

ΕΤΕΡΩΝΥΜΑ

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Cricket as a metaphor or... ICC Cricket World Cup 2015 final

According to experts, for example Benedict Anderson, nations are in many ways constructed, imagined communities. Communities that are not based on a daily face-to-face interaction between their members, but on a perception of belonging to the same wider group of people, defined by common experiences and expectations, by common values, by a common land and culture and by a common language. However, on a personal level, the sense of belonging to something bigger than your neighbourhood or small town, this wider affinity and connection to others, is mental, that is, 'imagined'. Nations are also defined or shaped to a large extent by their relations to others and to rivalries. These rivalries have always included sports.

Australian nationalism at its birth was defined in opposition to Britain. This opposition was expressed to a large extent not through Australian Rules football (since the English did not play the game), nor through rugby and the largely unknown to Australians, soccer, but through cricket. 'Officially' it all started in 1882 with the test series known as 'The Ashes'. In reality the first rivalry, namely the first test cricket match between England and Australia, was born in 1877. It is worth remembering here that according to British historian Niall Ferguson, when the British governed a country, there were certain distinctive features of their own society that they tended to disseminate, one of which were team sports such as cricket.

Therefore, cricket was and still is, a common defining thread and demarcation line simultaneously, for all the former British colonies that participated in the ICC Cricket World Cup 2015, which winds up tomorrow with the New Zealand vs Australia final at the Melbourne Cricket Ground.

The cricket supremacy of Australia against England in the crucial first half of the 1920s, or in the pre-war Depression and in the nation building post-war years, was a crucial morale booster and a nation building 'supplement' in a country that has always valued, almost on a daily basis, its sporting activities and its achievements.

This is why cricket is traditionally such a big sporting and social affair in this country and this is why a significant number of people tomorrow will be following the cricket final, hoping to see Australia win its 5th ICC Cricket World Cup title.

How sporting fortunes change though...

It was less than two years ago when the media, the sport's fans and a significant number of «ordinary»



people were lamenting the misfortunes of the Antipodean cricket team in the early stages of the last Ashes series in the United Kingdom...

Do you remember our response to the early stages of the annihilation of the Australian cricket team in the grounds of England in the European summer of 2013? Do you remember the concern and the number of articles that were published not only in the sports sections but also in the opinion pages of reputable newspapers?

Titles such as 'Who killed Australian cricket', 'Cultural change driving the decline of Australian cricket', 'Decline and fall of Australian cricket empire', 'Clarke, Watson and our great cultural malaise', were not only addressing the fears of the cricket fans, who look for an explanation or for an excuse in the rise of soccer or in the 'ruthless efficiency' and the wealth of the AFL that provides better prospects, better than cricket, to young talents.

There was an underlining fear in those headlines, that was rightly pointed out in The Age by public intellectual and Australia's race discrimination commissioner Tim Soutphommasane, when he wrote «Australia's decline as a cricketing power may be a metaphor for the state of this fragile nation».

The asylum seekers, these cultural, religious and political strangers were 'landing' on our pre-federal election shores and were dominating the media and the public agenda as well as the public's imagination in a distorted and out of context way. The mining boom we were/are told was/ is winding down sharply and the Australian economy that has provided more than 20 years of continuous growth was/is not prepared to make

the required transition. The all-important in the country's psyche and imagination, Australian Rules Football, was in the middle of a doping scandal. An iconic sport, AFL football, which is always considered to be very popular, very 'noble', very 'pure' and very Australian was going through testing times as its image was under threat.

Furthermore, the ascendancy of the culturally diverse and still somewhat 'alien' to wider Australia Asia continued/s to come closer to our shores with the 240 million strong Indonesia overtaking us as an economic power in the near future.

All these were and still are causes for concern and rising insecurity in this great, rich, Anglophone and empty continent of the south. All these multidimensional and complex insecurities did find an indirect way of expressing themselves through the debate that followed the collapse of the Australian 'cricket' empire in England, in the first two test matches of the 2013 Ashes tour. Not that the socioeconomic and geopolitical fundamentals of this country have changed dramatically since 2013, but...

The fortunes of the Australian cricket team have changed, a lot... Therefore...

Most Australians expects to win the ICC Cricket World Cup tomorrow in Melbourne, having already won the Asian Soccer Cup in Sydney a few weeks ago...

P.S. A similar argument was first published in Neos Kosmos English Edition in August 2013.