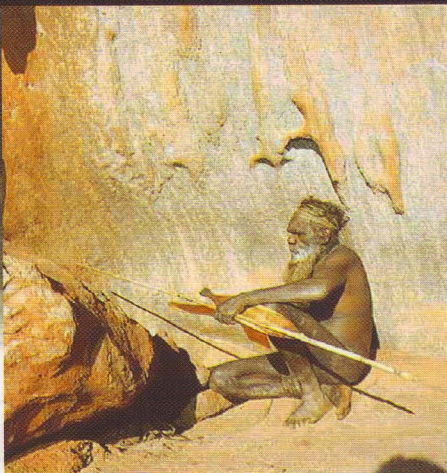


Firstness, History, Place & Legitimate Claim to Place-As-Homeland in Comparative Focus

Michael Roberts



A group Picture of Aboriginal people in the Yorke Peninsula (Black & White) taken by *Roth* and kindly supplied by *Peter Sutton*.

Picture of Aborigine hunter supplied by “*Froggys Community Page*” www.froggyswebs.com

Picture of Vaddas taken from ‘*Living Heritage Trust of Sri Lanka*’ from www.vedda.org

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Cover design by Dilshani Pillai

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International Centre for Ethnic Studies, Colombo

International Centre for Ethnic Studies
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The initial version of this essay was presented at the conference in UKM in February 2003 organised by the Malaysian Social Science Association and IKMAS, University Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM). The revised paper will be published as a chapter in "Rethinking Ethnicity and Nation Building: Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Fiji in Comparative Perspective" edited by Abdul Rahman Embong, Penerbit UKM, Bangi, Malaysia, in press. My thanks to Professor Rahman for allowing me to have the article published as pamphlet-monograph in Sri Lanka.

PREFACE

A preliminary version of this paper was presented at a conference at Bangi organised by the Malaysian Social Science Association and IKMAS, Universiti Kebangsaan, Malaysia in February 2003 and I am grateful to Professors Rahman Embong, Brij Lal and Siri Hettige for the invitation. Professor Abdul Rahman Embong was the driving force at the Bangi end and is preparing a publication entitled *Rethinking Ethnicity and Nation Building: Malaysia, Sri Lanka and Fiji in Comparative Perspective* to be printed by Penerbit UKM, Bangi, Malaysia, where this will be a chapter. He has kindly given me permission to reprint the essay as a pamphlet in Sri Lanka. ICES has been bold enough to accept it in their series even though it is not in line with their political position.

I profited from the discussions at Bangi. I thank Diana Wong in particular for her encouragement and her help in chasing down information on the Orang Asli and on Malaysian politics. On the subject of Australian Aboriginal peoples I have been beautifully and precisely assisted by the inputs of Fiona Magowan, Rod Lucas and Peter Sutton, all colleagues at the Dept. of Anthropology University of Adelaide. Brij Lal and Marshall Sahlins responded promptly and helpfully when I subjected them to inquiries about Fijian history.

The citations point readers towards the specifics of this aid and the bunds of written material that sustain these pathways. Needless to say, the responsibility for interpretation rests on my shoulders. The production process was assisted by the work of Dilshani Pillai in preparing the covers. Most of the pictures have been culled from internet sources, including reproductions of pictures from the book on *The Veddas* by CG and BZ Seligmann (Cambridge University Press, 1911). Peter Sutton kindly provided two photographs of Aboriginal people on Cape York Peninsula taken by W.E. Roth in 1899.

A key mediator in the process of production has been the ICES Librarian, Ponnudurai Thambirajah. This is an appropriate

spot to affirm the unostentatious, yet efficient, manner in which he has assisted a whole array of scholars who work in Sri Lanka or visit for research purposes. The ICES publication programme is secured by his work. In metaphorical terms, one could say that within the academic terrain of Sri Lanka the ICES products are among the sacred icons of our time – rather like, and yet unlike, those epitaphs that have been planted in recent years in the landscapes claimed by northern Irish Catholic and Tamil Tiger nationalists.

Michael Roberts, May 2005.

Firstness, History, Place & Legitimate Claim to Place-as- Homeland in Comparative Focus

Michael Roberts

I. The Story of Sri Lanka in Slanted Summary

To summarise the tale of modern Sri Lankan political conflict in a few words is impossible. The principal outlines have been set out in a number of publications¹ and Donald Horowitz has provided an instructive comparison of the divergent stories of accommodation in Malaysia and failure of coexistence in Sri Lanka (Horowitz 1993) in ways that cater to the thrust of this comparative exercise. Let me begin therefore with a specific twist upon a summary.

Once the formal administrative unification of Ceylon (Sri Lanka) was completed by the conquering colonial power of Britain in the years 1815-1832, the nuts-and-bolts of this unification were established by the administrative framework of institutionalised capitalism, the expansion of a modern transport and communication system and the growth of market exchange. Though some regions remained as sparsely populated backwoods, regional exchanges and internal migration developed apace during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.² The English language became the dominant language because it was the media for high-level governance and the path to social mobility. The emergence of two overlapping social categories of locally-resident, non-White residents, namely, the bourgeoisie and the “middle class,” consolidated this network of criss-crossing linkages that was at once spatial, social, economic and political. The concept “bourgeoisie” is used here in the standard Marxist sense of property-owners who employ labour; while “middle class” is a modification of the widely-used local vocabulary

to mark a status group that was influential because of its life style and command of the English language.³

It was from within the emerging middle class-cum-bourgeoisie that the first incipient political challenge to the British, as embodied in the concept “Ceylonese,” appeared. This initial impetus can be seen in the journal *Young Ceylon* (1850-52) and the pages of the *Ceylon Examiner* from 1859 onwards. This strand of anti-colonial Ceylonese nationalism initially had a significant input from the “Burghers” (Euro-Ceylonese). It was multi-ethnic in composition and attitude, all-island in orientation, and combined elitism with liberalism. From the 1880s onwards this strand of thinking began to challenge British racial policies by pressing for the “Ceylonization” of the higher rungs of the administrative services. It was this body of activists that began exerting pressure for constitutional devolution from the 1900s onwards. Though inspired in substantial ways by the political developments in British India, these Ceylonese nationalists were also hoisting the British with their own petard: arguments drawn from British constitutional history and Enlightenment philosophy.

More or less at the same time anti-colonial reactions also emerged in the nineteenth century among Tamil and Sinhala-speakers who responded to the proselytization work of Christians by developing counter movements of Hindu rejuvenation and Buddhist revivalism respectively. The Sinhalese response, however, had many strands: the work of religious revivalists interlaced with those Sinhala nationalists who focused on the decline in status of their language and the overwhelming diffusion of Westernised lifeways to the detriment of their *sirit virit* (customs) and *gunadharma* (virtue, ethics).⁴

In summary, therefore, one can speak of five strands of political ideology running in parallel and interlacing at points in the period 1840s-to-1940s: that of Ceylonese nationalism, Sinhala nationalism, Buddhist revivalism, Hindu revivalism and Sri Lankan Tamil communitarianism. The latter, SL Tamil communitarianism, did not utilise the concept of “nation” (or “nationality”) in English-speak to describe its collectivity. But they had a clear

understanding of their group identity in differentiation from the Sinhalese, Burghers, Muslims and named others. This foundation made it but a simple step for them to move towards describing themselves as a “nationality” in 1949/51 after political differences sharpened and the Federal Party emerged as one of the Tamil parties in the political firmament. But, ironically, this step was initiated a few years earlier in 1944 by the Ceylon Communist Party, which used Stalin’s famous words more or less verbatim to present a case for self-determination for both nationalities in the island, (Sri Lankan) Tamil as well as Sinhalese (Roberts 1999: 34-35).

In further summary one can say that the story of the latter half of the twentieth century is a tragic one, involving the upsurge of Sinhala linguistic nationalism in the 1950s,⁵ the progressive decline of Ceylonese (multi-ethnic Sri Lankan) nationalism and the sharpening of SL Tamil nationalism. The latter response has resulted in the jettisoning of their “Sri Lankan-ness” (in its institutional sense) by a substantial body of Sri Lanka Tamils. Ever since the 1970s and the Vaddukoddai resolution of 1976, their principal associations have desired to set up an independent sovereign entity called “Eelam” or *Thamililam* (Wilson 2000; Schalk 2002; Roberts 2002a). In pressing for this breakaway, they nevertheless maintain their distinction from the Tamils of Tamilnadu. However much they may have profited from their irredentist situation, their goal is not irredentist merger.

Thus, from the 1950s Ceylonese (Sri Lankan) nationalism went into steep free-fall. As a force it was soon in tatters, shredded on the one hand by the assaults of Sinhala and Tamil extremists in conflict with each other and, on the other, by governments responding to the demands of Sinhala populism and nativism in a context in which the Sinhalese have made up some 69-74 per cent of the population between 1948 and the 1980s.⁶ However, Sri Lankan nationalism survives as an ideological current because of the articulate voices of a small body of bilingual (English and vernacular) intellectuals. In the aftermath of the pogrom against SL Tamils in July 1983 both liberals and socialist intellectuals

developed an alliance that advocates a political structure that is liberal and confederative in order to maintain Sri Lanka as an institutional entity. (e. g. see CRD 1984). Thus, illustratively, the interventions of several NGOs,⁷ and the project on *A History of Ethnic Conflict: Recollection, Reinterpretation & Reconciliation* initiated in 1999 by Godfrey Gunatilleke, have been some of the activities associated with such strands of conviction. As the war with the Tamils (now dominated by the LTTE) dragged on in the 1990s, and it became evident to all but the diehard Sinhala extremists that the hopes of a military victory were minimal, a broad band of popular support has emerged in more recent years in favour of “peace” or even “peace with devolution.” In effect, then, Sri Lankan nationalism has been given a refreshing injection in recent years, but it nevertheless remains fragile and at the mercy of volatile political winds.

II. Heritage & Roots in Nationalist Thought

Romanticism was a significant force in the upsurge of nationalism in Europe in the nineteenth century-and-after. Poets, folklorists, linguists, historians and ethnologists were among those who sponsored images of nativist wholeness or past achievements that contributed to a sense of differentiated collective identity. This influence was especially pronounced among the peoples of Central and Eastern Europe. It has been argued that these peoples were cultural entities or nations-in-embryo that developed into “nation states” in the modern sense of the concept, contrasting thereby with the original archetype of nationhood associated with England and France, where the temporal process is said to have involved a progression from “state” to “nation” because in each instance the dynastic state was the chrysalis within which a sense of nationness developed.⁸ This historical interpretation is now questioned by scholars who trace the development of “English nationalism” back into the late medieval period (e. g. Hastings 1997). Be that as it may, even in the English case there is no doubt that such

Romanticists as Thomas Carlyle, Byron and Ruskin contributed to the sense of English/British patriotism in the nineteenth century.

With the implantation of Western education in British Ceylon the literature of the Romantics as well as the currents of “liberalism” and “nationalism” entered the circuits of the educated middle class.⁹ In this context, subject as they were to the racial prejudices of the British ruling elements and the other indignities of colonial subordination, both the English-educated and the vernacular literati were quick to seize on the evidence that quickly emerged about the past civilisational greatness of the island peoples.

This history became more widely available in part because one of the major Sinhala chronicles, the *Mahāvamsa*, was translated by a scholar official, George Turnour in 1837. In effect, this book indicated that the Sinhala people had a continuous history tied to a state formation and a historical tradition that differed from the *puranic* history of India, the latter a type of storytelling that was de-valued as “myth” by the ‘scientific’ codes of the Western world.¹⁰ The re-discovery of ancient ruins in Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Sigiriya and other places in the course of the nineteenth century and their vivid depiction by painters and cameramen provided eye-capturing evidence of the capacities of the ancient civilisation.¹¹ Surveyors and engineers quickly confirmed the skill levels in both the building work and the irrigation works associated with this state order.

This state civilisation, understood to date from about the second century B C, if not earlier, was also comprehended to be mostly the work of Sinhalese.¹² Since the island was, now in the nineteenth century, known as “Ceylon” and the people as “Ceylonese,” this evidence was comprehended as a mark of “Ceylonese achievements” in the ancient past – at a period when the Anglo-Saxons, that is, the British, were non-entities. In this reading “Ceylonese” and “Sinhalese” shaded into each other. It was feasible for a Sri Lankan Tamil such as Ponnambalam Arunachalam to note to himself in his diary: “what a glorious thing it would be for Ceylon to emulate and excel her glorious past.”¹³

In brief, the colonial context ensured that pride in the capacities of the ancient Sinhalese was interpreted as Ceylonese achievements by Sinhalese and non-Sinhalese residents alike, besides the British themselves.

My summary of these currents of thought comes from the world of English-speak. However, one must also attend to the oral, visual, performative and written traditions transmitted from generation to generation in the vernacular tongues Tamil and Sinhalese. These modes of transmission were lively and effective. Among the Sinhalese there can be little doubt that their literati and specialists conveyed themes drawn from the cultural productions of what I call the middle period (1232-1818) through *kāvya* stories, *sandēsa* (message) poems and ritual performances (Roberts 2002b).

Many of these tales were centred upon kingly figures. The Sinhala dynastic states of yesteryear were therefore kept in the forefront of popular consciousness. In these tales, moreover, the island was a singular entity known variously as *Tunsinhalaya*, *Tunrata*, *Sinhalē*, *Siri Laka*, et cetera. Though there had been a kingdom, known as *Yālpānam*, in the northern segment of the island from the thirteenth century to the sixteenth, such presentations glossed over this ‘fact’ or treated the kingdom as sub-kingdom encompassed by the aegis of the Sinhala Buddhist *cakravarti* figure that was head of state.¹⁴

As such, the Sinhala-speakers of British Ceylon had two streams of cultural production nourishing their sense of distinctiveness, thereby promoting their sense of self-worth and highlighting the contrast with their subordinate situation in the British era. One was made up of the various modalities of Sinhala storytelling and performance (including healing and protective rituals). The other was composed by the currents of idea and information borrowed from the Western world and English writings by those with bilingual capacities, especially the journalists. Needless to say, from the 1860s and especially in the twentieth century, print technology accentuated the influence of both processes.

Within the context of Buddhist revitalisation and the hostility to Westernisation that developed from the third quarter of the nineteenth century, therefore, the evidence of past greatness and independence inspired nationalist endeavour among Sinhala activists. Such a heritage could be used as an argument for Sinhalese to get over “their unfounded fears and a sense of inferiority.”¹⁵ In the thinking of some activists, moreover, the Sinhalese were “sons of the soil.”¹⁶ It was a simple step for such extremists to view all other island-inhabitants as outsiders in some sense, that is, as *para* (that is, “alien,” but also carrying the implication “vile” in the sense *nīca*).¹⁷ Thus, one editor and activist complained that Sinhalese not only sided with *paradēsin* (aliens) against other Sinhalese, but also went so far as to marry “*lansi, demala, ingrīsi, german ādhi parajātin*” (Burghers, Tamils, English, German and other such alien-cum-vile races).¹⁸

Such a hardline current of thought, however, was just one strand among multiple streams of argument in opposition to British authority. For all the vitriol poured out by such propagandists as Dharmapala, the English-educated Ceylonese nationalists were at the forefront of the political challenges to the British in the first half of the twentieth century, an emphasis that was given even sharper edge with the emergence of a Left Movement led by Trotskyists in the 1930s.

Whether hardline Sinhala nationalist, moderate Sinhala nationalist or Ceylonese-cum-Sinhala nationalist, or a Burgher, Moor, Tamil who was for Ceylon’s movement towards “dominion status,” it is probable that in the early twentieth century many activists, as well as the middle class in general, accepted one historical finding: the Sinhalese people originated from a body of people under a leader known as Vijaya who migrated in the fifth century BC from some part of India. This is the mythic tale in the *Mahāvamsa* and *Dīpavamsa*.¹⁹ In this story, significantly, there were wild forest people identified as Yakās and Nāgas occupying the island at this point of time. In this reading, as much implicitly as explicitly, what Vijaya brought to Sri Lanka was “culture” and an idea of state, namely kingship.²⁰

The fact that the Sinhalese were migrant people by origin in this popular reading of the ancient past does not make them “non-indigenous.” The autochthonous *Vādda*- were (and are) marginalised by their lack of culture, that is, their inferiority. The Sinhalese, then, are seen as more-or-less indigenous because they have resided for twenty-odd centuries and been in possession of “civilisation” (*shistāchāraya*) organised under a kingly state. However, we must remember that “culture” (*sanskṛutiya*) or “civilisation”²¹ is not just a matter of an educated ruling class, literacy, a capacity to build edifices and set up a state. “Culture” also can refer to the culture/cultivation of food in settled villages on a sedentary basis. In my speculative interpretation, therefore, in this hierarchy of value within Sinhala historical traditions, one that is more implicit than ‘said,’ rice cultivation is a praiseworthy trade, whereas hunting and gathering are low in the scale of things.²² Within such a perspective, then, the Sinhala rice cultivators of the past were undoubtedly and truly “sons of the soil” or *bhumiputra*.

III. Comparative Forays

Though I can hardly prove it, it would seem that in South and South East Asia settled agriculture was viewed as superior in evolutionary scale to swidden agriculture, while both were regarded as higher in status to hunting and gathering in jungles. Most state formations seem to have been dominated by lineages that occupied valleys and practiced settled agriculture. Those victorious in war, perhaps a capacity that arose in part from their institutionalised ability to generate surplus through perennial agrarian production rather than tribute, appear to have called the shots in establishing “ideological value.”²³

Within the realm of specific agrarian settings, moreover, those lineages that converted a locality into a field of food production had a lien on that land. “First cultivator = proprietor” was the principle at play. But it was not merely an issue of prescriptive

land rights. The first lineages usually secured their position as local ‘lords of the fields’ in relation to subsequent in-migrant lineages (unless the latter had the backing of a marauding state or a warlord).

Over the long term an extended and generalised version of this principle seems to be at play in (a) the story of the Sinhalese in relation to the *Vādda* and (b) that of the in-migrant Malays (*Melayu*) in relation to those autochthonous lineages that are assembled together today under the label “Orang Asli.” Over time the first people to develop agriculture become the local/regional lords. Culture (or civilisation) becomes superior to the wild. Here, then, one sees two principles of superiority combined in order to establish authority, that is, legitimised power. With necessary adjustments one can also say that these two principles came into force in the recent history of Australia.

IV. Australian Aboriginality

As in parts of Asia the founding myths (or “stories of the Dreaming”) among many Australian Aboriginal peoples clearly “argue that the first Beings came into each local area from elsewhere.”²⁴ To those unfamiliar with the Aboriginal scene let me stress that these peoples have always been internally differentiated in kinship structure, speech, location and self-perception. However, most of them relied on hunting and gathering for their sustenance. As a broad generalisation one could say that in each locality or region the Aboriginal “political economy militated strongly against both a successful organised resistance and also against achieving a population density that might have represented a serious challenge to [the White settler] invaders” who penetrated the continent from the 1780s onwards.²⁵ The overwhelming military power of the European settlers was compounded by the latter’s faith in the superiority of their civilisation, a mind-set that was bolstered in part by the values attached to settled agriculture.

Today the Australian Aboriginal peoples are roughly 2-3 percent of the total Australian population today of roughly 19 million or so. In 1996 they numbered 324,744 people or 2 percent of the total.²⁶ They have been subject to demographic and cultural decimation as a result of the actions of the mostly White (Anglo-Celtic) settlers who not only assumed political dominance, but also brought diseases to which the Aborigines were vulnerable. So much so that in the early-mid twentieth century the Anglo-Celtic settlers and the new Australian state of 1901 assumed that they were a "dying race."

But many Aboriginal lineages and descent groups²⁷ survived. A 'typical' Aboriginal reading of their specific histories is embodied in the manner in which the storytellers of the people occupying the Victoria Rivers Downs region in the Northern Territory told Debbie Bird Rose about their subjection to "Captain Cook's law." In this reading Captain Cook is "an outlaw, morally speaking."²⁸

The history of subjugation and discrimination has provided late-twentieth century and contemporary Aboriginal people with a measure of unity. With the support of White Australians of liberal humanist persuasion, their activists gained recognition in the census statistics in 1967. This was but one step in the series of measures that have dismantled most of the statutory forms of racial discrimination that existed previously, measures that were largely due to the initiative of public servants and politicians informed by more enlightened thinking.²⁹ As Peter Sutton suggested, active support from elements among White "middle class urbanites" have assisted the Aboriginal cause during the last fifty years or so.

The lobbying of Aboriginal activists and White supporters has also resulted in several symbolic gestures of recognition at mass public gatherings such as the Footie final and the Opening Ceremonies at the Olympics and the bi-annual Adelaide Festival. More critically, a series of measures by different state governments at various times began recognising native title. The capstone was provided by the Mabo decision reached by the High Court in 1992 and the legislation that followed under the Keating administration. These steps overturned of the legal justification, the theory of *terra*

nullius, supporting the non-recognition of Aboriginal claims to "place" (my term) and consolidated the process enabling some pragmatic room for "native land rights" within the considerable constraints of land already alienated as freehold.

A significant aspect of this debate was the use of the term "First Australians" by Keating and other activists. This may not have been the first occasion that it received valued voice, but it now entered critical arenas and secured official recognition. The label has been adopted by ATSIC, the Council of Aboriginal leaders that is an official body overseeing Aboriginal affairs: its' website describing Aboriginal history has a sub-section entitled "First Australians." As such, this label jostles alongside the term "Indigenous Australians" that is used, both by Aboriginal people and others, to refer to the original inhabitants of Australia and the Torres Strait Islands. This term, "Indigenous Australians," however implies that the Anglo-Celtics, as well as the motley collection of more recent migrants, are not yet indigenous. Thus, "First Australians" overcomes this problem by allowing that there are, so to speak, "Subsequent Australians," though that phrase is rarely used explicitly.

In summary overview, it could be said that the claims and rights espoused by Aboriginal activists and their supporters over the last half century have rested primarily on two justificatory grounds that are intertwined: (A) The Aboriginal people have lived on the continent for a many centuries and are truly autochthonous and aboriginal; and (B) these people, in all their variety, have an embodied and consubstantive attachment to their home locality and a relationship to 'place' that is as unique as sacred. The language of legitimation sometimes extends to (C) the idea for reparation for past injustices and horrors perpetrated on these men and women by the Anglo-Celtic settlers and successive Australian governments.³⁰ In my reading, however, this third ground of justification for special consideration towards the Aboriginal minority within Australia is distinctly secondary in the thinking of most Aboriginal activists.³¹

In the perceptions of those Aboriginal groups that have some links with their locality, that is, “homeland” or “sentimental place” in other words, it is the stories of the Dreaming, as passed down the generations by their persons-with-knowledge, that confirm this sentimental connection. The Dreaming is their version of history, one that involves a conflation of time and the fusion of present and past in emotive and embodied ways. By way of example, take the Yolngu people of Arnhem Land in the Northern Territory of Australia. Their beliefs in ancestor spirits, sacred sites and connections with the “country” are as profound as deep – in ways that render them “consubstantive” with ancestral power.³² The word the Yolngu use for “house” or “hut,” namely, *wānga*, also has the following meanings: (a) place, camp; (b) home[land]; (c) nation, country[side], area; (d) [Extension] ovaries; (e) position, situation. And the related term *wānga-watangumirri* refers to “original inhabitants or their descendants, owner of land or territory,” that is, to the possessors of territory.³³

However, the contemporary fact is that the Aboriginal stories of their long-standing connections with specific places, and the overall picture of their occupation of the continent, is supported by “modern science” in the form of the positivistic methods associated with archaeology, art history and conventional history. Artefacts from the past, whether rock paintings or Neolithic tools, provide ample testimony to long occupation of the land. Written accounts, sketches and paintings by Captain Cook’s party and other early explorers, besides the documentation left by the earliest settlers, supply further evidence of their life style and their existence. So, Aboriginal activists can hoist their Anglo-Celtic conquerors with their own instruments in legitimising their claims to homeland place. “Time” in association with place becomes a measure of justificatory value.

The value of a collective label in association with place in the varying stories of Aboriginal ‘rejuvenation’ is revealed in the story of the Kaurna (pronounced Garna) people of the Adelaide plains (i. e. effectively Adelaide city). In the late 1970s they were not heard of – except among select specialists. They are few in

number today and do not even reach four figures. But since the 1990s they have secured some prominence and are in the process of re-inventing their language with the help of White linguists and archival documents kept by the Lutherans and others. Nevertheless, the present-day Kaurna are emotionally attached to their distinctive identity as one segment of the wider Aboriginal people and articulate this claim vociferously.³⁴

Moreover, the recent opening ceremonies of the Adelaide Festival have begun with a ritual dance and musical item that acknowledges the fact that the festivities are occurring in Kaurna territorial space (place). This, clearly, is a symbolic gesture. It does not translate into Kaurna control of the Adelaide City Council let alone the government of South Australia. It is likely that most White and other recent migrants in Adelaide are not conscious of the Kaurna as a political entity and are wont, in keeping with standard prejudices and their profile of urban Aborigines, to see them as part of the down-and-out Aboriginal people who can be seen in the urban parklands among the “winos” and tramps of all colours. Given such generalised perceptions and their de facto marginality, the symbolic gesture may not seem significant. But, and this is the point, it is valued by the Kaurna. From our perspective, therefore, even though they do not embody “equality,” such symbolic actions express some official commitment to “multi-culturalism” and minority existence – as distinct from non-existence. In that relative sense, and in comparison with the recent past, it is an advancement for the Kaurna.

V. Firstness in Place: More Comparative Steps

In the history of the Australian Aboriginal peoples, as we know, their political and cultural subordination began with the occupation of large chunks of the continental space from the 1780s by waves of migrants who were mostly Anglo-Celtic. Not only did the Australian Aborigines lose land and clout, as time passed they were overwhelmed numerically. Though it occurred much further back

in time and the details are fragmentary, this has also been the story of (1) the autochthonous Orang Asli of peninsular Malaya within the state of Malaysia and (2) those autochthonous forest people of Sri Lanka known as the Vāddā.

“Orang Asli” translates as “the original people” and is a collective label that assembles together those communities with roots in the Austroasiatic-speaking peoples who moved into peninsular Malaya in the period 2000-1500 BC. Today the Orang Asli are less than 1 per cent of the total population of Malaysia and are conventionally subdivided by outsiders into three clusters, the Semang, the Senoi and the Orang Asli Melayu; but they themselves are likely to “regard themselves as ‘leaves of the same tree’.”³⁵ These indigenous peoples subsequently came into relationship with three waves of migrants who spoke Malayo-Polynesian (or Austronesian) languages. These in-migrant waves occurred in the early part of the first millennium BC, circa 100 BC and again in the fourteenth century. Their settlements were mostly confined to coastal areas. The last wave, involving the *Melayu* from Palembang, appears to have had the widest effect. Nevertheless, in the initial stages the demographic disparities were not great and the exchanges between the indigenous people of that era and the migrant *Melayu* involved reciprocities as well as acculturation and boundary-crossing in both directions.

As the demand for forest products in the regional trading pattern declined and as the Sultanate state system was consolidated, the relationship was transformed. Andaya summarises matters thus:

As the Melayu grew in dominance, they marginalised the Orang Asli both as economic partners and as human beings. The shift in attitude was reflected in the increasing scorn and contempt with which the Melayu began to treat the Orang Asli. The refusal of the Orang Asli to embrace Islam and to abandon their foraging and shifting agricultural lifestyle confirmed the Melayu view that they lacked ‘civilization’. The process can be detected as early as the seventeenth century in the

Sejarah Melayu, but it is far more obvious in the various episodes recounted in Malay and foreign accounts from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (2002: 39).

In the result, the process of acculturation appears to have shifted radically in favour of the *Melayu* (Malays). Following Benjamin, therefore, one could say that the present communities of Orang Asli represent those who made a “conscious choice [not to become] part of a state and hence were labelled as ‘tribal’.”³⁶ The pressures of political, demographic and ‘civilisational’ dominance upon the declining Orang Asli is reflected in the fact that the most ‘Malayic’ body of contemporary Orang Asli are identified by outsiders as “Orang Asli Melayu.”³⁷

This tale of the Orang Asli’s decline and absorption by politically and numerically dominant sedentary cultivators armed with “culture” or “civilisation” is replicated in the story of the Vāddās of Sri Lanka. As we saw, Sinhala mythology recognises the fact that there were autochthonous inhabitants in the island when Vijaya, the eponymous ancestor of the Sinhalese, is said to have arrived in the fifth century BC. Subsequent Sinhala folklore refers to the Vāddā people and these folk are deemed to be the lineal descendants of the original autochthonous peoples. It would seem that over the centuries these forest people lived in the hills and/or jungles on the edge of the various state centres and agrarian settlements.³⁸ When the modernising colonial state of British Ceylon took form in the nineteenth century, the Vāddā could be found as a partially or wholly sedentary people in pockets of the malaria-ridden and sparsely populated jungles of the North Central and Eastern Provinces, and even in the Southern Province and Sabaragamuva.³⁹ Despite their numerical insignificance, they remained a census category in British times and were counted: numbering 5,332 in 1911 and 2,361 in 1946, figures that could not even make up 0.0 percent of the population.⁴⁰ Since then their number has dwindled because the vast majority have become Sinhala-speakers and Buddhists (with a vestigial Vāddā awareness as “Kuveni’s children” in some instances), while yet others in the

Eastern Province (and Northern Province?) have become Tamil and Tamil-speakers.⁴¹ The virtual disappearance of the Vāddās in modern times, that is, their numerical minuteness, renders them of little moment in the political engagements taking place today. This is in contrast to the Orang Asli, while being in marked contrast to the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander peoples.

In overview, then, the Orang Asli, Vāddā and Australian Aborigines share one feature: they are widely recognised as the original autochthonous peoples of their respective lands. Taking my cue from Rod Lucas,⁴² one can accent the category “autochthonous” as “being of the land” and proceed to the argument that the “indigenoussness” (and thus the “firstness”) of these peoples is one measure deeper than that of peoples who are merely “indigenous” or those who possess migration myths marking their advent from other lands. In effect, I am drawing a classificatory distinction between the “autochthonous indigenous” and those simply “indigenous” by weight of time.

But, unlike the Aborigines, this “ancientness” and autochthony does not give the Orang Asli and the Vāddā a high measure of symbolic value.⁴³ Their absence of “culture” weighs against them in contexts where literate and poetic knowledge as well as high religion on the one hand, and settled agricultural activity on the other, had hegemonic force in the cultural order of evaluation. The contrast with the present-day status of Australian Aboriginal people is instructive. No longer can the latter be disparaged widely in public as “primitive.”⁴⁴ The influence of liberal ideas in White Australian circles and the articulate expansion of activist Aboriginal voices have now captured the high moral ground in ways that, say, the Orang Asli and the Vāddā do not quite enjoy.

In their turn each of these three differing cases, as a cluster, differs from the story of the relationship between a body of recent migrants entering lands with a settled population of long-resident, and thus “indigenous,” people who had a state system of their own prior to their conquest by the British. This latter type embraces three cases that are within the parameters of the comparative exercise sponsored by the editors of this volume: namely, (i) the

relationship between those known today as “Indo-Fijians” and Fijians, that is, in what is my deliberate contrivance, “Native Fijians,” and (ii) the relationship between those described as “Chinese Malaysians” and Malays⁴⁵ and (iii) the relationship between the Sinhalese, Sri Lanka Tamils, and Mohammedan Moors⁴⁶ on the one hand and on the other and those known in British Ceylon as “Indian Tamils,” that is, the *Malaiyaha* Tamils of the plantation districts of Sri Lanka.⁴⁷ In all these instances the migrants, whether plantation workers, labourers or traders, came across, or were brought across, in substantial numbers. Their numerical weight and relative proportions were of some consequence once the British left and a democratic form of government was in place.

Though the Indo-Fijians and the Chinese Malaysians have some demographic concentrations in a few territorial pockets, they do not have a substantial area where they are a majority unlike the Sri Lankan Tamils⁴⁸ or even the *Malaiyaha* Tamils, who have been the single largest group in Nuwara Eliya District since the 1980s. In Fiji, moreover, they confront an indigenous body of people, who amidst significant internal island and class differentiation, seem to have a special affinity with their lineage or clan place and/or land. This attachment appears to be expressed in a complex and varied set of ways. A critical concept in this regard is the term *vanua*.

As Marshall Sahlins clarifies matters, *vanua* bears a multiplicity of meanings, some of which overlap, according to context of usage:

1. *vanua* = a land “of itself,” i.e., with paramount chief and a complement of specialised clans (*mataqali*), and thus in this sense a political entity.
2. *vanua* = a place, [and thus] 2a. one’s place, home or homeland; [or figuratively,] 2b an area of expertise.
3. As “the *vanua*,” it = the underlying “land people” (also *kai vanua*) of a place — a village, land or kingdom; they are original occupants, in that sense = *i taukei* or so-called owners.⁴⁹

Vanua does not seem to have connotations of property because, says Sahlins, the term *qele* is deployed when references to soil are made. But its ramifying significance is indicated by the genitive “of” that precedes it and the overlapping meanings that link it with clan, clan chief and home-place so to speak. As critical, too, is its connection with *i taukei*, namely “native, first occupant” (or “indigenous owner”).⁵⁰ Thus, the concepts *vanua* and *i taukei* point to those with original, and thus prime, links with a place (though not necessarily carrying the idea of property). This summary can hardly do justice to the complexity of the Fijian social structure and its conceptual order. Because most Fijian clans relate “standard histories of moving from place to place for generations,”⁵¹ it does not seem possible to conceptualise their relationship with land as a form of consubstantiality in the fashion associated with the Australian Aboriginal people. Nevertheless, the evidence points to links with “place” that are profound and ramify into wider kin groups and the political-cum-cosmological order.

Since these suggestions are inspired by evidence partly garnered through latter-day anthropological researches, the question arises whether these attachments and practices are a product of British rule rather than hoary native tradition. It is well-known that it was the British Governor, Gordon, who secured native title for the Fijians as far back as the 1870s by decreeing that their lands were “inalienable” and held in corporate units. This paternal and protective act may well have been an “invention of tradition” – in the sense that Gordon and his aides may have misinterpreted matters and/or read the practice of one part of Fiji in their own time to be a generalised pattern. In codifying and standardising the tenurial scheme in the fashion favoured by bureaucratic rationality, they may have both transformed and frozen a scheme of things that had been quite diverse and subject to considerable fluidity. This seems to be the crux of Peter France’s review of the British intervention set against his interpretation of previous Fijian history in the immediate pre-colonial period. In his reading the pre-contact era was marked by “incessant inter-tribal skirmishing involving continuous migration and re-settlement.”⁵² Thus, he

asserts that there was no common land tenure system and that a *mataqali* (a localised kin group which, with other *mataqali*, coalesced into a *yavusa*, a corporate body at a higher level) was not a proprietary unit.⁵³

But *vanua*, as we noted, is not about proprietorship *per se*. In any event, and significantly, France makes no reference to *vanua* or other critical indigenous concepts such as *i taukei*, *lewā*, *masa*, *mana* or *tamata dina*.⁵⁴ These are worrying omissions. While allowing for the transformative effects of British codification practices, my experience of agrarian history in British colonies also indicates that, more often than not, the impact of British rule generated a re-working of tradition and some residual continuities. In effect, the transformations were often imbricated by elements of the past.

Be that as it may, Native Fijian understandings of their relationship today with land-as-place appear to be as profound as transcendental. As such, the legitimacy of their case appears to have a broad analogy to Australian Aboriginal land claims. To reiterate: the legitimacy of the Aboriginal demand for land rights today does not rest either on the victimisation and degradation they suffered in the past, or their numerical weakness in the political order in recent times. It rests on a sacred and emotionally fulfilling relationship of consubstantiation with their places of the Dreaming (sometimes referred to as “the Law”⁵⁵ in modern times).

Where such profound emotional attachments exist, the empirical “truth” or historical depth of these kin group and/or familial connections to land-as-place is usually immaterial. Therefore, where the majority of those identifying with, say, the hypothetical place BeBeing believe in their Bebeing claims, we have then a powerful force that one cannot arrogantly dismiss through empirical, rational, secular reasoning. It is because they sympathize with such orientations among the Native Fijians, or segments thereof, that the leaders and people of virtually every micro-state in the Pacific appear, as far as I know, support the Native Fijian insistence⁵⁶ that they should have a special status in the struggle for political rights in Fiji. In brief, on *a priori* grounds

I support privileges being attached to those with the deepest indigeneity unless their numerical proportions are negligible. There is no doubt that such special pleading is of functional benefit to the indigenes. It helps them sustain their power and makes it harder for in-migrant peoples to maximise their freedoms and advantages as individuals regardless of ancestry. The crux of each situation, however, is the specific cluster of "privileges" that are recognised within the context of economic and political power. Here, the Baltic states provide pointers to a more accommodative and politically-integrative socio-political process than that emerging in Fiji and Malaysia.

VI. Latvia

In order to further deepen our comparative exploration and to work out "pragmatic first principles," I take a majestic leap across continents to the situation of Latvia in the 1990s and today in 2003. Yes, Latvia. Latvia because, together with the other two Baltic states, Estonia and Lithuania, it is a land that has been subject to large scale migration during the last 60 years. What is more, this migration stems from a big imperial neighbour, Russia, which occupied the country in 1940 and ruled it as an incorporated territory subject to Sovietization for some fifty years.

Ethno-nationalist movements of popular mobilisation emerged in all the Baltic states in the 1980s and the collapse of the Soviet Union in August 1991 saw them emerge as independent entities. Thus, from the 1990s the Latvians have found themselves burdened with an irredentist situation of alarming proportions: of the population of some 2.5 million in Latvia today, 55% are Latvian, 32.5% are Russian, 4.05% Belorussian and the rest mostly Ukrainian, Polish and Lithuanian.⁵⁷ Many of the Russian settlers consider Latvia their home, but only a few seem to have been fully proficient in the Latvian language in 1991. In the 1990s they held "basic civil rights, such as freedom of movement, expression, and religion, but not important political and social ones: the right to

vote, hold civil service jobs, own shares in joint-stock companies, receive state benefits or possess weapons."⁵⁸ With the enactment of a law that rendered Latvian the official state language, their position was further threatened.⁵⁹ In this sense they are what some voices today would call "second class citizens." This was in effect the position adopted by Katherine Verdery during her Keynote Address at the Annual Conference of the American Ethnological Association in San Juan in 1996.

But such a verdict, such vocabulary, is premised on the democratic principle of equal rights and the ideals of liberal humanism associated with the Enlightenment and the American and French Revolutions. They do not take account of emotions linked to colonial subordination in the immediate past. The point is that most of the "Russians-in-Latvia" (my phrase) entered Latvia as one part of an invading force. Attuned as I am to the emotional circumstances arising out of colonial subordination, on hearing Verdery I assumed that there would be some Native Latvians who would resist the naturalization of the Russians-in-Latvia and who would see the latter as a cancer within the body politic.⁶⁰ In *a priori* terms, therefore, these Native Latvians would have four possible "solutions" to resolve the "Russian problem." In bald terms these "Paths" would be:

- A. To kill all the Russian Latvian residents, genocide on a Nazi scale.
- B. To evict the Russian Latvians (e.g. as happened to the Indians in Burma, namely Myanmar).
- C. To grant them qualified citizenship rights of some form, but to restrict the political ramifications in some way. There could be a whole range of permutations here, including "positive discrimination" that weights the voting power of the majority community or those having "more" homely belonging.⁶¹
- D. To give them full 100% citizenship rights.

Speaking from the position of an "outsider," I would not, of course, condone the courses A and B. But even as an "outsider" listening

to Verdery's Keynote Speech it seemed to me understandable that a significant proportion of Native Latvians would be reluctant to adopt position D. If such antipathies command some numerical support and emotional commitment among the Native Latvians, how could (can) an "outsider" advocate course D? To do so would be to encourage heightening conflict and the possibility of a Native Latvian movement (rather like the Taukei in Fiji?) towards B or A. Thus, in my view the pragmatic *modus vivendi* in the 1990s would have been Path C, with a proviso to the effect that a shift to D could be anticipated over time as new generations of Russians-in-Latvia adopted bilinguality and developed an attachment to their place of residence. It was in order to prevent a substantial minority of Native Latvians from pressing towards A or B that my response to Verdery's argument – before I had developed more detailed information on the Latvian situation – was to advocate course C as a first stage towards D.

VII. Towards a Summing Up

I adopted this position when I heard Verdery at San Juan in 1996.⁶² Since published (1998), Verdery's essay raises a series of highly pertinent issues in perceptive ways through her familiarity with the contemporary situation in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet bloc. However, her remarks on the nationality-issue in former Yugoslavia and the Baltic states indicate that she is committed to the secular, rational, democratic principles that have been institutionalized and naturalized in the West.

As we know, from the moment when the rationalist and capitalist framework of Europe moved into a position of world dominance in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the political ideologies of the "West" have assumed the cast of the "universal."⁶³ I have deliberately bracketed the word "Western" in order to avoid the oversimplified dichotomy associated with the image of "the West versus the Rest." The foundational premises of "Western" philosophy and politics that I highlight here are not fully accepted

in parts of South Eastern and Eastern Europe. To avoid this oversimplification I adopt another device, a synecdoche where the sign "French" stands for "Western." This rendering is informed by the fact that the American and French Revolutions were key moments in the evolution of the political philosophy that I am targeting, with the latter being the foundational embodiment of a major process of transformation. Thus, in the 1790s it was feasible for Abbé Sieyès to follow the ideas formulated by Rousseau and other Enlightenment writers and to define the "nation" as "a body of associates living under one common law and represented by the same legislature."⁶⁴ In France and in Britain, therefore, as Namier argues (1958) one saw the development of a (peculiar) territorial concept of nation-ness.

Verdery is clearly guided by this liberal "French" philosophy when she implies that the Russian people in each Baltic state, residents now for some 50-odd years and including new generations whose home is Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia as the case may be, should have the same rights tout court as the native-speakers. On hearing her in 1996, my immediate reaction was amazement at her disregard for the emotional sentiments of colonial experience. It is her universalist inspiration and philosophy, together with its own "imperialism of the mind," that I challenge: for I consider it to be as naïve as perilous in certain contexts.

In circumstances where the bulk of the Russian population entered the land as part of an invading force in recent times, in my view, the political leanings displayed by Verdery spell extreme danger: Their very pureness of liberalism, their utopian cast, endangers the prospect of liberal institutions taking root in such lands. It amounts to an application of principles extended to migrants to Britain, USA and Australia quite blindly to political and societal conditions that are radically different.⁶⁵ Speaking from a position in the "South" in today's global order, I regard Verdery's stance to be a classic instance of liberalism undermining itself. In effect, Verdery's "French" programme asks the Latvians to extend the same rights to a conquering people who had dominated them recently, who had (mostly) not bothered to learn the Latvian

language and who constituted a substantial and powerful minority within their new domain. To demand this, in my reading, is to ask for a great deal and not allow for the embodied experience of numerous Native Latvians in recent times. To demand this is to discount their experience of subordination.

The Latvian analogy, on the other hand, cannot be extended blindly to other 'like' situations because no two histories and circumstances are precisely similar. The comparative juxtapositions in this essay have a restricted purpose: they are meant to be sensitizing instruments that caution each other and bring the wholesale and blind application of "French" political theory into question.

My argument, therefore, leans towards pragmatism, a modification of foundational principles in order to prevent a descent into reactionary excesses and to establish case-specific forms of *modus vivendi*. As such, it supports the strategic adjustments behind the constitutional or political compromises in Malaya/Malaysia (1957, 1965, 1969/71) and in Fiji (1970, 1990 and 1997) that pragmatically weighed the political scales heavily in favour of the Malays and the Native Fijians respectively.

For the benefit of those unfamiliar with the political history and constitutional order of these two states, let me indicate that the political negotiations leading to independence from Britain involved bargains that installed statutory discrimination in favour of Malays and (Native) Fijians in each of these countries. Spatial constraints do not permit me the luxury of a comprehensive summary, so let me provide some select details to underline this point.

The emergence of Malaya (as it was then called) as a nation state on 31 August 1957 was preceded by a local political "bargain" in 1955 that informally recognised the principle of *Ketuanan Melayu*, or "Malay Dominance."⁶⁶ In consequence the Constitution of the Federation of Malaya accorded the Malays a "special position," made Malay the official language and Islam the official religion. While the category "Malay" was defined, it was left to the definition of "Federal citizenship" for others to secure citizenship

rights. The secondary status of others was also marked by Article 153 (1), a clause that reserved quotas for Malays for public service jobs, licences and scholarships.⁶⁷ Evaluating the situation in 1972, Esman observed that in 1965 the quota system effectively secured a ratio of eight Malays to one non-Malay within the Malayan Home & Foreign Services. He added that this imbalance was "an aspect of hegemony in government to counterbalance Chinese predominance in the economic and political fields," and served as a "symbol of second-class citizenship" accorded to the various groups of non-Malays.⁶⁸ His investigations also led him to the verdict that "communal issues in Malaysia are so salient, interwoven into every issue of public policy and public management, that they must be explicitly calculated in every policy decision."⁶⁹ In recent decades this principle has been even more sharply stressed by the deep currents of Islamic fundamentalism and the push to make Malaysia into "a Islamic state" of a theocratic character.⁷⁰

In summary view, therefore, in Malaysia today the *Melayu* or Malays constitute an apical and dominant Core, with the Chinese, Indians and others as Ancillaries, or what I would call the Et cetera, around the hierarchically located Core. Paraphrasing the words of Dr. Mahathir Mohamed, Cheang Boon Kheng has recently noted that until the Malays are willing to give up their special privileges, "*Ketuanan Melayu* will remain part of the Malaysian political system and *Bangsa Malaysia* [the idea of a multi-ethnic Malaysian community] seems remote."⁷¹

Albeit in different manner, this situation also holds true of the political order installed in Fiji at the moment of independence in 1970 and reiterated forcefully by the events of the late 1980s and then eventually embodied in the new constitution of 1997. In deliberately oversimplified terms one could say that the negotiations leading to Fijian independence in the 1960s involved four key sets of 'players': the Native Fijian leaders centred upon the Alliance Party, the spokesmen for the Indo-Fijians leading the Federation Party,⁷² local European interests and the imperial British authorities who were ostensibly an impartial umpire, but in fact operating as a

player within the local ferment. The constitution of 1970 was a compromise that set up a bicameral legislature with a Legislative Council that was largely chosen by separate ethnic constituencies. Critically, the colonial recognition of "Fijian paramountcy" was reinscribed by the recognition of a Council of Chiefs as a "supreme advisory body" that could (a) nominate both the President and Vice-President of State and (b) nominate a few members to the Senate, members who had the power to veto legislation affecting Fijian land, customs, customary rights and institutions. In effect, the hegemony of the Native Fijians was secured by these arrangements. The constitution of 1997 reiterated and thus entrenched these principles and procedures.⁷³

Even a cursory reading of the political history of the new states of Fiji and Malaysia indicates that the leaders the non-indigenous ethnic groups made pragmatic compromises that installed the principal indigenous communities in dominant positions as the British vacated the position of imperial satrap. In brief, what occurred in both countries was my Position C.

The subsequent story of Fiji presents a potential challenge to my argument that such pragmatic adjustments prevent a slide into political excess of a violent kind. The *modus vivendi* adopted in Fiji in 1970 after political negotiations in the 1960s did not prevent military rule from 1987-1990 brought about by coup d'etat in 1987,⁷⁴ nor prevent another political crisis centred on George Speight and his backers later on. These eruptions, however, emerged from the peculiarities of electoral outcomes that had not been anticipated by those constitution-makers seeking to institutionalise Native Fijian hegemony. These surprising results generated a right-wing backlash. These events display precisely the type of dangerous extremism that Path C is meant to obviate. The question at issue, therefore, is whether they negate my argument or whether they mark the failure of particular forms of Path C? Only a specialist in Fijian affairs can address this question. But the political set-up initiated in 1997 after the report of the Reeves Commission would suggest that pragmatic paths were deemed unavoidable.

"Pragmatism," however, must cut both ways. Those who benefit from Path C, the Malays and Native Fijians,⁷⁵ must also step forth into the future with eyes on the horizon and with a good dose of self-reflexivity. The energies of the disadvantaged citizens within their nation state are surely resources that yield investments, both economic and beyond economics. For the Native Fijians to consider themselves superior because they possess the phenomenological advantage of height and bulky size, or because the Indo-Fijians were formerly described as "coolies," would be to implant attitudes of racism that are as detestable as those found among so many White settlers in the heyday of imperialism. To inscribe measures of discrimination into stone, to entrench hegemony, is to court debilitating futures. There are worrying signs in Malaysia even though electoral necessities encourage ruling parties to assuage the factions representing Chinese and Indian Malaysian interests. Despite the fact that Malays have secured a significant proportion of the high prestige professional and administrative jobs, there seems to be a tightening of the screws in favour of Malay *bumiputera* as a result of the pressures mounted by fundamentalist Islamic forces.⁷⁶ This trend, moreover, is occurring in a context in which major demographic shift has been taking place because of the lower birth rate among Chinese Malaysians and the in-migration (legal and illegal) of peoples from Indonesia who speak dialects of Malay and can easily intermarry or pass as Malay. The proportion of Chinese Malaysians appears to have declined from 37% to 25%, but this is difficult to chart because census operations are a political hot potato and subject to administrative occlusion.

Such trends can be counterproductive within any nation state. There must, in other words, be a readiness among dominant groups to jettison some facets of institutionalised privilege over the long run as circumstances change. In this regard the ongoing contemporary histories of Latvia and Estonia may provide welcome lessons.

VIII. Integrative Pragmatism in Latvia & Estonia

Though disenfranchised initially, it appears that the Russian settlers are in the process of being re-integrated into the new nation states, especially in Estonia. “French” observers tend to take this rather for granted. But I wish to underline how remarkable a story it is for those with “Southern eyes” so that observers can decipher the factors that have aided this process. My review of Melvin’s early article on the subject (1995) indicates that the following facets have materially assisted the development of more inclusive political processes.

1. Because the migration was under the aegis of the Soviet Union there was “a strange admixture of Soviet and Russian culture” among the settlers. By the 1990s many Russians-in-Latvia and Estonia had lost their cultural roots so that “most Russian-speakers [had] great difficulty identifying themselves with any one particular culture.” In other words, “a high degree of reverse Balticization” and “de-ethnicization” seems to have occurred among these immigrants.⁷⁷
2. Several “Russian speaking settlers emerged from the independence struggles of the 1980s “as the most market-oriented and democratic of the settler communities in the former Soviet Union.”⁷⁸ In my vocabulary, then, the process of embourgeoisement among the settlers has aligned them with modern trends and the principles of institutionalized democracy.
3. In Latvia there has been a propensity for intermarriage: “in 1988 33.1% of marriages involving Latvians were of mixed nationality.”⁷⁹ This is a stunning figure to my eyes – and surely stunning to all those in Sri Lanka, Fiji and Malaysia — and its influence cannot be underestimated.

4. Again, in Latvia, as a small but momentous beginning, “there has been a growing tendency among Russian parents to send their children ... to Latvian-language kindergartens and primary schools” even though they have the option of sending them to Russian-media facilities.⁸⁰
5. In both states, moreover, there has been the osmosis of values that hold the high moral ground in the European firmament, those identified in shorthand within this essay as “French.” In a political context in which the Baltic states were (are) seeking “integration into international, especially European institutions” [such as the European Union], their leaders had to moderate the legislation discriminating against the recent migrants.⁸¹
6. In the crucible years 1989-91 Russian-speakers in both Estonia and Latvia “demonstrated increasing support for Baltic independence.” The election results in Latvia in the early 1990s indicate that some Russian-speakers voted for ethnic Latvians rather than Russian Latvian candidates, while sociological surveys indicate that nearly half the Russian-speakers in both countries did not consider themselves to be citizens of USSR.⁸²
7. A law passed in Latvia in late 1993 enabled “400,000 of the 700,00 registered non-Latvian residents of Latvia to apply for naturalization” in a process that should see completion by the end of 2003.⁸³

Melvin’s brief review of the two countries suggests that by the mid-1990s the process of incorporation of the Russian settlers has proceeded furthest in Estonia where the Russian-speaking populations were developing “a new non-Soviet identity” and revealing “growing loyalty for Estonia.”⁸⁴ In Latvia this trend is less advanced. The administrative services have been purged of Russian-speakers because of the requirement that bureaucrats be

fluent in Latvian. In the result, the Russian-speakers are finding themselves “at the mercy of civil servants of civil servants who are unaware of their problems or opposed to their presence in the country.”⁸⁵ Melvin 1995: 54. Note that in 1989 only 34, 249 out of a total of c. 279,000 non-Latvians, that is, 15.1 per cent, spoke Latvian as their first language (p. 30).

So the situation has not been without continuing tensions, not least the fear of “national endangerment” arising from tiny states sitting adjacent to a huge and powerful neighbour. But, for all that, the moderate and inclusive policies that are in process in Estonia and Latvia convey lessons of pragmatic re-adjustment for all of us in the global South. The most impressive aspect of these ongoing developments is the manner in which extremist forces within the hegemonic indigenous majority seem to have been contained so that integrative adjustments are stimulated within both sides of the ethnic divide.

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Notes & Citations

- ¹ For example, Roberts 1978; K. M. de Silva 1986; Gunatilleke 2001: 4-25 and K. Loganathan 1996.
- ² Labourers also came across from Southern India under the “kangany system” to man the plantations in the Central Highlands and eventually became a more or less settled community comprising c. 603,000 or 13.4% of the population in 1921 and 780,589 or 11.7% of the population in 1946. This body was identified as “Indian Tamils.” Guess estimates suggest that today they are perhaps 8% of the population (Bass 2001: 1).
- ³ See Roberts *et al* 1989. Also see Roberts 1974 and ‘Elite formation’, 1979. Technically the local “bourgeoisie” included the British merchants and planters, but they were not normally considered “Ceylonese.” Indeed, the Low Country Products Association was set up c. 1908 as a counter to the Chamber of Commerce an outfit that was totally British.
- ⁴ Roberts *et al* 1989, Amunugama 1979 and Dharmadasa 1972.
- ⁵ Embodied in the Sinhala Only platform of the MEP coalition that swept to power in the elections of 1956, a turning point in Sri Lankan history. However, an undercurrent of Sinhala nationalist thinking had continued to express itself in the period 1920s to 1940s through such associations as the Sinhala Maha Sabha and within the Left Movement as well as the Ceylon National Congress. For aspects, see Roberts 1977. The major split in the LSSP in 1953 was due to the language of administration issue; and the eventual shift towards Sinhala chauvinism by Philip Gunawardena’s wing of the Trotskyist thinking was an incipient dimension of the Left Movement from the 1930s. If one looks at the political biography of individuals such as Somaweera Chandrasiri this becomes apparent.
- ⁶ The proportion has increased because of the out-migration of Indian Tamils as well as SL Tamils in a context that has also promoted considerable out-migration of families from all ethnic groups for economic reasons. About 400,000 “Indian Tamils” were repatriated in the 1960s after the Sirima-Shastri Pact (Bass 2001: 12).
- ⁷ The National Peace Council, the Centre for Policy and Research Alternatives, ICES and SSA are among the many NGOs working towards these ends.

- ⁸ See Strayer 1963: 23, Snyder 1968: 57-59 and Pflanze 1966: 139-42 for elaborations of this argument.
 - ⁹ Roberts, ‘Stimulants’, 1979 and 1999: 28-29; and Roberts *et al* 1989: chap. 4-5.
 - ¹⁰ See Rogers 1990. For *puranic* history, see Chatterjee 1994.
 - ¹¹ Raheem & Colin-Thomé 2000.
 - ¹² It is my impression that this view was widely shared right through into the 1960s and believed by individuals from all communities. In recent decades archaeology and history have become a battleground of politics as protagonists attempt to claim first occupation of the island. Thus, Sinhala and Tamil writers seek to out-*Ur* each other and present fabulous assertions spun from their own mind. In the meantime, emerging work by archaeologists from Germany and Sri Lanka is beginning to reveal that the civilisation in the first millennium BC was not as undeveloped as the Sinhala/Pali chronicles imply.
- However, there is little doubt in my mind that by the early centuries AD most of the people in the main centres of civilisation in the north, east and south east of the island were speakers of *Sīhala* (that is, what we call proto-Sinhala). The evidence of the foreign monk scholar, Buddhaghōsa, in the 5th century and that of the source known as the *Dhampiyā Atuvā Gātapadaya* (probably 10th century AD) is quite explicit on this point (see Gunawardana 1995: 41-42 for quotation from the latter). Again, Indrapala’s early work concludes that (a) the toponymic evidence involving over a thousand place names of distinctly Sinhalese origin “in Tamil garb” indicates that the settlers in the Jaffna Peninsula during the Anurādhapura period were Sinhalese; and that (b) it seems unlikely that there were many Tamil settlers in the island other than the major ports and the capital city before the tenth century (1965: 273 & 282). Significantly, Indrapala’s dissertation at the library of the University of London has disappeared since I studied it in 1995. As significantly, and quite poignantly, Indrapala, who is Sri Lankan Tamil by upbringing, retired prematurely from academia after rising to the position of Dean, Arts Faculty, at the University of Jaffna and has since become a recluse in Sydney. I suspect that pressures from Tamil activists have been such as to enforce these directions in his life-world.
- ¹³ Diary extract according to notes taken by James T. Rutnam.
 - ¹⁴ Ideas of sovereignty in the pre-capitalist era in Sri Lanka differed from those familiar to us. I contend that the forms of allegiance can be described as “tributary overlordship” marked by rites of homage

such as *dākum*. Thus, the Kings of the Kandyan Kingdom looked upon the Dutch as “their guardians of the seacoast,” a conception that the Dutch catered to so that they could secure the commodity cinnamon. For aspects of this thinking, see Roberts 2002.

From a statement by Piyadasa Sirisena in 1910 quoted in Amunugama 1973: 211-12 & 267. Also see Roberts, ‘Stimulants’, 1979: 223-27.

Dharmapala 1965: 515 and Roberts, ‘Stimulants’, 1997: 1009ff.

For example, *Sinhala Jātiya*, 1 June 1913 & 30 March 1915 and *Sinhala Bauddhaya*, 2 Jan. 1915. Dharmapala even wrote a piece entitled “*kocci demalā*” (*Sinhala Bauddhaya*). Also see Roberts *et al* 1989: 10-21.

Address to the Sinhala Sahodara Samitiya on the 30th July 1910.

On the *vamsa* chronicles, see Mendis 1996, Perera, 1961 and Kemper 1991.

There is no independent confirmation that Vijaya ever existed (Mendis 1965). In my reading he represents an eponymous ancestor and the story is a genesis tale of the same order as that of Adam and Eve. It signs the conquest (*vijaya*) of the island for the Buddha Dhamma, the central message in the *Mahāvamsa* (Roberts 2000).

In many contexts of usage *shistāchārāya* and *sanskṛtiya*- (culture) are more or less synonymous – not unlike the English words themselves.

The ethos of Buddhism, of course, underlined this devaluation of hunting (and fishing) because the trade involved the taking of life.

This section is informed by vestigial memories of past readings of Burton Stein, Conklin, Geertz, Leach, Boserup and Farmer. It is also underpinned by my previous engagements with the agrarian history of Sri Lanka and British India.

Memo from Peter Sutton, December 2003. In further clarification Sutton says: “Human beings came later, conceptually if not temporally. That is, most, if not all, Aboriginal historiography, classically speaking, claims immigrant status for those who discovered or left behind the world which is now held by those who belong to bits of it. However, the Dreaming period is usually thought of as just beyond living memory of the oldest kin — maybe 150 years ago at the most, in calendric terms. It is modern political discourse which emphasises 40-60,000 years of continuous occupation, and which thus recognises the role of science in these politics.”

Memo from Peter Sutton, December 2003.

From ATSIC, ‘Matter of Fact’, website www.atsic.gov.au. In addition there were 28,744 persons who defined themselves as Torres Strait

Islanders. The latter are considered a distinct “people,” but fall within the rubric “First Australians” together with the “Aboriginal people.”

I do not use the term “descent groups” in the archetypal form deployed by early anthropologists so much as an approximation of the factors that bind localised and named groups together in differentiation from contiguous others. Some Aboriginal groups today refer to themselves as “tribes,” but others resist such a label vehemently

Rose 1992: 187-89. Note that Cook never ventured into this inland region. But having grasped the importance of Captain Cook for the stories related by White Australians, the VRD elders clearly deployed him as a trope and totemic emblem for the White order they have been subject to (see Roberts, ‘Histories’, 1997: 373-75).

This note is informed by a Memo from Peter Sutton, who observes that, “as far as I know, only a part of the Native Title Act remains regarded as a form of statutory racial discrimination.”

I recommend a viewing of the recent film *Rabbit Proof Fence* for a presentation of one such story from relatively recent times.

This verdict is the product of ‘permeation,’ the seeping in over the years of information through conversations with colleagues working on Aboriginal issues as well as the intermittent absorption of media stories. More specifically, I have run this argument before Rod Lucas of the Dept of Anthropology, University of Adelaide and profited from his remarks. Guided by him I refer to two publications that would provide outsiders with an introduction to the issues at stake: namely, D. Smyth 1994 and Isabel McBryde (ed.) 1985.

My initial comments in “Foundational Premises...” were informed by discussions with Fiona Magowan and Peter Sutton as well as the impressions I have gathered over the years from debates in Australian circles. In my first formulation I spoke of the Aboriginal connections with their land as being “intuitive.” But Magowan has questioned this usage, while supporting the thrust of the argument: “I’m not sure that Yolngu would consider their connections with country intuitive, in fact they would name what we label ‘intuitive response’ quite firmly as ancestral power ‘mārr’”. For them, the manifestation of spiritual presence or sentience is not an airy-fairy occurrence but a particular type of ancestral reality which can be prompted by human action and intervention. The problem with intuition is that in Western concepts human agency seems irrelevant and that we are unsuspecting recipients of some ‘coincidental occurrence/feeling/whatever’. Therefore the idea of intuition is

actually ours when we try to convey some parallel in Western terms. Intuition is consubstantive in Yolngu society" (Mcgowan's email memo, my emphasis). This kind of note should be mandatory reading for all political scientists.

33 Information conveyed via email by Fiona Magowan. Note that the concept of "ownership," as used by Aborigines and/or specialist investigators is not quite the same as "ownership" within a market system with property concepts.

34 Without specialist knowledge of local politics, my account of the recent emergence of Kaurna symbols is probably superficial. It does not, as Sutton notes in criticism, "go behind the scenes and recognising the competitive politics within Adelaide Aboriginal networks which energises such efforts, and the prizes of recognition and money that come from such recognition."

35 Andaya 2002: 23-24. The summary paraphrase that follows is based on this work. Note, however, that Andaya relies on such authorities as P. Bellwood and G. Benjamin for the archaeological and linguistic material.

36 Andaya 2002: 26, referring to a forthcoming article by Benjamin, entitled "On becoming tribal...." in a book edited by Benjamin and Cynthia Chou. Also see Laird 1979.

37 Andaya 2002: 23, 42. It is my speculation, a logical one on *a priori* grounds, that the Orang Asli were a forgotten people who lacked voice during the negotiations in the 1940s to 1960s leading to the constitutional reorganisations of that period. However, the prominent role accorded to the concept *bumiputera* in Malaysian politics has given them considerable mileage in recent times, while the global lobbies for indigenous peoples have encouraged them to claim a distinct ethnic space that could even extend to delimited pieces of territory (Andaya 2002: 25, 44).

38 See Meegaskumbura 1995.

39 Seligmann 1993; Obeyesekere 1987: 13, 304-06 and Obeyesekere 2000 and 2002.

40 *Census of Ceylon, 1946* (Colombo: Government Press, 1951) Table 28. It is possible, of course, that some Vāddas were not reached by the enumerators, or that many classified themselves as Sinhalese or Tamil.

41 Dart 1990 and Brow 1978, 1990 and 1996.

42 During a seminar at the Dept. of Anthropology, University of Adelaide on 27 May 2003 where I presented a version of the original UKM paper.

43 A caveat has to be inserted here for the Vāddā. The Sinhala worldview seems to accord them potency and the Vāddās were an important part of state rituals in the pre-modern period (e.g. that of the Kingdom of Kandy) and even today are figuratively represented in the Āsala Perahāra and the Kataragama festival. But there are significant ambivalences because of their association with "wildness" (*val*) and lack of culture. For an illustration of disparagement, see Leonard Woolf's fictional *Village in the Jungle*, London: Hogarth Press, 1961, pp. 27-28 (originally 1913).

44 The older strands of racist pejoration still prevail in certain circles and are occasionally voiced on talkback radio for instance. But these voices are aware that what they say is not "proper" and are under challenge.

45 For the sake of simplicity I leave out those identified as Indians, Ceylonese (Tamils), Sinhalese, et cetera in Malaysia.

46 In English-speak the term "Muslim" was only adopted in the 1930s. Till then "Mohammedan" was the label used. I adopt the term "Mohammedan Moor" in order to distinguish these Muslims (*yon*) from the Malays (*ja*), a distinction that is quite clear in the Sinhala language labels.

47 For facets of their lifeworld, see Bass 2001 and Daniel 1997. They numbered roughly 1.1 million or 6 per cent of the total population in 1981. Mostly disfranchised in 1948/49, they appear to have secured the vote in principle, and I believe mostly in fact, since governmental measures were initiated after 1977.

48 This point has been rightly stressed by Horowitz 1993.

49 Email note, 29 May 2003. As a proviso related to meaning 3, "namely, "the *vanua*," Sahlins added this line: "Certain clans (heralds, notably) from such people. They are the elders. The chiefs come later, are gone, 'children'." Cf. the definition for *vanua* provided by Brij Lal: "land in both the physical and psychological sense of attachment to a place [and] a unit composed of several villages of a *yavusa*," (1992: 379) – the *yavusa* being a corporate descent group that is the third level of a segmentary structure of lineages.

50 Email note from Sahlins, 29 May 2003 and Sahlins 1985: 83, 86, 87 and 95.

51 Second email note from Sahlins, June 2003.

52 France 1969: 13.

53 France 1969: 14, 136.

54 *Lewā* refers to "authority;" *masa* to "barkcloth;" *mana* to "god, spirit, potent power;" and *tamata dina* to "true people" in a manner that is synonymous with *i taukei* (Sahlins 1985: 95, 85, 83). Note

that in another context, that of the Solomon Islands, *mana* means “personal power” or “spiritual power” and is thereby linked to “moral guardianship” (White 1991: 177, 107).

55 The emergence of this term, “the Law” written with a capital L, as a synonym of specific Dreaming stories is itself an interesting window on the history of Aboriginal relations with the state machinery of the White settler invaders. A tracing of its etymology and usages could be instructive.

56 The Native Fijians, as I have noted, are not united or homogeneous, but there is, I suspect, a broad band of support within this ethnic category for the privileges they have in relation to landed rights, that is, the lack of statutory equality in relation to property which disadvantages Indian Fijians.

57 Data from the internet and Verdery 1998: footnote. Note, too, that in 1989 “the Latvians were minorities in the seven largest cities of their country” (Melvin 1995: 31). Melvin’s population figures for the year 1989 present the Russians-in-Latvia as 34% and the Latvians as 52%, while the Russians-in-Estonia were 30.3% and the Estonians were 61.3% (1995: 32-33).

58 Verdery 1998: 295 (citing Bowring) and footnote 14.

59 Melvin 1995: 38.

60 This supposition was on *a priori* grounds. Melvin’s essay indicates that my guesswork was on target. He speaks of “powerful ethno-political impulse[s]” emerging in the late 1980s and early 1990s and the push for narrow definitions of citizenship as well as forces that saw the Russian-speakers as “the fifth column of Russian-Soviet influence” (1995: 25-26, 37-38). Though written in clinical style, tell-tell signs within Melvin’s article indicate that his political persuasion is based on the same liberal “French” philosophy informing Katherine Verdery’s comments.

61 Note that the constitution of Slovenia has a three-tiered system of privileges differentiating the (i) Slovenes, (ii) “autochthonous” Hungarians and Italians, and (iii) others (Verdery 1998: 295). Japan, too, has tiered citizenship that makes Koreans of long residence and Russians in the northernmost isles into “second-class citizens” (information from Felix Patrikeeff of the Dept of Politics, Adelaide University). Relevant details for Malaysia and Fiji are provided in the main body of my article.

62 I initially penned a manuscript essay called “Foundational Premises...” on the basis of my recollections as a think-piece for the Marga Institute’s deliberations on the Sri Lankan situation. Since then, Verdery’s paper has appeared in print (1998).

63 This is a twist on Karl Marx, *German ideology*, London, 1938, p. 28.
64 Quoted in F. H. Hinsley, *Nationalism and the international system*, New York, 1973, p. 74.

65 Verdery is not entirely blind to the difference. She explains that she uses the term “ethnonational” for the peoples of East Europe “so as to emphasize that in this region the idea of ‘nation’ has long had primarily an *ethnic* sense rather than a political one more familiar to North Americans” (1998: 293).

66 Cheah Boon Kheng 2002: 237.

67 Cheah Boon Kheng 2003.

68 Esman 1972: 75.

69 *Ibid*: 4. Also see Cheah Boon Kheng 2003: 9-10.

70 Martinez 2002.

71 Cheah Boon Kheng 2002: 240. This observation seems to undermine Cheah’s earlier insistence that the “bonds of citizenship, the Malaysian Constitution and the sense of sharing one nation, of ‘my country’ among the various ethnic communities are increasingly evident in present-day Malaysia” (2002: 234). This latter position seems far too benign.

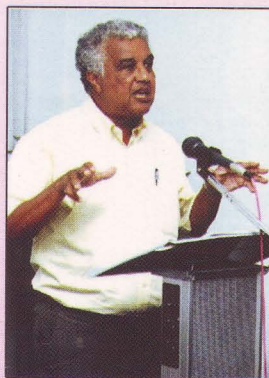
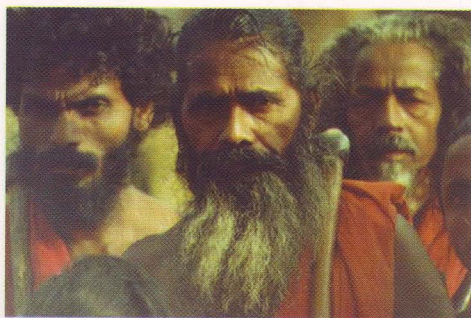
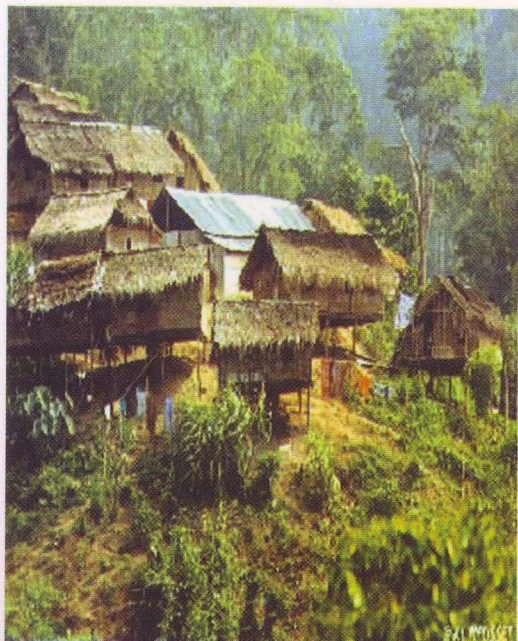
72 The Federation Party included some Native Fijian factions, while part-Europeans and Chinese were among the minor interest groups. For practical purposes the latter have been merged in recent decades with the “European” racial constituency.

73 Information from Brij Lal 2003.

74 See Brij Lal 1988 for an interpretation of these events and processes.
75 I have not referred to the Sinhalese because the situation in Sri Lanka has moved beyond the stages one finds in Fiji and Malaysia. For one, the “Indian Tamils” of yesteryear have had the vote for two decades. For another, the peace negotiations now in progress are a salvage operation to keep the Sri Lanka Tamils within a confederation or federation of some sort. In this sense the SL Tamils have secured their rights by violent means—means deemed legitimate by them (and some backers outside) in the face of both administrative discrimination and sporadic pogroms or riots.

76 Shamsul identifies two strands of thinking, namely, “the radical Islamic bumiputera group” and “the ‘nationalist faction’ within the bumiputera circle of bureaucratic intellectuals” (2003: 1 and 5). However, it would appear more meaningful to refer to the Parti Islam se Malaysia (or PAS), the principal opposition party, as the flag-bearer for these forces, widely supported by *ulama* as well as some regional parties in control of state governments. In the result the ruling party, UMNO, has also watered down its secular veneer and adopted fundamentalist rhetoric (see Martinez 2002).

- 77 Melvin 1995, quotations from pp. 30 & 27.
78 Melvin 1995: 53. Also see Plakans 1997: 246, 260.
79 Melvin 1995: 34.
80 Plakans 1997: 284.
81 Melvin 1995: 55 and Plakans 1997: 285.
82 Melvin 1995: 35-36.
83 Melvin 1995: 249. Also see Plakans 1997: 249.
84 Melvin 1995: 53 & 55.
85 Melvin 1995: 54. Note that in 1989 only 34, 249 out of a total of c.
279,000 non-Latvians, that is, 15.1 per cent, spoke Latvian as their
first language (p. 30).



MICHAEL ROBERTS (D. Phil., Oxon) taught History in Sinhala and English at the University of Peradeniya from 1961 to 1976 and since 1977 has been teaching at the Department of Social Anthropology at the University of Adelaide where he was appointed to the position of Reader in 1984. His major works include *Elites, Nationalisms and the Nationalist Movement in British Ceylon, in Documents of the Ceylon National Congress, Vol 1* (Colombo: Department of National Archives, 1977); *Caste Conflict and Elite Formation: The Rise of a Karava Elite in Sri Lanka, 1500-1931* (Cambridge University Press, 1982); *People In between: The Burghers and the Middle Class in the Transformations within Sri Lanka, 1790s-1980s, Vol 1* (Colombo: Sarvodaya Press, 1989); *Exploring Confrontation. Sri Lanka: Politics, Culture and History* (Reading: Harwood Academic Publishers,

1994); *Crosscurrents: Sri Lanka and Australia at Cricket* (Sydney: Walla Walla Press, 1998) *Sinhala Consciousness in the Kandyan Period, 1590s-1818*, (Colombo: Vijitha Yapa Associates, 2004). He has also published numerous articles and edited several works. Among the latter are (a) *Using Oral Sources: Vansina and Beyond*, special issue of *Social Analysis*, vol. 4, Sept. 1980, edited by Kenneth Brown and Michael Roberts, and (b) the two series on nationalism and politics in Sri Lanka published by the Marga Research Institute under the generic title "Collective Identities" in 1979 and 1997/98 respectively.

- 1979 *Collective Identities, Nationalisms and Protest in Sri Lanka during the Modern Era*.
- 1997 *Sri Lanka. Collective Identities Revisited. Vol. 1*.
- 1998 *Sri Lanka. Collective Identities Revisited. Vol. 2*.

Subsequently, he has been one of the Team Leaders in the Marga Project begun in 1999 with support from NORAD directed towards a collection of essays on *A History of Ethnic Conflict in Sri Lanka: Recollection, Reinterpretation and Reconciliation*, that has led to 24 pamphlets written by a number of specialists appearing in print in Colombo between 2001 and 2003. He has recently won a prestigious Grant from the Presidents' Fund in Sri Lanka towards the translation & publication of his book *Sinhala Consciousness in the Kandyan Period* (Letter dated 4 January 2005).

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