which is 'globalised through their laundering via global financial markets' (Castells cited in Perera-Rajasingham, 2022, p.90). Mahanama too endorses the saturation of neoliberalism within the social fabric of

cricket: He likens the International Cricket Council (ICC) to a corporate entity, arguing that the ICC's practices mirror the logic and imperatives of a neoliberal economy, reflecting such practices as prioritising market efficiency, engaging in commercial expansion and exercising centralised control. For example, Mahanama highlights how 'adjustments to remuneration too were based on one's performance rating' during ICC events (Mahanama, 2021, p.337), which underscores the fact that the ICC is characterised by corporate practices and principles. Biyanwila's perspectives (2007) in his article 'Cricket Mania, Men, and Politics' help the reader understand that 'professional cricket is about a money economy where the players are financially remunerated for their labour, legitimising and promoting corporate and capitalist interests' (2007, p.104). One other instance of neoliberal effects at play was Mahanama's resistance towards extending the boundary ropes further back, which he clearly identifies as a manipulation of the rules of the game in favour of the owners of the T10 tournament (held in the United Arab Emirates in 2019) in expectation of commercial gain (Mahanama, 2021, p.346). This is a perfect example of the modification of rules to transform the game for the benefit of mass audiences in order to provide a more spectacular view, and the choice of commercialisation over professionalism to please global television audiences. It is within this globalised project that one must locate *Chinaman'*s Innocent Emmanuel Kugarajah's involvement with cricket in the form of match fixing. Kugarajah admits that he fixed the First Test match in1992 between Australia and Sri Lanka: 'Was the 1992 Aussie Test fixed? *That, uncle, is a very long story'* (Karunatika, 2011, 316). Karunatilaka's use of italics coupled with the phrase 'long story' is a meronymy for all capitalistic references to Sri Lankan cricket. Mahanama exemplifies one such instance when he documents Aravinda de Silva's

obsession with American motor cars: 'Ari loved the big American motor cars, the Chevvies and Pontiacs. He is always buying and selling them back at home' (Mahanama, 2021, p.171). 'Home' carries negative connotations in *Chinaman,* since it is a space filled with ethnonational rhetoric which discriminates against minority communities. In addition, Aravinda de Silva's commercial trading of 'Chevvies and Pontiacs' also reflects 'capitalist desire' as theorised by Todd McGowan in his seminal work *Capitalism and Desire: The Psychic Cost of Free Markets* (2016). McGowan argues that "a commodity does not fulfil a natural need, but a desire distorted by the signifier — a desire that emerges through the signifier's distortion of animality" (2016, p.23). Aravinda de Silva has become a cultural metaphor due to his pivotal role in the nation's historic 1996 Cricket World Cup victory. This phenomenon has "enormous commercial mileage in the idea of minnows or underdogs winning" (Dunham and Jayasuriya, 2007, p.34). Therefore, Aravinda de Silva's trading of 'Chevvies and Pontiacs' is a foundational trope of neoliberal ideology which demonstrates how a 'national hero' becomes a 'branded commodity'. In *Chinaman*, it is the same Kugarajah who informs Pradeep Mathew that 'being Tamil, he needed to be ten times as good' (Karunatilaka, 2011, p.311) to be selected to the Sri Lankan national cricket team. Therefore, the match-fixing scene is represented in *Chinaman* as a vengeful response or resistance to the racial prejudices that are prevalent within the sports administration that selects the Sri Lankan cricket team. This is further consolidated by Karunatilaka when he hints that Kugarajah fixed the match through Pradeep Mathew. The reader should be aware of the cultural and sociological context of this phenomenon. Karunatilaka may have been inspired to fictionalise this scene after researching the sentiments of the diasporic Tamil community who cannot make themselves to support

the Sri Lankan national cricket team. One such well-known instance is a comment made by Lawrence Thilakar, a Paris-based spokesperson for the LTTE, as documented by Qadri Ismail.

> All Tamils in the North and East love cricket. It's part of their lives in school. All the school children love cricket and football… I cannot wish Australia to win. At the same time, it is difficult to wish Sri Lanka to win (Thilaka cited in Ismail, 2007, p.54).

This representation also becomes a political statement made by Karunatilaka on how hegemonic, Sinhalese narratives appropriate sports victories as part of their own propaganda. Karunatilaka's attempt, therefore, is not just to represent match fixing or spot fixing allegations in Sri Lankan cricket discourse, but also to throw light on the entanglement of ethnonationalism and neoliberalism.

The representation of nationalism and neoliberalism is also closely associated with party politics in both texts. Political support from political parties is freely given to cricket. Dunham and Jayasuriya identify that politicians use cricket as a tool by supplying a potent political opiate to exert control over a highly lucrative industry (Dunham and Jayasurya, 2007, p.35). One of the most prominent examples of political intervention in cricket is recorded in *My Innings* when Mahanama was dropped from the 1999 Cricket World Cup team. Mahanama notes that his exclusion from the team became a national issue since he was even summoned to the Sports Ministry.

> Sports Minister SB Dissanayake also asked me to see him and said I should be sent to England to join the National Squad, bringing an end to the public outcry. He said that he had no peace with letters and numerous phone calls coming into his office (Mahanama, 2021, p.222)

Chinaman is subtle and oblique when discussing acts of political intervention. The Minister who is represented in *Chinaman* is a stark contrast to one possessing the elitist, colonial values associated with cricket: 'The minister had done much for Sri Lankan cricket. He had built stadiums, brought in outstation players, and set up coaching clinics. He hoped to rise up party ranks on the wave of cricket. And he knew you couldn't rise to the top by being a gentleman' (Karunatilaka, 2011, p.416). *Chinaman's* representation of the minister resonates with the gentleman vs. player narrative which was quite popular in the political discourse of post-colonial Ceylon. However, this representation locates this particular minister within the 'lumpen proletariat' or the 'players' who were never accepted as equal members within the political fraternity of the UNP as a result of major class and caste differences (Dunham and Jayasuriya, 2007, p.38). This proves how cricket becomes one of the ideological state apparatuses (Althusser, 1971) and how it is used as an ideological tool in the process of interpellation in support of political regimes. It is interesting to see how emerging politicians are associated in the novel with entrepreneurial values in the form of benevolent patrons with wealth newly amassed through neoliberal means. Dunham and Jayasuriya identify this nouveau riche class as a 'confident, highly successful and extremely aggressive Sinhalese sensationalist entrepreneurial class with a strong lumpen base' (Dunham and Jayasuriya, 2007, p.38). Dunham and

Jayasuriya's comparison of cricket to an opiate becomes a perfect metaphor to illustrate the social fabric of cricket that intersects neoliberalism and ethnonationalism. Spectators as part of a larger national project need to be drugged constantly by the success stories associated with cricket; once this 'opiate' loses its effect, people start to act aggressively. Mahanama bears testimony to such violence, and he records them in *My Innings* with a heavy heart: 'Our so-called national flag bearer, Lionel, even threatened me after one such practice session' (Mahanama, 2021, p.109). Both examples in *Chinaman* and *My Innings* cement the nexus between nationalism and neoliberalism.

Nationalism and Ethnonationalism

Nationalism is a key concept explored by theorists and critics who have researched the sociological aspects of cricket extensively. Some researchers who have examined nationalism as a theme in Sri Lankan cricket are Janaka Biyanwila, Qadri Ismail, Michael Roberts, Suvendrini Perera, Harshana Rambukwella and Jayadeva Uyangoda. Intertextual links that revolve around the representation of nationalism and ethnonationalism (nationalism configured by ethnicity) in *Chinaman* and *My Innings* are largely connected with the assumption that cricket is a critical identity marker of South Asians. Appadurai points out that for an Indian male, viewing cricket is rooted in the bodily pleasure of playing or imagining playing cricket (Appadurai, 1995, p.20). School is represented in both texts as a vital identity marker that influences a cricketer's career and impacts the critical decisions that shape such a career: 'Another batsman upset by sledging was a pudgy little *Anandian* who was one day to become the *captain'* (Karunatilaka, 2011, p.377- emphasis ours). Karunatilaka subtly insinuates the connection between the school and the captaincy. Any study

on nationalism related to Sri Lankan cricket should consider the dominance of certain schools over larger cricketing hierarchies and selections. Roberts (2011) identifies allegiance to one's old school as one of the four lines of favouritism that bears on selections to cricket teams. Cricket was earlier played only in Colombo-based schools and was restricted to social elites. Mahanama identifies hierarchical distinctions even among schools in Colombo, claiming that players like Aravinda de Silva from D.S. Senanayake College were not as fortunate as Mahanama himself, since emerging schools were not assigned a full season's matches with other schools, whereas already established schools such as Ananda and Nalanda (Mahanama's school) were (Mahanama, 2021, p.18). Nationalist consciousness in schools is a topic with scope for another, separate research project, and yet, this reference, together with Mahanama's positive representation of Buddhist schools and their contribution to the development of cricket is an illustration of the transition of power from Westernised schools in Colombo to schools in the periphery such as those in Moratuwa, Kandy, Amabalangoda and Galle (Roberts, 2011, p.92). Michael Roberts argues that the power Westernised schools had on cricket was not a mere coincidence but was caused by the 'transmitting of good practices from one cohort of boys to those cohorts behind them as *Cricketing capital'* (Roberts, 2011, p.62). The power garnered by schools such as Ananda and Nalanda as cricketing centres replacing Western/Christian schools had resulted due to the political reversal of 1956 (Roberts, 2011, p.63). Michael Roberts posits that the transition of power from the elites to the proletariat class reaches its climax with Sanath Jayasuriya's (a player who emerged from the peripheral town of Matara) ascendance to captaincy.

In Analysing *Chinaman* and *My Innings* as discursive practice, the intertextual links mark a subtle and sometimes obscure line between truth and fantasy. The blurred lines between fact and fantasy are interesting and challenging facets of all ethnographic fictions, used in improvising to fill in gaps in knowledge regarding social interactions among members of society. These blurred lines also reflect the social ruptures that cannot be captured through discourses such as journalistic essays which are ideologically geared to protect the existing power hierarchies. Roberts argues that many journalistic essays are political acts (Roberts, 2011, p.1). Specifically, popular media platforms such as newspaper articles, documentaries, and TV programmes do not capture the fault lines caused by nationalism and neoliberalism.

At the textual level, there are differences between *Chinaman* and *My Innings* in terms of their representation of nationalism and ethnonationalism. The idiomatic expression 'Ado, Silva. As a Tamil I have to become ten times better than the Sinhala spinner' (Karunatilaka, 2011, 234) serves as the thematic bedrock of *Chinaman*. *My Innings* refrains from such overtly vitriolic condemnation of nationalism. The alienation of Tamils from the Sri Lankan national cricket team reflects the political gulf between Sri Lankan Tamils and mainstream Sinhalese in the political climate that existed in the country from the mid-1970s onwards, which prompted even young Tamils residing in the southern and western regions to lose interest in cricket (Roberts, 2005, p.135) However, Michael Roberts argues that allegations on racial prejudices within cricket are 'malicious lies' or due to 'colossal ignorance' of the changes that happened in the domestic cricket scene since the 1980s (Roberts, 2011, p.93). As an ethnographic fiction, *Chinaman's* representation of nationalism has strong links with neoliberalism: 'He told Kuga of how the Sinhalese mob had

nearly turned his father's *bakery* into cinders in '83' (Karunatilaka, 2011, p.293). Perera-Rajasingham argues that implementation of neoliberalism from 1977 has exacerbated, reignited and channeled the pathways of nationalism and violence (Perera-Rajasingham, 2022, p.18). Therefore, *Chinaman* provides strong literary reference for the fact that ethnic violence has close ties to neoliberalism. A critical reader is tempted to compare Mathew's story with that of Muttiah Muralitharan, a cricketer of Malaiyaha Tamil origin whose father ran a small factory and could afford to educate his sons at St Anthony's College, Kandy (Roberts, 2005, p.135). It is possible to draw parallels between this scene and Roberts' analysis (1994) of the 1915 riots between the Sinhalese and Muslims (which the historian identifies as a pogrom launched against the Moors) due largely to the 'hostility of the Sinhala villagers against the ubiquitous Moor traders' (Roberts, 1994, p.190). In both cases where violence was unleashed, it is, ironically, the capitalist symbols that were attacked by the 'Sinhalese mob'. Whether this is pure coincidence or intentional, we can read this literary example as a demonstration of the violent consequences of the strong nexus between nationalism and neoliberalism.

Even though *Chinaman* configures such racial discriminations with authority, *My Innings'*s treatment of such racial codifications can be read as an 'alleged atrocity'. An 'alleged atrocity' is a biased or fictionalised representation which can cause negative sociological relations such that people's lives are increasingly shaped by representations which are produced elsewhere (Fairclough, 2013, p.549). Roberts identifies the modality of dangerous and malicious stories about the 'alleged atrocity' perpetrated by the 'Enemy Other', a theory well documented by Kannangara, Roberts, Vittachi and Silva (Roberts, 2011, p.94). Such stories of 'alleged atrocity' transform ordinary individuals into assailants (Roberts,

2011, p.94). In *My Innings*, the violent consequences of the intertwining of nationalism and neoliberalism are attributed to 'rumours'. One such 'rumour' is well documented in *My Innings* after the Test defeat of Sri Lanka by Australia in 1992: 'A few within the earshot of our dressing rooms stated accusing us of taking money and losing the game purposely… Such rumours are malicious' (Mahanama, 2021, p.93). Mahanama connects the dots by exemplifying the magnitude of the effect of such 'rumours'; the reversal of the 'national hero' and 'branded commodity' into an 'Enemy Other'. He narrates the story of Asanka Gurusinha, whose house in Colombo was stoned during a series in Sharjah in 1994. It is also interesting to notice how Mahanama responds to Gurusingha's emigration:

> But I love Sri Lanka more. It is my home. It will always be. According to the Buddhist philosophy which I believe in high esteem, I believe that if your time is up, it does not matter where you are. You will have to go consistent with the Karmic forces. (Mahanama, 2021, p.52)

Ismail argues that as ideology, Sinhala nationalism acts often in the name of the country, and that that ideology tries to pass for Sri Lankan nationalism (Ismail, 2007, 49). Ismail's theorisation of Sinhala nationalism as ideology has roots in Partha Chatterjee's and Ranjit Guha's theoretical perspectives of the nation and nationalism. Ismail borrows Chatterjee's argument that the nation is an idea unthinkable without the notion of hegemony, and Guha's argument that hegemony acts as a relation of dominance. Ismail situates ideology in relation to hegemony to prove 'how the exploited get persuaded and coerced into feeling a comradeship with their exploiters' (Ismail, 2007, p.47). What subaltern classes or groups do

for the nation are, therefore, not done willingly, but done as an appropriation according to the larger hegemonic narratives. Ismail drives his argument home by theorising that nationalism as ideology is the dogma which represents this appropriation as consent. A thorough analysis of Mahanama's response to Gurusingha's idea that 'Melbourne is a better place for his kids to grow up and be educated' (Mahanama, 2021, p.52) through Ismail's perspectives sheds light on the significance of Sinhala ethnonationalism and Buddhist hegemonic narratives that dominate the discourse on Sri Lankan cricket. Apart from the fact that this quote demonstrates Mahanama's principles and personal religious beliefs, as a discursive practice, it demonstrates how he locates himself as part of the larger narrative of Sinhalese ethnonationalism which is the 'hegemonic discourse' that shapes narratives on cricket. It is interesting to analyse this quote against another political comment made by Mahanama in the book: but ours is a small country, slightly bigger than Tasmania, and having two separate states was out of the question from the Government's viewpoint and the majority of the people as well' (p.50). 'The government' and 'the majority of the people' in the above quote can be easily substituted with 'Sinhalese government' and 'Sinhalese majority,' which represent hegemony. *My Innings* is characterised by expressions such as 'our passion was to play and achieve glory for our country' (p.61), 'we were all proud to represent Sri Lanka' (p.93) 'I am absolutely privileged to have represented Sri Lanka (p.262). This clearly positions Mahanama as an institutional subject who participates wholeheartedly in the 'Sinhala nationalist project'. However, *Chinaman* adopts a rather vitriolic, sarcastic view of this very project: 'The world champions return the next day to be greeted by Buddhist priests chanting blessings and cash rewards from Kandy's sacred Temple of the Tooth' (Karunatilaka, 2011, p.123). At all

three levels, *Chinaman,* as a text, as discursive practice and as social practice, refuses to participate in the nationalist project. Karunatilaka ironically juxtaposes 'cash' with 'blessings' using the powerful additive conjunction 'and'. As a discursive practice, these images force the reader to confront an unsettling proximity of the discourses of Sinhala ethnonationalism (associated with Buddhism) and neoliberalism (associated with cash rewards for sporting victories). This helps to locate *Chinaman* within a social practice that criticises, most powerfully, the manner in which ethnonationalism is reinforced by neoliberalism.

Linguistic Capitalism

Cultural wealth in the form of linguistic capitalism is a key factor that builds intertextuality between the two texts, and an analysis of cultural wealth as represented in the two texts helps the reader understand these texts as discursive practice. The two protagonists in the books, Mahanama in *My Innings* and Pradeep Mathew in *Chinaman* can be seen to occupy two different ends on a continuum of linguistic capitalism. The first-person narration in *My Innings* helps the reader to understand that it is Mahanama's voice that dictates the use of Standard Sri Lankan English in the autobiography and Mathew, in *Chinaman,* represents the non-Standard Sri Lankan English speaker. Through a thorough analysis in his article entitled 'Standard English, Cricket, Nationalism and Tyrannies of Writing in Sri Lanka,' Harshana Rambukwella argues that Kumar Sangakkara is a Standard Sri Lankan English (SSLE) speaker and that Sanath Jayasuriya is a speaker of the non-Standard Sri Lankan English (NSSLE) variety (Rambukwella, 2018, p.113). The representation of Mahanama in *My Innings* can be mapped onto the way Sangakkara is represented in media discourses as a competent English speaker. Rambukwella analyses

extensively how Sangakkara is hailed as a gentleman worthy of delivering a Colin Cowdrey lecture and how Jayasuriya was frowned upon by Standard Sri Lankan English (SSLE) speakers when he used a Sinhalese term (*pas* for soil or earth) during a live cricket commentary in a Test match between Sri Lanka and Australia in 2011. In much the same way that Jayasuriya's 'Not pot English' (a term Professor Manique Gunesekera coined in her book *The Postcolonial Identity of Sri Lankan English* in 2005 to denote the derogatory, non-standard Sri Lankan English variety) is ridiculed, Pradeep Mathew is ridiculed multiple times in the novel for his lack of finesse in the use of the English language. This has been presented in an extremely comic way in the scene where Pradeep Mathew is presented the best catch award during a match between Australia and Sri Lanka. Ironically, this shows the ramifications of neoliberalism, since the best catch award (CrocDundee2^{TM} catch of the match) was a commercial project funded by 'some private investors that included sports baron Kerry Packer' (Karunatilaka, 2011, p.237). Mahanama is consistently represented as a gentleman with good linguistic skills whose power lies in the articulation of the Standard English variety. His communicative competence in the English language is demonstrated through the fact that he co-authored the first edition of the book in English with Ken Piesse, which is sound testimony to his command of the English language. As Harvey highlights, neoliberalism is another way of acquiring more power to the elites (Harvey cited in Perera-Rajasingham, 2022 p.19). Similarly, Standard Sri Lankan English is identified as an elitist weapon which demarcates the elites from the proletariat in Sri Lanka (Gunasekera, 2010). The references to Standard Sri Lankan English and Non-Standard Sri Lankan English in *My Innings* and *Chinaman* underlines how linguistic capital is used in cricket to cement the authority of the elites inside and

outside the cricket field, and how that linguistic capital is translated to cultural wealth, creating more opportunities for the elites and less for the less privileged.Masculinity is another analytical category through which the representation of the mutual intertwining of nationalism and neoliberalism is analysed in the two texts as discursive practice. Rambukwella argues that South Asian elite classes adopted cricket to emulate colonial masculinity through cricket (Rambukwella, 2018, p.119). As ethnographic accounts in both *Chinaman* and *My Innings* demonstrate, emulating masculinity through cricket has transformed into hero-worship in a neoliberal framework. Cricket is represented as a masculine sport in the two texts, where players must play hard and there is no space for 'non-masculine characters' who are represented as weaklings within the discourses of both narratives:

> Vince Wells walked past and said something like: "That's not the way you play cricket."
>
> "I know", I replied in the heat of the moment. "We have learnt the game from you guys. It's about time you learnt something from us now."
>
> Hick joined in something uncomplimentary about Sri Lankans which I do not wish to repeat even now. "You can't afford to talk. You are a traitor," I said. I was pretty worked up. (Mahanama, 2021, p.235)

> This is not Lords or the MCC. This is urchin cricket played on the streets of Mariyakade or de Saram Road. The Poms are finally playing it Lankan style (Karunatika, 2011, p.391)

In *Chinaman* and *My Innings*, violence is unleashed both in the form of physical and verbal abuse at multiple layers both within and outside the cricket field. Such occurrences may be attributed to new semantic values and are romanticised as depicted in the two quotes, given that the masculine spectacle of cricket is revealed as having a huge potential for mass participation as a popular cultural activity. It is this 'masculinity' that is also marketed as a 'mass product' through live media coverage. The masculinity depicted here becomes a local variant, much like the Sri Lankan English variety, 'impromptu, innovative and inflected by local rhythms' (Rambukwella, 2018, p.119). However, its romanticisation signals that 'Sri Lankan cricket', framed as a 'commodity', is now ready to be exported to international markets, highlighting a tension between the conflation of the local and the global. This also signifies the tension existing between Sri Lanka's colonial and de-colonial identity, specifically its transition from a closed-economic capitalist system to a neoliberalist system. Therefore, as is the case with the representation of linguistic capitalism and Standard Sri Lankan English, which we have discussed earlier in some detail, *Chinaman* and *My Innings* bear witness to the economic, sociological and political tensions between the colonial identity of Ceylon and the de-colonial identity of Sri Lanka.

The intersection between the two books as text, discursive practice and social practice is also reflected in the heteroglossia evident in the two books. Heteroglossia is a term introduced to literary criticism by Mikhail Bakhtin. Heteroglossia often functions as a key intertextual link in literary criticism. Wilfrid Jayasuriya defines heteroglossia as the existence of many voices in a text (Jayasuriya, 1994, p.97). According to Jayasuriya, the presence of heteroglossia reflects the presence of different social structures with different ways of speaking (Jayasuriya, 1994, p.97). Using Bakhtinian

ideas on discourse strategies, Jayasuriya argues that the discourses of different narrators are demarcated by various styles, which according to Bakhtin are related to the ideological differences among the speakers (Jayasuriya, 1994, p.97). According to Jayasuriya, the multiplicity of the voices present within a text is also a strong "cultural form of the nation," as via heteroglossia, the writer unites the members of the nation, providing them with a platform on which to talk to each other in textual space. Jayasuriya quotes Timothy Brennan to emphasise how the novel became a critical element in the formation of the nation state:

> It was the novel that historically accompanied the rise of nations by objectifying the "one yet many" of national life, and by mimicking the structure of the nation, a clearly bordered jungle of languages and styles. Socially, the novel joined the newspaper as the major vehicle of the national print media, helping to standardize language, encourage literacy, and remove mutual incomprehensibility (Brennan cited in Jayasuriya, 1994, p.98)

Heteroglossia in *Chinaman* deconstructs and questions the notion of the nation state and ethnonationalism. *My Innings*, on the other hand, utilises heteroglossia as a technique to form a sense of the nation state and cement its imagined boundaries. For example, heteroglossia in *My Innings* involves the nation state as a critical factor throughout the entire narrative. The dialogues that involve a multiplicity of voices revolve around Mahanama's sense of duty to the nation and his national consciousness which represents him as a warrior. *My Innings* contains fewer dialogues than *Chinaman*. The lengthy, descriptive passages with their temporal and

spatial descriptions bear witness to Mahanama's rigid sense of Sinhalese ethnonationalism.

Association between Nationalism and Neoliberalism

One of the key arguments raised by Perera-Rajasingham (2022) is that neoliberalism and ethnonationalism are mutually entangled. In this paper, we argue that the commercialisation of cricket is closely connected with nationalism since it is an activity of mass entertainment which mobilises the entire nation as spectators, one that has broadened the scope of commercialisation more than ever in the past. Perera-Rajasingham borrows Cedric Robinson's argument that racism was a central catalyst for capitalism, even predating the medieval societies of Europe (Robison cited in Perera-Rajasingham, 2022, p.14). This critical argument further suggests that capitalism is a restructuring of racism and not a fundamental break with feudalism as is generally supposed (Robison cited in Perera-Rajasingham, 2022, p.14). Perera-Rajasingham further highlights how Robinson critically evaluates racism in colonialism as an extension and expansion of a European sentiment that was well present even before the emergence of merchant and industrial capitalisms (Robinson cited in Perera-Rajasingham, 2022, p.15). Perera-Rajasingham also borrows Barbara Fields' and Karen Fields' argument that race as ideology is a system of lived beliefs that is not grounded on material reality but is brought into being to make sense of and organise life-worlds. (Perera-Rajasingham, 2022, p.15). These arguments explain why race is identified as a critical factor that determines the deprivation of liberty for some people while it is taken for granted by others:

> He tells us that racism exists everywhere. Once he had tried to put his daughter into a prominent Colombo convent and was told that the Rs. 15,000 entrance fee was only for Catholics. Buddhists had to pay 50,000, Muslims 100,000. He tells us that he once accepted a lakh from a man in a bar to break the stumps seven times during a Sharjah game (Karunatilaka, 2011, p.287).

'He' in *Chinaman* here refers to Uvais Amalean, a wicketkeeper batsman who can remember Pradeep Mathew's heroics in the cricket field quite vividly. Amalean boasts that he managed to keep well when Pradeep bowled through a secret code between Pradeep and himself using 'Hindu powder from the Kovil' (Karunatilaka, 2011, p.285). The application of 'Hindu powder' on Mathew's fingers would give a hint to Amalean the direction to which Mathew was going to spin the ball. He claims that 'The Silvas and the Alwises wouldn't put up with this hand signal nonsense' (Karunatilaka, 2011, p.285). This scene is full of racial codifications and gets even more complicated with the bribery allegations levelled against Amalean. Karunatilaka validates the claims of bribery in his narrative, but Mahanama refutes such claims as 'rumours,' as detailed earlier in this paper. Perera-Rajasingham argues that the configuration of a new racial order or racial discrimination in post-independent Sri Lanka, particularly after 1977, is one of the ways in which neoliberalism transforms its practices and ideologies in relation to the ground realities it encounters (Perera-Rajasingham, 2022, p.19). We argue that Amalean's acceptance of the bribe can be read as his resistance against the neoliberal, racial order existing in the country. This signals the sociological tensions that emerged as Sri Lanka transitioned from a closed, state-regulated economy to an open, neoliberal state. This has to be placed against Perera-Rajasingham's

central argument (2022) that this neoliberal shift in Sri Lanka has systematically 'othered' minority communities. This situation is quite unique to Sri Lanka as an Asian country since the Sri Lankan government was one of the first governments in the South Asian bloc to openly embrace finance capitalism both as an economic and political model (Perera-Rajasingam, 2021, p.18). It goes beyond the traditional classification of neoliberalism as characterised by a free market economy, private property and deregulation of the government. Neoliberalism is also used as "an epistemological structure of disavowal" (Perera-Rajasingham, 2022, p.21) to justify discrimination against minorities. In *Chinaman*, the neoliberalist entanglement with racism is dealt with using pungent criticism and black humor. Since Uvais Amalean is a Muslim wicketkeeper, he is offered Rs. 100,000 as a spot-fixing bribe, the precise amount he needed to 'put his daughter into a prominent convent college'. One the other hand, Mahanama documents the bribery allegations levelled against the Sri Lankan national cricket team as malicious and atrocious. He associates this rebuttal with his nationalist sentiments. Mahanama's ideological formation resembles Michael Roberts' theorisation of nationalist sentiment constructed in the sociological fabric of cricket. Roberts argues that the sense of nationalism exemplified inside and outside the cricket field was a key contributor to the discourse on nationalism and the revitalisation of nationalist consciousness in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in Sri Lanka where all ethnicities such as Tamils, Sinhalese, Moors, Burghers and Malays played in one category as Ceylonese (Roberts, 2011, p.411). It proves Benedict Anderson's thesis that the nation is both real (a site of inequality and exploitation) and imagined/conceived (represented as a fraternity) (Anderson cited in Ismail, 2007, p.46). Mahanama structures his narrative in a way that suggests that the imagined fraternity helps to form a strong

sense of 'nation' to which everyone belongs and that this pride in the nation or national consciousness prevents them from engaging in malpractices such as bribery. However, in the text, such a positive representation of the sociology of cricket is used to conceal the nuances of racial codification or racism. As explained earlier, *My Innings* is a celebration of Sri Lankan nationalist consciousness and adopts an ultra-critical stance against the West while deriding globalisation as a Western hegemonic narrative. However, *My Innings* fails to capture the nuances of the weaknesses inherent in the Sinhalese Buddhist hegemonic narrative, shortcomings which are censured satirically in *Chinaman*.

Conclusion

This paper looks critically at how neoliberalism and nationalism (and ethnonationalism) are mutually dependent in the representation of cricket in two ethnographic fictions, *Chinaman* and *My Innings*. A comparative reading of *My Innings* and *Chinaman* situates the two books as ethnographic fictions that blur the boundary between truth and fantasy. *My Innings* illustrates how ideological power can be represented as 'common sense' through the naturalisation of the nexus between nationalism and neoliberalism. *Chinaman* provides a critical space to interrogate this nexus between nationalism and liberalism. *My Innings* was written and produced in a context where the mutual entanglement of neoliberalism and nationalism is represented as a 'dream machine' (Perera-Rajasingham, 2022). Mahanama willingly participates as a subject who endorses the co-existence of nationalism and neoliberalism within the larger community in Sri Lankan cricket. However, his narration is a powerful politically discursive event given his own situated knowledge, not just as a cricketer, but also as an ethnographer. He bears witness to a pivotal

transformation of cricket from a bourgeois activity into a commodity. On the other hand, *Chinaman* critiques hegemonic 'common sense' by giving voice to the 'Other'. Karunatilaka's protagonist neither becomes a 'national hero' nor a 'commodity'. He is a manifestation of the rejection of nationalist and neoliberal projects. CDA enables the reader to see that identifying differences in textual, discursive and social references in the two texts with regard to the representation of neoliberalism and ethnonationalism is an ambiguous process. These ambiguities should be interpreted as the result of the intersections of fact, fiction and ethnography. Such intersections blur the rigid boundaries among literary genres and sociological frameworks. We argue that these ambiguities make the two ethnographic works of literature dialogic rather than closed systems of knowledge, which is a critical discursive benchmark with which to analyse the tensions existing within the postcolonial and postmodern Sri Lankan identity.

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