



## Introduction

### *A Talk, Drinks, and Dinner with God*

I remember dates—birthdays, anniversaries, important historical events. I never forget them. In my life there are few dates more important than the 18th of March 2004. It was the day I met God. “I’ll give the talk,” I said, “as long as you get John Barnes to come to it.” They offered, instead, to get me tickets to the Liverpool–Wolves game. “Sorry,” I replied. I would eventually revise that position, but not until later. Two nights before I was due to give the talk at Liverpool John Moores University, just after having given a talk at the University of Manchester (at the invitation, as fate would have it, of a Manchester United fan), I was in a noisy student pub outside the University of Manchester when someone handed me a cell phone. “John Barnes is coming to your talk,” the voice on the other end of the line said. John Barnes.

In truth, I still didn’t believe it. The player who had enabled me to be, finally, truly, a Liverpool fan was coming to hear me give a talk. I was going to meet John Barnes: Liverpool winger, Liverpool captain, scorer of one of the greatest goals in the history of football. He scored that goal on the 10th of June 1984, at the Maracana Stadium in Rio, England against the Brazilians. Barnes beat five Brazilian defenders—left them sprawling in his wake, mesmerized them, made Brazilians believe that the traditionally stolid English, after all, might have some skill in addition to that famed toughness and endurance. Pelé, it was

said, admired the goal. John Barnes is the player I had worshipped for almost fifteen years. I'd watched him play for Liverpool on TV in Cape Town, South Africa, in the late 1980s (with so many dearly held memories of that phenomenal 1987–1988 season). I'd watched him play on TV in a dingy community hall in Detroit (where I'd experienced the pain of the 1996 Football Association [FA] Cup loss to an Eric Cantona goal at the death). I'd watched him countless times in crowded Irish bars on the East Side of Manhattan, TVs scattered everywhere, in the mid- and late 1990s (first as a graduate student and then as an English professor who'd traveled three hours to watch a Liverpool game). I'd watched him on TV in my various homes in the USA, from New York City to a small college town in New England, every opportunity I got.

John Barnes was coming to my talk.

It was the culmination of a strange, and yet not so strange, sequence of events. I'd written an essay, the foundation of this book, entitled "Long Distance Love." An acquaintance of mine read it and passed it along to a friend of his. Not just any friend, though—a "Liverpudlian." Ross Dawson is wary of calling himself a "Liverpudlian" or a "Scouser," as the city's natives are known, because he was born and raised on the Wirral. Instead, he calls himself a "Woolly Back," as Wirral residents are known. After he read my essay, Ross and I struck up a telephone and e-mail friendship. Ross teaches at Liverpool John Moores University, "JMU" in local parlance, and he didn't imagine that USA-based academics wrote about his beloved Liverpool. Ross had a colleague, Hazel, who'd worked in television, and she knew someone who knew Barnes, himself a TV pundit. I'll never know what they said to Barnes to convince him to come to my talk, but I am eternally grateful to whomever it was for whatever it was he or she said. Ross, who has a memorable birthday—he turned forty on the 11th of September 2001—and I are close friends now. Kiplingesque, we share triumphs and disasters on the phone, with the famous 2005 Champions League victory in Istanbul taking pride of place in the archive of our conversations. Understandably, we were both delirious after the "Miracle on the Bosphorus."

Five minutes before the JMU talk I was busy putting my papers in order and someone, a student of Ross's, I think it was, said, "John Barnes is coming." I thought they were taking the mickey out of me. Who wouldn't have made fun of me? Then, there he was—in the flesh,

smiling, confident, and friendly. I moved a couple of steps toward John Barnes. “It’s an honor to meet God,” I said. He smiled. I’m sure he thought I was mad. He kept smiling, benignly, and sensing that I was overwhelmed, he went on: “I’m going to give you a few minutes to compose yourself before your talk. We’ll chat later.”

I remember everything about that talk. It was on intellectuals, and I recall distinctly how Barnes participated in the question and answer session afterward. He was erudite and insightful in his comments. Not just polished like the television commentator he is, but fully engaged, pointed in his questions, sure in his argument. At the end of the talk, we took pictures, he and I. One of those pictures I have framed, together with a signed picture of himself Barnes gave me. And, on the back of one of my business cards, he wrote, in slanting hand, his name and address. That piece, too, is framed with the two pictures. Those three pieces of memorabilia hang together in my study. From time to time I look at them and remember the 18th of March 2004.

“You want to join us for drinks?” I asked, a little tentatively. “Sure,” he said, without hesitation. Drinks drifted into dinner, five hours in total. Between drinks and dinner, Barnes and I were strolling a little behind everyone else, on our way from the bar to the restaurant, when he got a call on his cell phone, or “mobile,” as he called it. “Jamie,” he said, before launching into a brief conversation. “See you Saturday at Old Trafford.” (Tottenham Hotspur, “Spurs,” were playing Manchester United at Old Trafford, the latter’s home ground, that weekend.) Barnes hung up his mobile. He talked about Jamie’s knee injury, how much Jamie liked playing for Spurs, what a good passer of the ball his friend was.

Jamie Redknapp was, like Barnes himself, a former Liverpool captain. Redknapp had been on the other end of the conversation to which I’d been, completely by chance, privy. It was an entirely surreal moment in my life. Here I was with God, who was talking on his cell phone to another former Liverpool captain and an England international midfielder, a player much beloved by the Anfield faithful and his teammates for his inch-perfect passing (all of them, from Barnes to Robbie Fowler to Stevie Gerrard, comment on it). I didn’t even dream about something like this happening to me.

Maybe this is the reward for a lifelong pathology, a pathology whose proper name is love. Here I was, as Barnes might say, “touched by the hand of god.”<sup>1</sup>

The significance of John Barnes to my long distance love for Liverpool Football Club (FC), the absolutely crucial role he played and continues to play, in my relationship with Liverpool, is everywhere in the essays of this book. I became a Liverpool fan, as the “Long Distance Love” chapter describes, by accident. It was an arbitrary decision, a choice made by a young boy in apartheid South Africa from a very long way, geographically and conceptually, away from the city of Liverpool and the club’s Anfield Road Stadium. The full ethical complexity of that choice, a disenfranchised coloured kid supporting an almost uninterruptedly white team for almost two decades in a supposedly democratic metropolitan society, only became resolvable at the moment that John Barnes signed as a Liverpool player in June 1987. His is the central presence in *Long Distance Love*. John Barnes alone enabled me to become *fully* a Liverpool fan: no other player, not Graeme Souness or Steven Gerrard, the greatest central midfielders ever to wear a Liverpool shirt (and central midfield, Barnes apart, is my favorite position), could have made possible a full reconciliation to Liverpool FC.

There are many Liverpool players I admire, names that roll easily off my tongue: “Big Ron” Yeats, Ian Callaghan, Ray Clemence, Kevin Keegan, Kenny Dalglish, Steve McMahon, Ian Rush, Jan Molby. . . . To each of these I attach a series of memories, of sterling defensive performances, of spectacular or vital goals. Since February 1970, when I became a Liverpool fan, I have formed a vast number of emotional attachments to Liverpool FC, to the players, to specific teams (the 1976–1977, 1987–1988, 2000–2001, 2004–2005 sides, just for starters), and to the various iconic managers—the inimitable Bill Shankly, the tactically unsurpassed genius Bob Paisley (my favorite, and the greatest manager in the history of the English game), and Kenny Dalglish (especially for that amazing 1987–1988 team he assembled in his own stylish playing image). But even in this pantheon of “Reds” (as Liverpool is nicknamed) greats, John Barnes stands alone. Singular. Apart, elevated slightly above everyone else. Just slightly, but enough so that you’d notice.

Fans of Watford FC, for whom Barnes once played, say much the same thing. After all, he scored the Maracana goal while he was still representing Watford in the English First Division.

But Watford, for whom John Charles Bryan Barnes made his debut in 1981, is a small club without many, if any, greats of whom to boast. (Barnes would top the list by a mile, but there is also his rugged team-

mate in that side, Luther Blisset, who is worthy of a mention if not such an honor. Surely, however, Watford fans can easily add to that list. Nigel Callaghan? He played on the opposite wing to Barnes during that same era. All three players represented England.) With Liverpool, on the other hand, there are greats aplenty.

Barnes's role was a profoundly visceral one in my relationship with Liverpool. He made things right, he brought together the best elements of my long distance fandom: his deft, complicated awareness of race (see the chapter "Am I Black or Something?" in his autobiography<sup>2</sup>), his capacity to triumph over Liverpool FC's mainly all-white past (making me revisit Liverpool's slave past, when the city was the major English slave port), to say nothing of his sublime, brilliant, sometimes breathtaking skill. Any time I want, I can call up those loping, powerful runs: shoulders dropped just a little, almost squared, like a boxer's, cutting across the field, most often from his position wide on the left flank, feinting, picking up pace with an almost invisible burst of speed. Defenders feared him; the Liverpool fans, hardly the most racially tolerant when he first arrived, came to adore him. All of the city of Liverpool, both Reds fans and Evertonians, love Barnes. (Everton FC is the other club in the city of Liverpool. Taunting Evertonians, Bill Shankly once claimed that there were only two clubs in Liverpool: "Liverpool and Liverpool Reserves." Doing his best Shanks imitation, Rafa Benítez called them a "small team.") Took him to their heart, they did, in this tough Northwestern city where cold blasts of wind whip off the River Mersey during winter, this city still, decades later, struggling bravely to come to terms with the harsh economic facts of postindustrial life. I thanked Barnes from afar every time he performed so exquisitely, every time he led Liverpool out as skipper, every time he scored a goal.

It's little wonder, then, with such a depth of emotion, that upon meeting him I called him by the only name I thought proper: "God." It's not often that you get your prayers answered. I did, though, prayers I didn't even know I'd uttered. Prayers I was too afraid to intone even silently. And I have the pictures to show for it. I left the land of apartheid in 1989, about six months before the de facto end of legalized segregation, never to return permanently. However, it was in that ideological soil, toxic though it was, that my love for Liverpool was born.

**B**ecause of its dislocated roots, *Long Distance Love* is a story about race. But it's a complicated, transnational, antinational story. I am South African by birth, but I do not identify with the nation—I did not

in its apartheid instantiation, I do not in its “democratic” manifestation. I have lived in the USA for the great majority of my adult life, but I make no claims to being an American. South Africa is where I was born, but it is only partly who I am. America is where I live and work, but it does not even begin to define me. National identity is not ontology. Besides, as someone who is not a lover of the nation—not the one of my birth, the one I live in, or any other—I never support a country during the World Cup. I only root for Liverpool players representing their country. Recovering Catholic that I am, I confess, however, to having had a soft spot for Jack Charlton’s Ireland. Charlton’s World Cup teams of 1990 (Italy) and 1994 (USA) won my affections. They were gritty underdogs, drawing into their ranks a few nominal Irishmen, and, besides, who can forget that 1994 victory over Italy at the New Jersey Meadowlands? There are no surprises, however, about why I backed the Republic of Ireland. I never really was too keen on “Big Jack” Charlton (didn’t dislike him, either, in truth), but there were three current or former Liverpool players on his team—Steve Staunton, Ray Houghton (who is actually Scottish; born in Scotland, at any rate, and with the accent to prove it), and John Aldridge (English, a native-born Scouser)—to prove my point about precarious Irishmen. I felt similar affection for Xabi Alonso and Luis Sanz García on the Spanish side at Los Mundiales 2006 in Germany. I kept a keen eye on their performances, conscious as I was, of course, of rooting for—respectively—a Basque and a Catalan representing the “Spanish” national team. (Being a football, or *fútbol*, fan means living, sometimes more uncomfortably than others, with ideological contradictions.)

All of this serves to reinforce the larger point: Liverpool FC is who I am. It is my primary form, arguably my only form, of affective identification. That is how *Long Distance Love* is written: in the voice of the fan, a passionate, consumed-with-Liverpool-FC-for-life fan. Bristling with opinions, without apology for being a fan, full of animus, animated by a lifelong dislike, and sometimes intense hatred, for other clubs—too many to name, but I get around to it, believe me. This a writing born out of multiple transitions: from the random act of a childhood choice, through the wonderfully misguided dreams of an adolescent, to the insights of an adulthood that intensified my relationship with Liverpool. *Long Distance Love* marks the transition from being a keen amateur player in Cape Town to becoming a “professional” (academic) occasionally coaching in the USA and (too) often

writing about the game, about my team. It is for this reason that, like any true fan (I despise the casual fan, the fan who knows nothing, or embarrassingly little, about “her” or “his” team; such a person has no right to the claim of “fan”), I cannot remark upon one match without invoking the history—what may seem like the *entire* history—of my club and my club’s relation not only to its immediate opponents but to almost every other club.

There can be, for me as a Liverpool fan, no writing about my club that is not a knotted blend of pleasure and pain, a writing nurtured by the history of victory (the 1970s, the 1980s, Istanbul) and defeat (I will only rarely give those events proper names; it would be traumatic, it would only recall the soul-destroying pain of the moment). *Long Distance Love* is a writing midwived by the specter of earlier losses and the anticipation of more failures, a writing saturated by the history of triumph—those eighteen English Championships, those five European Cups/Champions League wins—which is, in every encounter, “burdened” by the expectation of yet another piece of silverware for the Anfield trophy cabinet. It is a writing that is impossible without repetition, without the telling of a story more than once, a narrative that requires its being made public again and again. *Long Distance Love* is my going forth and singing, like the Kop (those legendary Liverpool FC fans who occupy the “Spioen Kop” end of the club’s Anfield Road stadium) on game day, the glory of the Good Lord that is Liverpool Football Club. What is the true fan but a religious fanatic? The man who has found the One True Faith? The woman who has found the (football) Answer? (Or, out of respect for NBA fans, the “Answer” who is not Allen Iverson.) The fundamentalist?

*Long Distance Love* is a writing that bears within its every enunciation the life of my fandom, my very life itself. And there is in that declaration, I promise you, not an iota of hubris. Ask my family and friends, especially my brother, Glenn, who is himself a rather, shall we say, keen fan (although I find his evaluations of Liverpool to be less harsh than mine). If the stakes were not so high, what would be the value of my Liverpool fandom? Liverpool means so much because it means so much more than Liverpool FC. And yet there is nothing more than Liverpool FC. How could there be? As the diasporic South African poet Arthur Nortje, who died, too young, in Oxford, said many years ago, “It is life, somehow.”<sup>3</sup> But it is life, nonetheless, the only life worth living.

*Long Distance Love* is a narrative grounded in the experience of growing up in an apartheid society. It's a story about understanding how incomplete knowledge is, about how partial knowledge is sometimes the product of love, about how race can be temporarily contained, politically undermined, but never fully repressed, by a passion for your long distance football club. It's a story about how you get to know the world through football and about how "careless" the knowledge of the fan can be. As I acknowledge in the chapter "Careless Whispers," in which I try to explicate the condition of being a (not-so) nominal fan of FC Barcelona and a (very, but not always so) reluctant admirer of Real Madrid, fandom is at once an absolutist, deeply political commitment and an infelicitous affective relationship with social institutions. Moreover, while complete knowledge about your long distance affiliation is desirable, maybe even advisable, it is, finally, unachievable. (Fandom is like any form of knowledge: we can know more or less, but absolute knowledge is impossible.) Long distance produces a "careless" sort of love, in a George Michael kind of way: saccharine, breathtaking, undeniably always a part of who you are. It is unintentional, marked as much by pleasure as by pain. It is often riddled with ambivalence, and it is filled with contradictions: the object of our affections can produce a love capable of inspiring bitterness or the spiteful bite of defeat as easily as admiration. But it is love, in its full complexity, nonetheless. My long distance love is imperfect in its representation of Spanish football's great rivalry; it is imperfect in its understanding of Catalan and Basque politics. However, commitment to Barça and *la causa Catalana* can make you read literature about the Spanish Civil War, a literature you thought you knew well—say, George Orwell's *Homage to Catalonia* or Ernest Hemingway's *For Whom the Bell Tolls*—in entirely unexpected ways. Finally, however, it is football, or *fútbol*, more than anything else, that makes these political conflicts accessible, that animates them for you as fan and political animal, in the first place. Or, in the most primal, partisan way—it is a form of engagement that literature makes more difficult. It is football, and *fútbol* (the term that came to you second, but sounded the same, so that you already knew its meaning, even if you did not, could never, fully grasp the difference), that inspires you to learn, however poorly or inadequately, if not a new language then a new set of (deeply political) terms in a language not your own, to familiarize yourself with a new history. *Fútbol* is foundational, if not singular, in its ability to move you to take sides in a long-standing political animosity.



Because it is a story that turns so fundamentally on race, *Long Distance Love* is an unabashedly political account of fandom. The Trinidadian-born thinker C. L. R. James, one of the most eloquent writers on cricket, says famously in his magisterial work *Beyond a Boundary*, “Cricket had plunged me into politics long before I was aware of it. When I did turn to politics I did not have too much to learn.”<sup>4</sup> James and I speak from different moments, with different inflections and emphases. Colonial Trinidad and apartheid South Africa have their similarities, not the least of which is their shared propensity to teach politics through sport—be that cricket or football. However, although James did not have “too much to learn” about politics, I, on the other hand, had a great deal to learn about places football introduced me to: I had much to learn about the politics of Spain, about the “*Guerra Civil*” (the Spanish Civil War), about Catalan nationalism, about Argentina’s gory, bloody moment of the “*Guerra Sucia*” (the “Dirty War”), about the particularly gruesome violence that girded the 1978 Argentine victory in the Copa Mundial, about the amazing courage of *las Madres* who opposed the violence of the *generalísimos*.

There was, and remains, much that I do not know about the anti-Pinochet team Colo-Colo’s place in Chilean society, even though I visited the Colo-Colo stadium, bought a Colo-Colo jersey, and spent many hours talking with folks about Colo-Colo’s relationship with the dictatorship in July 2004. Alone in that Santiago stadium on a bright, sunny July day, the snow-capped Andes resplendent in the background, the bust of the native figure Colo-Colo fresh in my memory (it is in the foyer of the stadium), I wondered about what had happened there during Augusto Pinochet’s rule, about how one had played *fútbol* under the dictatorship. But I knew, most importantly, that one could never not play during the dictatorship. In that poignant moment, in that historic Latin American locale, I understood, better than I ever had before or since, what Liverpool’s Bill Shankly meant when he said, “Football is not a matter of life or death, it’s much more important than that.”<sup>5</sup> It’s certainly more important than a brutal dictatorship. Shankly’s insight, I’d wager, would have been available to both the committed and the careless fan, in that moment, in that place I did not know but, if only for the briefest of instants, understood.

How does one explain the 1978 World Cup, a competition so tainted by corruption and violence as to be, still today, an embarrassment to

football and *fútbol* fans everywhere? This sad outcome resulted despite the desire of the “leftist” Argentine manager of that 1978 team, César Menotti, to have his team to play a kind of *fútbol* that was open, artistic, and creative, precisely because such a style would distinguish his World Cup–winning side from the brutally repressive “character” of the *generalísimos*’ state. “Menotti’s philosophical tract *Football Without Tricks* sold well in post-Falklands Argentina during the early 1980s. In it he contrasted his admiration for a free and creative style of football with the ‘tyranny’ of the defensive, destructive football favoured by authoritarian managers.”<sup>6</sup> Whether Menotti’s aims were achieved or not continues to be a matter for debate. Whatever Menotti’s reservations about General Jorge Videla, his side too—as football critics have long suggested and as I argue in the “*Los Desaparecidos*” chapter—benefited during that Copa Mundial from the “interference” of the *generalísimos*.<sup>7</sup> “*Los Desaparecidos y la Copa Mundial: The Disappeared and the World Cup*,” turns—unlike most thinking about football—on what might be named a “gender conflict,” on the struggle between Argentine women—the mothers, *las Madres*, the grandmothers, *las abuelas*, and their daughters (and the disappeared children and grandchildren)—and their dictatorial male counterparts—generals such as Videla and Viola, admirals such as Massera and Lambruschini. The women, with nothing but their own resourcefulness, their deep commitment to justice, and their determination to seek truth in the face of massive state repression, resisted the violence of the men. That is the story of the *desaparecidos*, simplistically, tentatively rendered because there were, of course, several thousands of Argentine men opposed to the *generalísimos*.

A critical racial consciousness is the enviable byproduct of growing up disenfranchised in South Africa. During apartheid, because of apartheid, nothing could ever not be political—a not inconsiderable price to pay, I grant you, for watching sport. But, there was an advantage: it made it impossible for me ever to overlook the politics of sport. It taught me many invaluable lessons, some predictable, others unanticipated, applicable both in South Africa and outside of it, about how intimately connected sport is to politics. So, even today, I cannot root for Real Madrid. I can admire their players: the “Galloping Major” from Budapest, Ferenc Puskás,<sup>8</sup> Alfredo Di Stéfano, “Paco” Gento, Jorge Valdano, Emilio Butragueño (nicknamed *El Buitre* of *La Quinta del Buitre*—the “Vulture Squadron” or the “Vulture Cohort”), Fernando Hierro, Zinedine Zidane. *La Quinta del Buitre* were home-

grown Real players, blooded by their coach Di Stéfano in the early 1980s. In addition to Butragueño, the most charismatic of the five, the group comprised Manolo Sanchis, Martín Vásquez, Miguel Pardeza, and Michel. Pardeza was the first to leave (for Real Zaragoza, in 1986). Manolo achieved what the other four did not: he won two Champions Leagues<sup>9</sup> medals with Madrid, 1998 and 2000, thereby winning the only trophy that had eluded his fellow Vultures. When Sanchis retired in 2001 he made history, of sorts, becoming the only *buitre* never to have played for a club other than Madrid.<sup>10</sup>

Despite my admiration for certain Real players, I can, however, never support a club whose iconic figure, Santiago Bernabéu, was such an unrepentant Francoist. Bernabéu both supported and enjoyed, without too many qualms, the support of the *generalissimo*. Whatever the *madrileños* or *Madridistas* (Real fans) might say, however they might pooh-poooh any historical link between the team and Francoism (they were, after all, “*El equipo del gobierno*”—the Franco government’s team), the club has a fascist history. At the core of Real Madrid is a simple, unyielding principle: *El club de España*, not only “Spain’s club,” but the *fútbol* representatives of Castilian Spain. “*Hala Madrid*” (the chant “Let’s go, Madrid”) is something akin to the force of Castilian Spain opposed to Catalan and Euskadi (and all other) nationalisms.

Still, the Argentine-born Di Stéfano may be the greatest player ever. Di Stéfano’s fellow Argentine, Diego Maradona, who once played for Barcelona, says so. How could I not watch with immense regard as Hierro, a limited player to be sure, proved himself—over several seasons—a single-minded leader of a team filled with “*galácticos*” (the stars of the football “galaxy,” those paid huge sums of money to sign for Real)? Little wonder that the Real have struggled since Hierro was so unkindly, brutally, even, shown the door marked “*Salida*” (exit) at the Estadio Santiago Bernabéu. And Zidane? Who could argue against his particular “*beur*” genius (Zidane, the Frenchman of Arab descent without whom France would not have won the World Cup in 1998 or the European Championship in 2000)? Not me. But how do you root for Franco’s team when the good general practiced a politics different from, but not unfamiliar to, that of the apartheid regime? Franco’s regime was repressive in the extreme, callous in its disrespect for human life, and willing to brook no political dissent, and Real Madrid will remain for me—perhaps unfairly, perhaps not—always tainted by its relationship with Franco. For me, this link makes a mockery of the pure all-white strip Madrid wears, of the Corinthian

ethics of the Englishman Arthur Johnson, the Spanish club's first *técnico inglés* (English coach or manager).<sup>11</sup>

Maybe this is what true fandom is: intense affective relations molded by politics—a deeply held partisanship. Not quite the absolutist political distinction, friend/enemy, developed by the “conservative” German thinker Carl Schmitt, but so close you’d sometimes struggle to tell the difference. But then, again, Schmitt argues for politics as a sovereign life form, a matter of, literally, life or death. Schmitt alone, I think, would have given Shankly pause about his own extreme maxim. Football partisanship, Schmitt might have sensed, is the dangerous, constitutive ground of love, and too proximate to it lies intense, sometimes virulent, ideological dislike. Not quite hatred but, again, often too close to call. “Intimate enemies” might be the proper way to describe this condition of fandom, to borrow a phrase from the French philosopher Alain Badiou.<sup>12</sup>

Fittingly, perhaps, Badiou coined the term “intimate enemies” to critique democracy. In those days of 1978, between keeping an eye on developments at the Copa Mundial and awaiting the next instance of anti-apartheid resistance, between playing amateur youth football and keeping abreast of matters Liverpool, democracy—as a just, ethical political possibility, an alternative to local racism or fascism Argentina-style—was much on my mind.

As a teenager following, via newspaper, radio, and scant television reports, the 1978 Copa Mundial, I understood, with a certain instinctiveness, what was so violently wrong with that World Cup-winning Argentine team. In that moment, Cape Town (“*Ciudad del Cabo*”) shared a great deal more with Buenos Aires than simply a geographical latitude. After I visited in August 2001 for the first time, just weeks, literally, before the great economic collapse, “Baires” immediately became my favorite city—*mi ciudad favorita*—beautiful, deliberately lived by its inhabitants as a place culturally removed from where it is physically. The “*porteños*” (as the residents of Buenos Aires are also known) stroll the boulevards of this Latin American city as though they were in Paris or Milan, not at the far edge of a distant continent. Baires, with the river lapping gently at its waterfront, its languid, intellectual sensibility, its love of good art and cinema, and its plentiful bookstores. Baires, home to Jorge Luis Borges, one of my favorite authors, so reminiscent of my native city. It is an easy *ciudad* to love if dislocation is your mode of being. Cape Town, other South Africans say, with some justification, aspires to be—is, the more stringent

critics suggest—a European rather than an African city. At best, a Mediterranean city in Africa.

In the Southern Hemisphere winter of 1978 I understood, viscerally, why the apartheid regime had close relationships with the Southern Cone countries: Chile's Augusto Pinochet, Paraguay's Alfredo Stroessner, and Argentina's Jorge Videla and Leopoldo Galtieri were endorsed by the apartheid regime. Removed by an ocean, separated by language and culture, these different societies nevertheless had much in common. South Africa's was never a government that hid its admiration for the strong man tactics of these Latin American leaders—or for Franco. Pinochet and Franco were especially well regarded by the apartheid regime for their opposition to “godless Communism.” The South African press mourned when “*El Caudillo*” (Franco) died in November 1975. How ever was I not going to root against Real Madrid? How was I not going to oppose what Jimmy Burns named the “concept of *Madridismo*, a complicated notion whose central core is the glorification of indifference—an almost deliberate sense of narrow-minded commitment to the cause”?<sup>13</sup>

By the time of Franco's demise I was already an FC Barcelona fan, principally because of the Dutch master, the prince of “total football,” Johan Cruyff—Barça icon, outspoken loyalist of the Catalan cause. I felt a definite sense of relief at Franco's death. I rooted, much as I liked the Argentine skipper Daniel Passarella and was intrigued by Menotti, for the 1978 Dutch team (sans Cruyff) in Buenos Aires. The “Brilliant Orange” Dutch team of 1974, maybe the most technically sophisticated team in the history of the game, lost the 1974 World Cup final to Franz Beckenbauer and Gerd Müller's mechanistic West Germany. Cruyff's team, and the Dutch nation itself, remember the 1974 match as the “Lost Final.”<sup>14</sup> But that's another matter entirely. I admired Cruyff especially because he made so public his anti-Franco politics. I admired the Dutchman even more because he never went to the 1978 Copa Mundial. He was too determined, too unable to countenance playing for the ultimate trophy in international sport, to overcome his opposition to the Videla regime. Instead, he effectively retired from international football in 1977, having helped the Dutch qualify for the Copa Mundial. Cruyff was less a “victim” of the *Guerra Sucia*, I imagined, than a high-profile, principled opponent of fascism.<sup>15</sup> By the time Cruyff decided he wouldn't grace Buenos Aires with his eloquent presence, I was already, as much as a teenager can be, a veteran of anti-apartheid sports boycotts. I'd participated in my share of boycotts,

attended rallies and protest meetings, and engaged in skirmishes with the South African Police Force and the heavy-handed Defence Force. I'd experienced, upon entering high school, an academic year interrupted by protests (the historical year, 1976) and marched on downtown Cape Town.

In a spirit of solidarity with the Dutch master I thanked Cruyff, silently, for not going to Argentina. I understood. I was in full agreement with him.

Arguably the greatest player of his generation, and unarguably the greatest Dutch player of all time, Cruyff had played for Ajax Amsterdam before joining Barça. He could have gone anywhere in 1973, just before the 1974 World Cup in West Germany (as it was then still called), but he chose the Catalan capital after losing the Ajax captaincy to Piet Keizer before the start of the 1973–1974 season. Cruyff was, and is to this day, renowned as a proud man. He did not take kindly to losing the captaincy after hoisting a third European Cup for Ajax at the end of the previous season. Stripped of a position he loved, he left the De Meer Stadium in Amsterdam almost immediately for Camp Nou. Some Ajax loyalists, and the Dutch football public, count his departure as the most traumatic event in the club's history. Why wouldn't one designate Cruyff's unceremonious leaving a historic trauma, *'n tragedie*?

There is at least one irony, maybe more, at work in my regard for Cruyff. He is Dutch, belonging to the European nation that spawned the seventeenth-century settlers who colonized first the Cape of Good Hope and then South Africa. Cruyff arose from the same stock as those who had engineered apartheid. Centuries and a radically democratic politics removed from those who became the repressive Afrikaners of the twentieth century, this made Cruyff the signal figure in world football for me. In my pre-adolescent years, the Dutch master was the player who compelled a rethinking, a historic disjuncture between nation and politics, Europeans and Afrikaners. In addition, Cruyff was against Franco's Castilian centralism and for the Catalan cause—and anti-apartheid too, no doubt, I ventured to my friends in 1975—*'n briljante speler, 'n politikus*.

What I learned from Franco, Cruyff, Videla, and Galtieri, in different measure, of course, was the impossibility of understanding sport without politics. Moreover, right wing (southern) Europeans and Latin American dictators revealed to me that the South African regime was not unique in its capacity to make sport so publicly, so

obviously, political. The apartheid state's policy of racism could easily be substituted for Franco's antirepublican, anti-Catalan, anti-Basque politics—or for the repressive, antidemocratic propensities of the Argentine *generalísimos*, or Pinochet, or Stroessner in Asunción—Stroessner, violently anti-communist, criminally pro-Nazi. In a strange way, what I lived as long distance politics through sport was also, paradoxically, the intimacy of international politics. Johan Cruyff is obviously as good an example of this phenomenon as there can be. There was, I recognize, a distinct intellectual pleasure to understanding sport through politics, a reverse sort of C. L. R. Jamesian methodology, if you will. The politics–sport nexus produced a kind of epistemological inquisitiveness by generating desire: football had done more than “plunge me into politics.” It had engendered in me the need to know about other places, other histories, other forms of violence and oppression. Wanting to know about more than what *fútbol* meant, almost inevitably, as I found out, required learning more about football. I found out more about all kinds of things that affect Barça, Ajax, Colo-Colo, and Racing. (Racing is the Argentine team I support. It's an idiosyncratic choice, I know, but River Plate and Boca Juniors, the dominant Argentine clubs, were, for some strange, still inexplicable reason, respectively, either too suburban Buenos Aires or too popular for my youthful taste.) Teams have a history; the game has a history. They both have a politics. Inquire and think about the team from a distance; read, in translation, and Lord knows what you'll turn up. Suddenly, in the light of belligerent Afrikaner apartheid demagogues such as Prime Ministers Hendrick Verwoerd and B. J. Vorster, Franco, Galtieri, and Pinochet became all too ideologically recognizable.

This is the only way to engage sport: “an expectation without a horizon of expectation,” in the phrasing of an amateur Algerian footballer named Jacques Derrida. There is, properly, always “expectation” in sport: of victory in a match, of winning a trophy, of—critical for me—remaining a singular football institution. The condition of long distance love reveals, often quite starkly, that there really is no “horizon,” no limit, no end point, to the “expectation” of the fan. There is, as it were, always more to know, always another “expectation” that makes nonsense of the previous “horizon.” Long distance love teaches the fan to think, feel, and be in entirely unexpected ways. “Expectation” is, in this way, a dangerous, precarious lifestyle, but it does open up vistas aplenty—from afar, no less. Vistas susceptible to being opened up only from afar, I sometimes think.

As long as I can remember, I have always loved sport. On moving to the USA, I adapted to the locals, as it were. I support, courtesy of attending graduate school in the New York area, the New York Knicks (basketball), the New York Giants (gridiron; what Americans call, improperly, “football”), the New York Rangers (ice hockey), and the New York Mets (baseball). (Since 1989, when I first started supporting them, they have all managed to, at some point or other, break my heart—the Knicks in the NBA finals in 1994, and countless times before that in the 1990s in their many painful losses to Michael Jordan’s dominant Chicago Bulls; the Mets on what seems to me an annual basis, most recently in the 2006 season as they conspired to lose to the St. Louis Cardinals when it seemed easier to win and, of course, in the epic collapse of September 2007, when they contrived to lose twelve of seventeen games, capitulating with a singular horror—wresting defeat from the jaws of victory, that kind of thing. I still have nightmares about all of my New York teams’ losses. The Giants in 1990 and the Rangers in 1994 have at least given me a championship each to leaven the other searing defeats.) Apartheid simply provided, perversely, but not unproductively, the opportunity and the imperative to think of sport in an absolutely unique and urgent, perhaps even life-sustaining, way. Always, however, it was with the prospect and reality of pleasure—of utterly surrendering yourself to the experience of the game, of submerging yourself totally in an experience over which you have absolutely no control. None, zilch, *nada*, *niks*. The game becomes all, becomes pure pleasure: the prospect of infinite joy, the reality of being entirely devoid of agency and yet believing fervently in your capacity to effect a favorable outcome for your team(s). Barnes setting off on a dribble, defenders quivering at the prospect; Souness tackling with a venomous bite; Gerrard commanding—that’s the face of pleasure, of fully requited love. Often, the pleasure of my fandom makes nonsense of my political instincts.

Football partisanship of the primal, Schmittian (Shanklean, dare I say?) variety can make me put up with the otherwise politically intolerable, even the ethically untenable. This explains my capacity to live with English—specifically, Liverpool’s—racism while being totally opposed to dictatorships in Spain and Latin America. Political ambivalence, ideological incommensurability, even-handed critique: all are constitutive parts of long distance love. Still are, for me. That is why I can simultaneously hate Chelsea and acknowledge their getting it



right, as opposed to us getting it patently wrong when we lose to them; or, at once hate Everton and talk enthusiastically with one of their supporters, even share a joke with a “Blue Nose” (Everton fan), even admit that talking football makes nothing of my partisanship. I can refuse to gloat when we beat Newcastle or Spurs, because I don’t think it’s the Liverpool Way, even though Shanks was a master of the rhetorical flourish and the put-down of opponents. (There is, as I suggested earlier, a famous example in his pronouncement about the city’s clubs: there are only two teams in Liverpool, Shanks held, Liverpool and Liverpool Reserves. It would be like George Steinbrenner saying that in New York there are only two baseball teams, the Yankees and their Triple A affiliate. Sometimes, given how woeful the Mets can be, I wonder . . .) This is the complex condition of the long distance partisan: the deep, life-giving desire for victory and the refusal to demean (and yet always wanting to).

Apartheid both compelled me and invited me to live outside of my own racially stratified surroundings. Most importantly, it forced me to live, imaginatively, affectively, speculatively, outside of South Africa in order to withstand—if only for the duration of a Liverpool game—the inequities and violences of the local confines. The repressive politics of apartheid made me, before I even knew it, and long before I had the language for it, a “global citizen.” The experience of living in the diaspora begins not in that other place, but in your imaginary, in the moment you imagine living somewhere else—that moment when Liverpool means more to you than Cape Town, when a Liverpool defeat means more, much more, than a loss suffered by your own amateur team. Disenfranchised by apartheid, I found connections—and, perhaps, a symbolic, certainly an affective, “citizenship,” certainly a sense of cultural belonging—in places far beyond the reach of the repressive state: Liverpool, England, Barcelona, Buenos Aires, Santiago de Chile, and yet, states not without their own ugly repressions.

Cricket bound me, for life, to the West Indies and India—to players such as the greatest of them all, Gary Sobers, to the Bajan fast bowler Charlie Griffith, to the magnificent all-rounder Learie Constantine, to the Prince of batsmen Viv Richards, to the graceful Parsi wicketkeeper Farouk Engineer, to the wonderful captain and all-rounder Kapil Dev, to the wizard of spin, Bishen Bedi, and to the unworldly patience of Sunny Gavaskar. Rugby tied me to the New Zealand All Blacks—to the winger Bryan Williams, the first Maori to play for New Zealand against the all-white South African Springboks,

to the formidable and formidably bearded hooker Billy Bush, to the outstanding number 8s and skippers (in different eras, of course) Murray Mexted and Zinzan Brooke, to the free-running brilliance of Christian Cullen. The strictures of apartheid racism opened onto other histories. In very substantive symbolic ways, the disenfranchised can always live elsewhere, however momentary that psychic relocation might be. Through football, and cricket, and rugby, I could belong outside of, despite, where I was: I learned to know the world, to understand it, to live simultaneously in and far beyond South Africa—not only psychically outside it, but in places where apartheid law had no jurisdiction, where the Afrikaner regime had no sovereignty, where affective life and death had a very different meaning.

Of course, as the chapters “Long Distance Love” and “At Home, Out of Place” demonstrate, living beyond apartheid was fraught with its own complications. Racism was, as I have already intimated, not restricted to Cape Town, South Africa. That was something I knew politically but had to learn affectively. With great difficulty, with pain, I had to learn to acknowledge it, despite my attempts to foreclose the boundaries of racism, despite my efforts to not speak it. Racism would not be silenced. Child of the apartheid state, lifelong opponent of institutional racism, I had to make myself understand, as if for the first time, that racism lived and thrived, even in Liverpool, England. It took a long time for me to articulate this realization, in its full complexity. Not even the spectacular triumphs of John Barnes could, I learned later, much later, completely reconcile what I have called, in the “Long Distance Love” chapter, my “warring selves.” I am borrowing, of course, from the African American thinker W. E. B. Du Bois, who writes in the opening line of *The Souls of Black Folk* that “the problem of the twentieth century, is the problem of the color line.”<sup>16</sup> Indeed, this “problem” was as manifest in apartheid’s racial logic as it was in the all-white Liverpool teams of the pre-John Barnes era. (Black Scouser Howard Gayle’s all-too-brief stint in the Liverpool first team in the late 1970s amply makes Du Bois’s point. There is no more painful chapter for me in *Long Distance Love* than “At Home, Out of Place” because it demands—after an extended interval—the kind of confrontation with Self, with the sustaining politics of Self, that I had for decades been postponing, that I would not, could not, did not know how to, speak.)

At more or less the same moment that I was coming to understand my discomfiture with the 1978 Argentine Copa Mundial team, some-

thing equally troubling was happening in the Liverpool FC ranks. Howard Gayle, the club's first black player, was struggling—in some ways through no fault of his own—to make his mark at Anfield. He did not survive for very long, playing only five games for his hometown Reds. The pain of that experience remains seared into my psyche. As I recall in the “Long Distance Love” chapter, the pain was made much more acute not only by my long distance affiliation but because other English clubs either had been fielding black players for a long time or were starting to introduce them. In the 1960s, West Ham United had Clyde Best, the late-1970s Spurs had Garth Crooks, West Bromwich Albion had the “Three Degrees” (Cyrille Regis, Laurie Cunningham, and Brendan Batson); and Nottingham Forest's right back Viv Anderson was representing England by the late 1970s. But not my Liverpool. Not my Liverpool. I was silently shamed by my Liverpool. That was a difficult fact of life for a disenfranchised South African to swallow. But live with it I did—for almost two decades. That's what long distance love will do to you, make you do, make you not do. Long distance love renders renunciation impossible, denies the possibility of supporting a more ethical team, a team more in line with, more consistent with, your politics.

To add a further wrinkle, while English fans, especially those of the Tottenham Hotspur persuasion, were welcoming two members of the Argentine World Cup-winning squad, Ossie Ardiles and Ricky Villa (the former played for Huracán, the latter for Racing, among other Argentine clubs), to London, the Liverpool-born Gayle was more or less shunned by the Anfield faithful. And, later, in a key moment, Gayle was shunted aside by Bob Paisley. On his decision to join Liverpool, Barnes talks, the experience of Gayle much on his mind, with his customary (and, yes, slightly troubling) equanimity, about being confronted with racist slogans “daubed on the stadium walls: ‘NF,’ ‘White Power,’ ‘No Wogs Allowed,’ ‘There's No Black In the Union Jack’ and ‘Liverpool Are White.’”<sup>17</sup> Spurs manager Keith Burkinshaw signed Ardiles and Villa, the first Argentines, indeed the first Latin American footballers, to play in the top English league. They would both be asked to leave Spurs when the Falklands crisis broke out in 1982. Ardiles went to Paris St. Germain on loan. He returned in 1993 to manage Spurs for a brief season. The former Racing midfielder Villa, whose hirsute visage inspired Spurs fans to reproduce a Ché-like image of him on their T-shirts, is still worshipped for his 1981 goal in

the FA Cup final replay against Manchester City. In 2001, fans voted Villa's strike the Wembley "Goal of the Century."

In the late 1970s, Gayle, on the other hand, was hardly welcomed by his white teammates, with central defender Tommy Smith vocal in his disapproval of this "racialization" of the Liverpool dressing room. "Liverpool Are White," indeed. The black Liverpoolian Gayle was reminded that he was black, first and foremost, and a Scouser only second. The lesson of Gayle was clear: race mattered more than geographic origin. The Jamaican-born cultural critic Stuart Hall's maxim is most apropos here: for black Britons, "race is the modality through which class is lived." Indeed. And still I lived with this Liverpool attitude even as I protested apartheid, boycotting touring international sports teams who played the all-white South African sides; even as, like many of my generation, I threw stones at the yellow armored vehicles of the South African Defence Force who invaded my township and who stormed the campus of my segregated university. I sustained the contradiction, living with two sets of irreconcilable principles: love for Liverpool and a deep commitment to an antiracist society.

Because *Long Distance Love* is grounded in these various phenomena—apartheid racism, international football and politics, the politics of repression spanning continents, and a fanatical devotion to Liverpool FC—one could say that this book has no "proper" organizational structure. The chapters are arranged in keeping with my pathology. Anchored by my love for Liverpool, there are perhaps four recognizable essays. In considering three of these—"Careless Whispers," "*Los Desaparecidos*," and, of course, the title essay, "Long Distance Love"—I am struck by one aspect: there is a certain commensurability, an unexpected dialogic at work in this book—there is a tension between the Liverpool "local" and the international (Spain, Argentina essays) that serves both to animate their differences and to elucidate how the politics of football (and *fútbol*) links them. "*Som Més que un Club, però Menys que una Nació*," which turns on the key issue of representation, is the other "proper" essay. It is, however, best read as a companion piece to "Careless Whispers." These two essays constitute what I think of as the "Spain" section of the book; they provide a broad historical background for and elaborate each other, but they are both, especially "Careless Whispers," linked to Liverpool—with Xabi Alonso playing, as he does on the field for the Reds, a key role in connecting Liverpool to FC Barcelona and Real Madrid,