

Sverige: here's 1 of 1000 reasons not to abandon your asylum policies

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Encountered on my way back from the swimming pool: this Sunday afternoon demo. Look hard and you'll see that's imprisoned PKK leader Abdullah Ocalan on the back of a Kurdish participant's T-shirt.

The main chants: 'Erdogan – Terrorist', 'Turkish Army out of Kurdistan'. And yes, they'd have had a very tough time holding this demonstration back home in Turkey. All in all, one of a 1000 reasons for you to hold onto your long-established asylum & refugee policies, dear Sweden.

This Is London: Life And Death In The World City

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Brilliant, incisive-as-ever essay excerpted from Ben Judah's new book on London today published in the [February 2016](#) edition of *Prospect*. His eye for the telling detail combined with empathy, informed by real understanding, for the often intertwined fates of the capital's new immigrant communities is extraordinary. A must read – the book [This Is London: Life And Death In The World City](#) now included.



London's skyline. ©Ben Judah

Pawel does not look like a builder, with his thick black glasses and plush grey mane. Pawel doesn't sound like one either. Inside his overheated white van he talks about communism, literature, politics, chess: everything he lost in 1981 when he became a dissident refugee. He misses those first building days.

“You know what it was like then? Back in the eighties, the nineties, when I was first building, your painter, he would've

come from the Warsaw Academy of Fine Arts... You'd tell him to rip off the wallpaper and throw on three thick coats of paint and he would just begin telling you about Polish minimalism. Your bricklayer... He would be a sociologist, talking Hayek when it was tea break."

His voice purrs.

"Those days... When we finished and the sun would come pouring in... Loft conversions were very popular then, that's what I remember... We would have all these nice chats as we cleaned up. The English... hah, they probably thought it was football we were always arguing about so passionately."

Pawel's first job on site was wall painting, in a building trade then run by Irish wide boys. Pawel is one of the old Poles. Today he swerves the corners between his sites. Pawel is one of the winners: one of the make-it-up-as-you-go-along building bosses who benefited from the mass migration of labour in the 2000s.

Pawel knew London wanted bathroom refits for cheap. And he has been rewarded for it. As we hit red lights, he reminisces: how he walked this street when he owned nothing except a small ripped suitcase; when he slept in that mite-infested bedsit. Today he owns a house in Balham, a chalet in France and an apartment in Warsaw.

"I'm not middle class... I'm an immigrant, I'm not part of that." He squints at me. "I'm privileged... I got the chance to be both Polish... and a little English."

"'You know what breaks my heart?' says Pawel. He glances at me. 'That my job is to destroy London... The lovely things I rip out'"

Like any mansion builder he knows everything about the rich. "These people... They like the Polish because they hate having

the white English inside their house. Those boys, they are so rude. They come in and they go, 'Put the kettle on love,' then sit on the sofa. This make the rich very tense. They like my boys. They are silent... They can't speak English, so they're very polite."

Together we drive long afternoons around Pimlico. But these rows of white dolls' houses are not all the same. There are damp flats let out by the council with cracked paint, facing freshly veneered mansions owned by Russians. Pawel knows quite a few of them.

"You know what breaks my heart?"

He glances at me.

"That my job is to destroy London. They call me every week... and every time they want the same thing over the phone. White walls with chrome finish. Minimalist, modernist. That's what the Russians want. The lovely things I rip out... the mouldings, the wallpapers, the carved old basins... You wouldn't even believe."

Pawel has three Pimlico Ukrainians as his clients.

"They come quickly, when they want to buy... And the English, they rip them off every time. They lie to them. 'Yes, Mr Boris, this place is so prestigious. Yes, Mr Boris, this place is so close to the Westminster Palace.'" He imitates their fawning lisp. "These guys were nervous... they were politicians in Kiev and they needed this money out very quickly. So they believed, the stupid fools, those English suits trying to pick their pocket. Nobody bothered to tell them that opposite is the council terrace, with a hoarder, with rats, with loads of mental-health issues. Never trust an Englishman in property..."

Renovating a £2.5m flat for £7 an hour are a bunch of dreamers. The youngest labourer in the team is a grumpy, heavysset joiner inexplicably called Miner. He is a newcomer,

in England since 2009. The boy knows some English. Just about enough to read. Miner was permanently alienated from his life in a cramped flat in Wood Green when a plumber was called in three years ago. The Essex man left *The Sun* next to the radio. Miner opened the paper. He was horrified.

“Why you English always saying things like, ‘We like Polish... The Polish so hardworking... The Polish so good.’ Why you say this to my face? When I open the paper, I see all lies about Polish. They say Polish stealing, Polish drinking, Polish taking the work... You English only pretend to like Polish... English must be lying when they talk to my face.”

Miner is, like almost all builders, an obsessive saver. But he is neurotic about it. He is always on his mobile phone calculating the precise value of his savings. This is because like many of the young Polish migrants he thinks he is only here temporarily. He is saving to build a dream mansion. Miner needs £30,000 but the exchange rate and the influx of Romanian labourers are working against him.

He rolls a cigarette.

“Those Romanian... They are like, how you say... like cowboy. They never have insurance paper. They never make, how you say, the health and the safeties... They working for nothing. Romanians making Polish wages go down... They working for £4 an hour. The Britain is mad to let them come... The Britain is mad.” He groans. “The Romanian, he not the worst... The worst, he is the Albanian. They coming more and more to the London... They are thief. They like work building too. They come find Polish... Go, ‘Yes, we pay good, we have good work, one week, two week, easy cash, no problem, no contract... No worries, mate.’”

He draws breath and begins looking for a framing square.

“Then they throw out Polish... He work maybe one month, but they change job, say, ‘You got no contract,’ and never give Polish money. The Polish, he gets beaten. My friend, the Albanian

they beat him... hitting him, hitting him. He come to me... Teeth is gone. Albanian mans... They are only peoples in London who scares me. They look like white but they are really like Muslim..."

Polish churches are full every Sunday. London was long a city of empty Victorian chapels. These frumpy Gothic naves now echo to Polish mass or Nigerian choirs. Polish churches are full of toddlers and pushchairs. Teary tattooed plumbers cross themselves. Hard-up meat packers shove £20 into the collection boxes for the nuns needing furniture in eastern Poland. Masses are sung for the war in Ukraine.

"Polish builders have little time for the white working class. They think they do not know how to look after themselves. They think they talk like black people."

"Polish people think English churches only very, very weak."

I go drinking with Miner. We begin in the newsagent, filling his blue plastic bag with a dozen cans of Lechs. It tears. Traipsing home, Miner shares his confusion about the English.

"Why do they give the benefits? Why £60 a week and a flat for free for the lazy pig... when he no work? Why this happen? Poland... no money for the pig... no nothing for the lazy pig."

Polish builders have little time for the white working class. They think they do not know how to look after themselves. They think they talk like black people. They think they look sick. Like they are going through a very hard time. Some think they are stupid. Polish builders buy food in bulk to make the cheapest packed lunches.

"This is the only way a poor man can eat..."

But why do the English wander into expensive sandwich bars and lose more than one hour's wage for just a meal deal? Polish builders think they are out of their minds to spend three

hours' wages on three pints in the pub, when you can get eight tin cans for that, and even drink them in the park with roll ups and everything.

"The English no understand money, I think..."

Miner snatches the police notice in his letterbox. "Fuck! Not again." He quivers in rage. "The black people... They are stealing again!" There has been a robbery in the area. Miner lives in the part of London filled with dirty parades of betting shops, twirling doner kebabs, payday lenders, unlicensed pawnbrokers and signs for we buy gold.

"The black people... They are crazy people."

We crack open the cans. Miner drinks, then grows flushed. "The black people, they like to fight Polish... "

London is home to more than 150,000 Polish migrants, probably. So keen are they to save that little bit extra that many go under the radar to avoid tax. This is why every builder I get to know on site has been burgled. Their flats are always the cheapest, built with flimsy locks. The kind that can be undone in 10 seconds. Sometimes landlords are in on the racket.

Burglars love Poles because they are paid in cash and hide it in shoeboxes. When they see builders and cleaners moving in over the road, they are already laughing. They can sometimes make £5,000 from one bedsit. And they know the Poles will never call the police.

Tonight I am waiting for the Fiddler in sodium light outside the Fine & Country estate agent. The Roma are homing in to sleep; they shuffle and stumble on crutches and sticks, sniffing for coins in Russian, Arabic and French. They wheel their belongings in granny trolleys under the bare trees of Hyde Park, and cross their legs under these preposterous, belittling buildings, pleading with their eyes for 50 pence and pound coins. The shape of the Fiddler moves into the light.

With a flick of his leather cap, he gestures at me to follow him.

“We are not from this village. I hate those Gypsies. They are thieves. Our village is down at the bottom of Park Lane. At the edge of the streets of the Arabs.”

**London is
home to 150,000 Polish migrants ©Ben Judah**

The Fiddler laughs at the map I have made of the area as the traffic swirls past in a static hiss, screened with the immense, winter-dead plane trees in the darkness of Hyde Park. He chortles quietly as we pass an illuminated Americana of boasting concrete, glass and stucco ultra-luxury hotels, overlooking the Serpentine.

The Fiddler stops, and stares at a gleaming Mercedes, where in

the white space of a supercar showroom, the lights never go out, be it day or night.

“What struck me first when I came to London, two weeks ago now, were the lights. There are no lights in my village. There are no buildings wrapped in lights. There are no rooms where white lights never go off. The whole two nights on the coach from Romania I was depressed. I curled up and saw my children in my head. The ones I can't feed. But when we arrived in London and the night came and we saw the lights, I felt we had, maybe, a chance to pay back the debts.”

I am listening to the Fiddler talk about the first time he played in London. He says he stood right in front of a huge florid department store, the brightest building he could find in all these streets, and began to scrape the violin into a Gypsy melody, up and over, as manicured Arab men, in black tailored coats, gold watches glinting from their wrists, and impossibly leggy Russian women, clutching black leather handbags, passed by Harrods, laughing with each other, in another world.

Fiddler was amazed: “These bright, bright buildings... They are so beautiful. But that night when I went back to the tunnel where we sleep I began to feel scared. I'd made no money and the others were telling me... The night before there was a Polish attack. They said that three drunk builders came into the tunnel and started beating them. They were sleeping when the attack happened. And that night the others had seen those three Poles coming off a building site nearby.”

The Fiddler takes me into the underpass.

The encampment from Slobozia is under Hyde Park Corner. The chi-chi stucco and glistening Maseratis are out of sight. We enter subterranean tunnels of cream white tiles. They shine with clinical white lights embedded into the ceiling. These are long and low tunnels. And they are covered with thin line-

drawings of the glories of Victorian London. Walls of men in top hats and ladies in flowing frocks. Tiles painted with cavalry charges and country houses. And, in places, if you look closely, they are smeared with blood and shit.

“Those English... They scare me.”

The Fiddler points. This is where the smack-heads are. They are mostly northern. And they are dying. There is a girl with a blue sleeping bag who sits under the tiles of the golden coach and horses. She barely looks human, and she hides this in a thick waterproof hood, because her neck has pinched and vanished, and her eyes have swelled up, all glassy and black, on a bulbous head which has lost its hair, so she looks more like an alien. Fiddler says she hardly sleeps.

“All of us from Slobozia are frightened of her.”

He says they always choose the tunnel furthest away from her, with the pastel-coloured sketches of the garden wing of Buckingham Palace, when they camp down, ripping up and laying down their scavenged cardboard boxes.

“Here we are. This is where we sleep. The rubbish of London.”

Fiddler is exhausted and confused as the village beds down in the tunnel. He says they have to keep walking until this late, when they are almost faint, otherwise they get told to move on. He says around now is the time the police stop caring. The Fiddler scratches his stubble and his eyes turn to me, sombre. There are 16 of them here in the tunnel; throwing down worn peach and yellow blankets, patterned like summer flowers, between damp duvets.

“I’m worried I am going to be stuck here begging for ever. Here where there could be a Polish attack. Here in the tunnels where people come and go. And the tramps blabber like crazy people.”

The Fiddler stares at the others. The villagers all look different. There are gaunt faces and sunken eyes. There are some caked in dirt and others still smooth and bright. Their skin is a yellowish ivory or a tanned brown. And they plead with me to find them work in the stables. The Fiddler starts asking questions for them.

“Is it true that the Queen of England has given an order that the Romanians may never work with her thousand horses? Is it true that the Queen hates us and she thinks we will steal her horses? Please tell her... we can make ironwork, their horseshoes, we can leatherwork the reins. We can do anything with horses.”

The pubs are emptying.

Drunk eyes linger on us. A white man with a slick black and grey fringe and red cravat, turns to the Asian woman on his arm, with curly black hair, in a long brown flannel coat, and points at the Fiddler. She turns to him, as they pass, playfully stunned by what she sees. But fumbling through her green leather bag, she finds only copper change.

This enrages the Fiddler.

“I can't take it any more. Today I only made £15. All day I went trying to play the music for the Arabs and they gave me nothing. I saw them coming in and out of the golden places but they gave nothing. They couldn't even see me.”

The Fiddler is distraught about the police. They have shocked him. They are white. They are brown. They are even black. And they keep confiscating his money. But there is nothing he can do when he loses a day of fiddling for coins. He barely knows how to say, “Hello, Bye,” in English.

Fiddler does not eat. He covers his face with his tattooed hands and starts talking about having been an alcoholic. Things have not turned out the way they should. Fiddler says

he has always lived his life in and out of brawls. Tucked into his pocket is a scuffed and thumbed New Testament. But he doesn't want this. What Fiddler wants is a dictionary. There is no other way to make back the debt.

The Filipinas took weeks to persuade. The bosses are violent, they said. The bosses will fire us, they pleaded. But finally the Filipinas invited me for tea: on one condition. They could only be identified collectively as the Filipinas.

And once that was agreed, they promised me the secrets.

The Filipinas have seen it all: Doha, Abu Dhabi, Dubai. They have seen a thousand skyscrapers, a hundred gleaming airports, and a hundred days of smog. Every Filipina has felt like family; and every Filipina has been slapped like a slave. They have seen every side of them: the master's little smiles, madam when she cries. The Filipinas have seen what they wanted. They have shivered on rolled-out sleeping mats on the balconies of Beirut and sweated trembling on bunk beds in Bahrain.

They are enslaved by the Arabs before they realise what is happening, and they pray and cry and dream that the Arabs will take them to London. Because that's where you can run away.

Auntie Mia would never forget the first hundred runaways: their names, their eyes, their villages. How the girls first heard of her having lunch in the McDonald's or the KFC in St John's Wood (she liked to alternate) she was never entirely sure. Auntie Mia never rushed the girls. Auntie Mia always held their hands: as in the corner of the McDonald's (or the KFC) it all tumbled out—how madam had thrown boiling water at her, how master had raped her, how madam had whipped her, how master had not paid her for nine months. Auntie Mia hugged them—Auntie Mia loved them.

Every weekend the Filipinas come to see Auntie Mia. They come to relax, they come to laugh. With Auntie Mia the tension

shakes out into hysterics—unstoppable hysterics. Because all week they are hidden, cowed, silent little women. All week—they are frightened of the line.

“Nobody knows where the line is with their master, because the Filipinos who have crossed it are fired”

Nobody knows where this line is with their master and madam, because the Filipinas who have crossed it have been fired on the spot. All the servants have their own ideas. There are some that say the line is speaking when not spoken to. There are some that say the line is speaking like a master: questioning, criticising, even asking. There are some that say the line is being seen: a good Filipina is an invisible Filipina.

There was a Filipina in a crooked old mews off High Street Kensington who was receiving hush money. There was a Filipina in Hampstead who had been handed £5,000 to lie. There was a Filipina in St John’s Wood who refused three weeks’ paid-holiday hush money because she was a Christian and ran in a fury to Auntie Mia to find her a new home.

And every week there are the tears about the children. A few years here; a few years there. And the Filipinas become mothers. And they pass around their smart phones—there are my two Jewish children, these are my lost Arab babies, and here is my two, back then, Italian twins. And they cry, and cry as they pass around their smart phones with the smiling backgrounds of little ones. They bonded: and then they were culled.

And they ask questions. “Please, sister, please—you are now working in the big house in South Kensington. Does my French baby still remember me? Does he still put his head like this? Does he still remember who taught him to brush his teeth? Does he still read *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*? Does he still cry a little when he laughs? Please, sister—ask him if he remember

me. Please, sister—kiss him for me.”

And then they tell the brave stories. And everybody listens and cheers. And everybody says, “Next time I will be a brave sister like you.” And this is something they never expected to see: the punching, the kicking, the swearing—the men, the rich men, the men who have everything—they are hurting their women like the men who have nothing. And they hide this from everyone: apart from their Filipinas.

There was the millionaire in Hampstead that punched his pregnant wife. There was a drinker banker in Notting Hill who would come home and smash his cutlery and hurt everyone—the banker would even hurt his children. The beaters and the drinkers: they were no different from the beaters and drinkers in the shacks of Manila. They are cowards. They are always cowards: these men who lash out at women.

And every week they come and tell Auntie Mia: “Auntie, Auntie, they treat us like appliances, like one of their appliances, which are made of metal, and even these sometimes break, and what about us, us who are made of flesh—we are the ones who are never allowed to have a breakdown.” And Auntie Mia hugs them.

As the afternoon becomes dark and the lights are switched on, the Filipinas talk about managing madam. About how sometimes madam throws out all her perfumes—hundreds of little bottles—and they scabble out to the bins when she is asleep to scoop them up. About how unfair it was when madam threw away her Filipina for grabbing dozens of dresses out of the recycling bags, which she was supposed to have taken to the charity shop on High Street Kensington.

But lots of Filipinas have nothing to gossip about. They are the Filipinas of empty mansions that they have to clean, day in, day out. They know every nook, every cranny, every alarm, every alcove. They know how the light falls in the master

bedroom and where the chimney draughts rush across the living rooms in winter. These are the Filipinas of the golden cage.

But they are not fools. They get to know everything. They understand the security. They come to trust the guards. Every year, in the dead of winter, when master and madam are in the warm islands—there are the Filipina balls. Those nights in winter, the streets in Mayfair are silent and cool like an ancient tomb. The street lamps come on but house lights and fireplaces do not follow them. There is nobody here. And this is when the brave ones, the clever ones, open the doors—and they stand under those colonnade steps in white women's clothes and welcome other Filipinas into the warmth of the winter ball.

Walking up the stairs into the mansions of Mayfair, they look beautiful in clothes as precious as diamonds which madam never wears. And inside they are singing, the curtains thrown open to enormous views of the parks. And the Filipinas are laughing—their smiles across the black canvas of the night.

**'I want to feel proud of
Denmark, but it's not easy'**

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Syrian refugees arrive at Copenhagen's main station. Photo: Ole Jensen/Demotix/Corbis

A new Danish law allowing police to seize refugees' assets is a frightening example of how a country with liberal traditions can lurch to the right, says Sofie Gråbøl, star of the internationally acclaimed Danish TV crime series *Forbrydelsen* [*The Killing*]. And as she says in the interview below, "More than ever, we need to live up to the humanistic values that our society was built on. The liberal and open-minded Denmark that I still know is hoping, desperately, that these days of nationalism are numbered."

Moreover, as a brief video news report included below points out, in practical terms, the tripling of the time many refugees will have to wait for their families to be allowed to join them is an even more serious aspect of the new legislation.

"I am having a hard time recognising my country right now. I want to feel proud about Denmark, but it's not easy. I am in London at the moment and when I see the news that Denmark is [allowing police to seize refugees' assets](#), it hurts me. I think, "This is how we're viewed." We don't realise how we are perceived abroad and I think this has damaged Denmark's image immensely. We will have to make [a lot of television dramas](#) to reverse this, won't we?

I feel it's a pitiful waste. [Denmark](#) has so many resources; we are one of the wealthiest countries in the world and yet we

want to stand in front of people who are in the most vulnerable situation and have travelled for weeks, and argue with them about whether the chain of gold they are wearing is sentimental or not. That is just appalling; we are talking about people who have lost everything.

What may seem odd or strange to people from other cultures is that we have a very strong and proud tradition of debate where everyone expresses different points of view. This has benefits, but it has but dangers, too. We have been used to the very right-wing Dansk Folkeparti – the Danish People's party (DPP) – suggesting the most outrageous things for many years and we all assumed they were nothing to fear, that they were just in the corner.

But we were wrong. The DPP has grown massively, from a party that no one took seriously to becoming Denmark's biggest rightwing party in [last year's general election](#). Now our prime minister is only governing the country with their support. In my view, this new law is a way of pleasing them, throwing them a bone in order to stay in power. It disappoints me that Venstre, the governing party, would stoop so low. A lot of politicians are protesting and some have left the party in shock at the rightwing direction they are taking.

Because this nationalistic feeling isn't so new, what really shocks me is that the DPP suddenly have such a massive influence. I am amazed the law went through; the strong reactions from abroad should have given some objectivity, but it just didn't.

It is frightening to watch them try to explain it all rationally. It is a symbolic law that won't have any effect on any budget. It's not rooted in economics; it's emotional. The police are already saying it's not workable – they're not experts on an antiques show and they don't have the knowledge or skills to judge what's valuable or not.

All I am hoping for, in some absurd way, is that it will get so bad that the opposition will have to react more strongly. The biggest danger is moving the goalposts. If this is viewed as permissible, what law could they pass next?



Sofie Gråbøl: 'It disappoints me that the governing party would stoop so low.' Photo: DR / Tine Harden

I am still proud of Denmark; after Sweden, it's the European country that spends the most on receiving refugees. I think that, more than ever, we need to live up to the humanistic values that our society was built on. The liberal and open-minded Denmark that I still know is hoping, desperately, that these days of nationalism are numbered."

As told to Emma Cook

**'Policed multiculturalism'
and predicting disaster**

'Policed multiculturalism'

and predicting disaster



Police in Paris. Demotix/ Cesar Dezfuli. All rights reserved.

Long but excellent interview with a European academic specialising in European policy responses to terrorism. In particular the interview makes some highly instructive connections between government counter-terrorism strategies and the discourse of ‘the failures of multiculturalism’ promoted some years back European leaders including Angela Merkel and David Cameron, also highlighting the importance of putting responses to state policy – and behaviour – at the centre of any attempt to understand the root causes of ‘radicalisation’.

Counter-radicalisation in France draws on British and Dutch policies developed in the mid-2000s. It extends police action to areas of diversity management such as education, religion and social policy. With what results?

[Francesco Ragazzi](#) interviewed by [Rosemary Bechler](#), published on 27 January 2016 on [openDemocracy](#),

Rosemary Bechler (RB): *Francesco, you have analysed in some detail the relatively recent French plan to ‘combat radicalization’, following a path previously trodden in the UK and the Netherlands. Could you explain how, in your view, this approach to counter-terrorism influenced the nature of the French response to the Paris attacks last November?*

Francesco Ragazzi (FR): What is interesting is that the first attacks in January 2015, on the Charlie Hebdo office, came not much more than six months after the first counter-radicalisation programme ever was announced in France, in

April 2014. They paved the way for this strategy with a ministerial report which was kept secret, in fact until a few weeks ago when it was made public by the French media outlet, [Mediapart](#).

The report was headed up by Prefect Jounot who was mandated by the prime minister at that time, in 2012-2013, to try to get to grips with what was best practise in the Netherlands and the UK, as well as what was going on at the EU level. This attempt to revise policy was in turn a response to a series of developments including the [Mohammed Merah killings](#) in 2012. France had been spared terrorist attacks over a long period from 1996 to 2012, during which time it had relied primarily on a law enforcement strategy, the work of intelligence services and the police and no or very little involvement of civil society or any other groups in the counter-terrorism apparatus.

Intelligence services, specialised departments of counterterrorism in the police, and anti-terrorism judges – this was the way counter-terrorism had been structured and organised in France.

And suddenly in 2012 it appeared that the system had not only failed to prevent these killings, but that the list of people regarded as dangerous for a large number of reasons by the intelligence services kept on growing. More or less at the same time there was a new concern about the number of individuals going to fight in Syria. Intelligence services and anti-terrorist judges were in particular worried about the possible dangers of returnees. Add to this pressures at the European level to be seen to be doing something in relation to counter-radicalisation, and there is this decision by the French government to change course.

It is not really a response to a changing threat, or to an analysis of what the response should be, but a response to what was considered to be a failure in the Mohammed Merah

attacks, and the pressures of the European Union.

RB: *To carry on retracing our steps a little, you refer to the speech delivered by the British Prime Minister David Cameron, in February 2011, in which he talked about 'different cultures' living 'separate lives apart from each other and apart from the mainstream' and denounced 'multiculturalism', echoing remarks about its 'failure' made by Angela Merkel in 2010, as an important contributory moment, having its roots in changing models of integration resulting from the July 2005 attacks in London.*

One had the sense at the time that this seemingly coordinated drawing of the line by several European leaders was an important moment, but what was that actually about? Multiculturalism was the target of all the rising populisms from Pim Fortuyn onwards.

FG: Two things happened in parallel that can only be explained if you consider the political sphere and the sphere of what Didier Bigo refers to as the 'professionals of security' as relatively autonomous spheres.

What was happening on the one hand was the public renunciation of multiculturalism as a particular way of managing diversity – as a failure. But this process in itself had a long history. If you look at the Netherlands it started in the mid 1990's and was the target of all the rising populisms from Pim Fortuyn onwards. In the UK, it took off not really with the 7/7 bombings, but with the riots of 2001: that was probably the moment when the idea of "parallel lives" entered the public debate with the suggestion that multiculturalism had encouraged the development of "separate communities" which did not think of themselves as British, and so forth.

Stand-off between rioters and police in Croydon, London 2011.
Flickr/ Raymond Yau. Some rights reserved.

So, if the idea that separate communities within a country need to be recognised as such and that the polity at large should accommodate for difference – if this idea of multiculturalism is to be discarded, in the name not only of fending off possible riots but in tackling terrorism – then you might expect the policies of homogenizing citizenship and playing down differences, trying to get the entire population at least organised or functioning around a single set of values, you would expect *that* to be more or less the backbone of the new guidelines for counter-terrorism. This is the message that we hear now in the Netherlands, that has been somewhat vaguely outlined in policies in the UK, but has been very much state policy in France for a while now.

In fact, however, when you look closer at what ‘professionals of security’ have been doing in the Netherlands since 2003/4, in the UK very much after the London bombings of 2005, and at what had been going on in France for a while – it is exactly the opposite! The idea is that to tackle radicalisation as a particular social problem, you have to deal with it differentially as if it was primarily a Muslim problem. So if you are to deal with it as a Muslim problem you end up targetting specifically Muslim populations. If you are to deal with it as a Muslim problem you end up targetting specifically

Muslim populations.

So, when [Prevent](#) was rolled out in the UK, it targeted particular areas where there was a determinate percentage of the population that was Muslim. It was pursued through the idea of promoting moderate voices within Islam, reforming the governance of mosques. So it was very much targeted at a community and the same happened here in the Netherlands. France, interestingly, which for a long time you could have expected to pursue a non-identity based, or non-community based way of tackling radicalisation, in fact in 2014-2015 really adopted a similar model. What I show in [the study of France](#) in this period therefore is this discrepancy between deeds and rhetoric.

There is the political discourse questioning management through difference – the policies of multiculturalism – on the one hand, and on the other, in fact, the managing of security issues through a differential approach based on the different treatment of communities. This was a paradox only at the level of appearances, and only if you believe that security professionals do what politicians say. In fact they don't. Whatever is said, what counter-radicalisation began to do as a set of security practises was very much to reinforce a division between a Muslim community and the rest of society.

RB: *This is where your concept of 'policed multiculturalism' comes in, an account of a system for managing religious and ethnic diversity even in a laicist society like France, where this is not what their culture is meant to be about. So let's come back to the impact of 'policed multiculturalism' on the response to the Paris attacks.*

FR: 'Policed multiculturalism' is an idea that I have been playing around with to think about this particular set of security practises, not so much in terms of whether it is efficient counter-terrorism or not, but really in terms of what it does to citizenship.

When you do this, what immediately becomes very clear is that within this whole overarching discourse of questioning multiculturalism – both in the UK and the Netherlands that had, explicitly or implicitly, operated by the multicultural principles of governing through diversity, and in a France that hadn't – what was really happening was the management of diversity without any open political discussions about them. Instead of saying, we need to pay due recognition to this community because this is the right thing to do, or because this is the way that we want to organise our society, now it became a question of, "We need to govern in particular these Muslim communities in such and such a way, because otherwise it will create a terrorist problem."

Instead of open discussions about how and what should be the model of citizenship in our contemporary European societies, all the talk instead was of what kind of welfare we should provide, what kind of recognition, what kind of place we should give to religion in society, so that we don't provoke an attack on our way of life by "angry Muslims", and so that we can prevent people from becoming radicals, going to Syria and so forth.

For the first time you had a directive from the minister to the prefects who are in charge of administering the counter-radicalisation strategy, telling them to set up dialogues with the religious representatives! This is entirely unheard of in France. This recognition that religious representatives could be part of social policy, and that the French would recognise or deal with an organised form of Islam, such as the official representative body of Muslims in France, the Conseil Français du Culte Musulman (CFCM), was resisted by many as quite contrary to the principles of laïcité.

In fact if you dig into how laïcité is supposed to work, it's not that clear cut, there were always debates between accommodating and maximalist positions. But this was the first time that there was an acknowledgement of Islam, and the place of religious representatives, in the management of the terrorism question, branded as "radicalisation". So implicitly it made the recognition of the Muslim community as a community by the state something of a reality, which it had not been hitherto. And the driver for that was the fear of terrorism.

There are many reasons why Nicolas Sarkozy built on the initiatives of the previous ministers before him and created the CFCM. Not all of them had to do with security. Some of them were to do also with short-term electoral expectations that he would get something of a Muslim vote, and that didn't really work out for him, so he abandoned the idea. But the institution stayed. And so progressively the French state started changing in its approach to Islam and to Muslim communities. Now, many of the initiatives that are taken by the French state are done under the rubric of a partial recognition of communities. There is a hotline that can be called if you think somebody is at risk of radicalisation.

Various local schemes will be based on religious cults, so Salafism and violent Salafism can be treated like sects, like scientology or something that you should be protected from, or that can be observed under the heading of youth violence. But

underpinning all of it is always this idea that it is a Muslim problem. The minute you ask a French official about this they will say, "Of course we don't recognise communities." But this is how it actually works on the ground. It always ends up being about Imams, communities, what does the Muslim community want, how is the Muslim community making an effort to tackle radicalisation and so forth. So I think it has had quite a strong impact.

RB: *I was interested in your comments about the contestation over the nature of radicalisation that took place in Europe as this set of security practises, with these similar identifiable features in different countries, emerged... and the jettisoning of the 'expert' view.*

FR: Yes, you are referring to a particular episode that I looked at in 2008 when the discourse around 'radicalisation' was not yet fully formed. A few scholars working on terrorism and on Islam in Europe saw the opportunity to query the term and in particular the simplistic description of radicalisation as a predictable linear process along which intelligence services, police or social workers could intervene in order to prevent the next step from being taken, as if this was inevitable.

An expert group had been set up in 2006 by the European Commission which was meant to be supplied with the findings of four smaller groups who were writing more grassroots-based or more technical short reports. The expert group would draw up the final report. I spoke to some of the people who participated in these various groups and interestingly the expert group, which contained the most highly recognised scholars, thought that the whole idea of radicalisation was a little bit silly and didn't in fact make sense in the way that it was being interpreted by the Commission and by the emerging 'common sense' on this subject.

They were particularly dismissive of the four reports that

were meant to feed into their reflections because they saw them as narrow, poorly documented, and in fact heading in the wrong direction. Essentially, they were giving a picture of radicalisation as a process in which any kind of politicised Islam was a conveyor belt to violence, or where radicalisation was seen essentially as an individual process regardless of the wider group dynamics, and in particular the escalating dynamic in the relations between individuals, groups and state practices. This they thought was pretty poor and not particularly helpful.

But in the end what happened was that the short reports got published, but not the overview of the expert group, which was questioning the entire enterprise around radicalisation. What became very clear was that the discourse of the 'professionals of security', essentially the discourse reproduced in the four smaller reports, was the dominant one for the institutions, and not to be questioned. So where did the notion of radicalisation come from? Essentially from those security circles before they turned to the academic world in order to find out more about these contemporary problems.

At that time it might still have seemed possible to challenge and even dethrone the notion of radicalisation. But right now, seven years later, maybe twelve years after it was first introduced into the European Union in various public documents, we have to concede that this attempt was a failure. 'Radicalisation' is here to stay and if we want to produce interesting knowledge about what is going on, I think we have to deal with the term in another way. Maybe we have to show that the process so identified doesn't work at all in the way that has been theorised by government, by the intelligence services and some of the scholars who reproduce this rhetoric.

RB: *Would you say that this is the value of Arun Kundnani's concept of 'radicalisation as a relational process' ? Is this where such a concept fits in?*

FR: Yes absolutely. One of the characteristics of the way radicalisation is conceived is almost teleological, an inevitable set of steps in which people are first attracted to religion, either by going back to their traditional faith or as converts, and are put in touch with preachers who bring them to a more fervent way of practising their religion. There are a few more steps and then basically they commit an act of terror.

What we know from the work of [John Horgan](#), an original member of the expert group, is that it is actually much more complicated than that. It has a lot to do with individual trajectories and choices, as opposed to people being a product of what an ideology or a group would like them to do. In the dominant discourse there is always this passive idea that you are radicalised, but never a political actor or the driver of your own radicalisation, right? You are at risk, a victim. This is to do away with the free will.

Scene from Pontecorvo's 1966 masterpiece, The Battle of Algiers, a film about the Algerian War of Independence.

The ideas of escalation that [Arun Kundnani](#) has developed with others, alongside the earlier work of [Didier Bigo](#) on the 'terrorist relation', that of [Martha Crenshaw](#) and also [Donatella della Porta](#) from a social movements theory perspective – all of these help us to see that in fact if you

don't take the state into account, whether it is the state of origin, as in Egypt, Syria, or Algeria where we think about [the GIA](#) and the civil war that happened there – but also the state over here in our liberal democracies, you are ignoring an essential component in the escalation of violence.

So if you don't include the state, the foreign policy of the UK or other countries, the sense of discrimination created by law enforcement and other agencies, if you don't factor in all of these elements you have a very very partial account of why at any given stage people decide to engage in political violence. So if you don't include the state, the foreign policy of the UK or other countries.. you have a very very partial account.

These are some of the ideas that we have been including in our recent reports and others have argued this as well. And the reason why it is important to insist on this is that recently the French Prime Minister has come out and said that, “to explain is already to justify the attacks”. This was a heavy anti-intellectual attack that must be challenged. Actually the exact opposite is the case. We need to understand why some individuals decide to carry out this kind of violence and this will give us insight into how we can prevent it.

RB: *As you put it rather well in [the Sciences Po study](#), “The Egyptian military government’s brutal crackdown on the Muslim Brotherhood or the Syrian government’s slaughter of civilian populations can of course not be compared with practices in European countries. It would be just as mistaken, however, to disregard the significant role of the “illiberal” practices of western democracies, particular in matters of discrimination, surveillance, and even torture (for instance in Guantanamo) in certain individuals’ decision to engage in political violence.”*

Can we turn now to some of the perverse effects of these choices that have been made in counter-terrorism?

FR: Yes. Here the reports of the UK's independent reviewer of terrorism legislation, [David Anderson](#), were really clear in documenting how a certain number of state practises in counter-terrorism such as stop-and-search in the streets (section 44.1 and 44.2, now revoked), the Schedule 7 stops at the borders when people travel used by the UK authorities, and many other measures have adverse effects and touch a very large population that has nothing to do with terrorism.

These procedures have in common that they involve extensive contact with the authorities, despite the fact that there is no clear idea that the person involved is a suspect in a terrorist investigation. In France, we are talking about such techniques of counter-terrorism as those in which a very large number of people are arrested and detained pre-emptively while officials see what comes out of the interrogations, even if they have to release a lot of these people in the process. If you look at the official numbers published by Europol you will see that France carries out the largest number of counter-terror arrests, but then also has the largest number of individuals 'released without charge'. Laurent Bonelli has documented rather well how that works.

But France has other techniques, like the regional units for the disruption of radical Islam (Pôles régionaux de lutte contre l'Islam radical), which consists of agencies from non-law enforcement services such as tax, veterinarian, health and safety and the police going into cell-phone stores, butchers, different kinds of shops, raiding entire streets because they have targeted one shop or business which they think supports terrorism.

But in order to be invisible and not seen to target specifically Muslim businesses, they go and visit the entire street. Then they look in detail into a particular business, trying to find anything they can peg onto its business practise, which has nothing to do with terrorism. It might have to do with a breach in health and safety for example, or

irregularities in how the taxes were declared – but they scour the business for sufficient fines they can levy to disrupt the activities which they consider might be linked to the financing of terrorism. These raids are a concern to a lot of people in France.

Meanwhile, all of these techniques have clearly signalled to the Muslim community in Europe that they are under suspicion.



Manuel Valls, Prime Minister of France. Zaer Belkali/Demotix. All rights reserved.

RB: *We heard so much about free speech during the Charlie Hebdo atrocity, but here again we have very mixed messages being raised at the EU level where such questions are put forward for consideration as, “to what extent online content can be blocked if it does not directly violate the law?” – this, against a background in which hate speech legislation seems to creep into more and more of the ways in which we deal with each other as citizens?*

FR: Absolutely. This was one of the elements of the latest legal changes in France, in which a website can now be preemptively blocked and the only recourse is to an administrative judge, after the fact. So the authorities can decide to block from one day to another a website whose content they consider may be too close to radical Islam or

justifying terrorism.

Another cause for concern is the very problematic climate set up by the new 2015 law in the UK alongside its 'counter-extremism strategy'. It is interesting that we are no longer talking about preventing terrorism, but countering it now – and no longer targeting violent extremism, but 'extremism *tout court*'.

It has set in motion a huge debate and multiple problems on British university campuses regarding academic freedom and freedom of expression. This I think, and I go back to what I was saying before, is a direct outcome of some of the understandings of how radicalisation works; because, the only justification you can have for preventing somebody from speaking, even if they are not advocating violence at all, is by arguing that, well, extreme or radical ideas end up leading to violence in the medium or the long term.

This is the argument that I think is being deployed in the UK. It was quite shocking that the newly-appointed Vice-Chancellor at Oxford, Louise Richardson, felt she had to argue in defence of the right of organisations like Cage, for example, to be invited to talk at Oxford University. The fact that this became a piece of news, that an organisation like Cage was "allowed to speak", is surely quite telling about the climate of severe limitations on freedom of expression when it comes to anything related to questioning the practises at Guantanamo, the drones policy, the foreign policy of the UK, its counter-terrorism strategies and so forth – a climate that it seems we are now in.

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RB: *What is very noticeable about these perverse effects, taken in the round, is the way they revolve around the predictive capacity of the state, an anticipation of radicalisation which ensures that in all our countries minority populations are caught up in the broadening nets of counterterrorism and suspicion in significantly swelling numbers...It is no longer proof but just suspicion which is sufficient.*

FB: I would like to say two things on this point. The first of course is that you are right that all of this is grounded in a predictive, anticipatory idea of security. Probably one of the more significant paradigm shifts of the past ten to fifteen years has been the increasing belief that law enforcement and policing should be predictive rather than reactive, and this is changing the entire system of criminal justice, so that it is no longer proof but just suspicion which is sufficient to enact a certain number of either administrative practises, such as the freezing of assets, control orders – they have now been transformed into temporary measures (TPIMs) – measures that operate below the threshold of proof, but that are thought to be enough to restrict liberties and prevent people

from engaging in terrorist-related activities.

Certainly, this is anchored in that kind of predictive understanding of policing and that shift has been discussed a great deal in terms of algorithms, mass surveillance, the Snowden revelations and how all of the justifications for this mass surveillance lie in the promise – and it is very much a promise and maybe a myth – of the ability to predict through numbers, big data and so forth, who the next terrorist is going to be.

Now, of course some of that can be put down to an element of, “Let’s trust the numbers.” But I would like to raise a different point that is emerging from our current research, and that constitutes another important part of the rationale behind counterterrorism and these new security measures. This focuses rather on trust in society, and the ability of intelligence services, the government, the authorities, to hijack existing relations of trust in society and to use those relations of trust in order to make predictions. Who do we know that you also know who is going to give us a lot of information about you?

So it is not the logic of Google or the database that we have here, so much as it is, to remain with the technology metaphors, the logic of Facebook. Who do we know that you also know who is going to give us a lot of information about you, not because of some kind of algorithm that has computed that you might be representing this or that risk category, but through these particular relations, whether they are interpersonal relations or professional relations? We think we will be able to anticipate the future of these suspect individuals by getting at them through these relationships.

Let me give you a few examples. The first is the idea that Muslim communities need to police themselves, or that the authorities can pick and choose some Muslims who are not suspect Muslims, but who are in fact the trusted ones. They

will occupy functions like maybe the local police officer, or the Prevent coordinator: or maybe they will be part of an NGO working in a specific neighbourhood on countering radicalisation. These individuals will be co-opted into the law enforcement counterterrorism logic in order to reach those individuals who, let's say, the white middle class policeman is not able to reach, because they don't trust him.

But then there is a second category of people. The first category taps into community relations, interpersonal relations, people – say – who grew up with each other, so that law enforcement thinks, 'if we are able to bring one of those people into our ranks, then we will have a key informant (like some anthropologists would say) for our communities over there to know what is going on'. This is recognisable as very much a colonial logic. But the other dimension is that this trust is not confined to interpersonal relations. And this is the second category.

There are a whole set of professions that also operate on the basis of trust: teachers, kindergarten instructors, university professors, doctors, lawyers... all having a certain privileged relationship with their clients, the students, patients, general public that they work with, that is based on trust. And indeed they depend on those trust relations as the only possibility for them to carry out their work properly. Right?

So in a way, these are professions that have the opposite a *priori* relationship with the public to the law enforcement and security professionals. A customs officer or a policeman should be a *priori* suspicious of what she or he observes, or they won't be doing their job properly, whereas a doctor must have her or his trusting relationship with the patient or be unable to understand what is going on. The same goes for a teacher or a professor: you cannot create a proper learning environment if you don't establish a proper relationship of trust in the classroom.

Now, what is interesting is that the logic of counter-radicalisation is to ask those professions to go precisely against the necessities of their profession which are to build trust, and to replace it with a logic of suspicion. Not only are they asking the impossible, but they are asking these people to undermine the very basis of the relationship they must have with those they work with. I think this is really a recipe for disaster, since it can only take us in a few directions and none of them is desirable.

Either, let's say, the teacher decides, "OK, she or he is not qualified to detect signs of early radicalisation or to deal with it", and as soon as a young boy reads the words "terrorist house" instead of "terraced house", the teacher [had better report them](#) to the police because "they know better." What that does is to completely undermine any trust the class might have in its teacher. They will be afraid that the next time they write or say something dodgy or suspicious, they will be reported. When you read about this in the news, it might be funny and absurd if it wasn't so tragic. But on a day to day basis, how will this teacher deal with a relationship of trust that has been entirely undermined in this classroom? This remains an open question.

I have carried out some research with some social workers here in the Netherlands who are extremely alert to this phenomenon. Two things happen. Either they behave like this teacher and they report, but the reporting only works for them if nobody else can disclose the fact that they have reported a person. A youth worker working with a group of young men from the neighbourhoods of the Hague, for example, will tell the police, but only on condition that the police never tells anyone that he or she is the one who has reported that individual. So the trust relationship that she has can continue, but on the basis of a lie. This is one way that it can work, but only by asking the social worker to be untruthful about the relationships they establish.

What is the other outcome? The other possibility, and I have evidence of this first hand, is for the social worker to tell the youth they work with, "Well listen. I have to tell the police everything that you say, so don't tell me anything that I might have to report. We can talk about anything but that..." In which case the whole purpose of using the trusted workers to report signs of radicalisation is defeated because they would prefer not to listen rather than have to report!

RB: *Could you also explain the negative impact of the Prevent strategy in relation to social and economic inequality, where assumptions regarding the cause of radicalisation led to the UK Department for Communities and Local Authorities prioritising areas with a larger Muslim population. But this coincided with substantial cuts in spending earmarked for developing disadvantaged neighbourhoods, so that Prevent became one of the sole sources for funding... Could you explain how this exacerbated the stigmatisation of the 'suspect community', so that by 2010, the Communities and Local Government Cttee. of the House of Commons was denouncing this focus as having "increased the risk" and "not been constructive".*

FR: Well, this I think is quite specific to the UK. Community projects flagged as Prevent became one of the only sources of funding. There might be a manifestation of it in other countries, but we should look at the evidence first. Because Prevent was initially based on the assumption that the recourse to politically motivated violence was due to dire economic and social conditions, it was deployed in local authorities through the Department of Communities and Local Government – on the controversial basis of the percentage of Muslim population in designated target areas.

This coincided, after the economic crisis of 2008, with important cuts in community-related spending. Community projects flagged as Prevent became therefore one of the only sources of funding for several NGOs, who then had to take the

difficult decision whether to accept abundant 'counter-terrorism' funding for their activities or chase meagre alternative sources.

The 'Muslim community' here, is therefore understood as a reified, monolithic and cohesive group which is collectively responsible for the violence emerging from its midst, and perceived as a result to be collectively responsible for addressing the issue. This led some to 'tweak' regular community projects to match the descriptions of the funding stream (in particular refocusing on Muslim beneficiaries), irrespective of the risk the beneficiaries posed in terms of radicalisation. For others, this focus amounted to pure and simple stigmatisation of the Muslim community, considered as a suspect community composed entirely of potential terrorists.

As Paul Thomas has shown rather convincingly, for non-Muslim community leaders, it generated frustration, as the traditional funding sources they relied on became unavailable, and they could not claim the new ones. The [Channel](#) mentoring programme raised similar concerns. Individuals are identified by or referred to professionals (police, local authorities, teachers, doctors, social workers, youth services, offender management services) who then devise a 'support plan' for the individual, generally through a mentoring programme. Between 2007 and 2010, 1120 people were referred to Channel.

Although Channel is not purely targeted at young Muslims, there is a widespread feeling in the Muslim community that regular activities such as political involvement in peace movements or a pious religious practice, when carried out by young Muslims, trigger unnecessary referral to the Channel programme, due to the lack of experience of those who refer them.

RB: *Do we have any idea then, what kind of chilling effect these trust-destroying practises are having on the everyday lives of Muslim youth in European countries, and in particular*

activists enjoying what rights our democracies have to offer them ?

FR: A good example to illustrate this is the case of Rizwaan Sabir. He was one of the two students at Nottingham University – you might remember – who was arrested on terrorist charges for having downloaded the Al Qaeda manual from the US Department of Justice website. He was preparing a thesis on Al Qaeda so it made perfect sense for him to have this on his hard drive, but he was nevertheless reported to the police and was only freed after six days of detention. He then won a subsequent court case against East Midlands Police for having fabricated evidence against him. There was already a file on him.

But what is interesting about his case is that as he learned more and more about what the police had on their files against him, it was clear that it was not so much the terror charges that first marked him out as a potential radical, but it was when he attended pro-Palestinian demonstrations a few years before these events that had already placed him under surveillance. There was already a file on him, nothing to do with terrorism, but for participating in a march in favour of peace in Israel.

And certainly this is one of the effects of this suite of policies. Because radicalisation is such a vague term, and because nobody knows what one sign of radicalisation actually looks like, and frankly I don't know what that sign would be... everybody is working with the stereotypes they have about what constitutes a radical. And for many, including civil servants, police officers or maybe local intelligence services, participating in perfectly legitimate political events which question UK's foreign policy, or which might question the war in Iraq or in Afghanistan, or any other topic that may not be very palatable to the administration, or to the authorities – is considered to be a sign of radicalisation.

Therefore, yes, I think this is an open door to all sorts of limitations on freedom of expression, or at least, the categorisation of a perfectly regular political activity as a form of radicalism that in the future might lead to a possible terror attack. And this is distinctly worrying.



2003 No to Iraq march.

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**#RhodesMustFall: A Movement
for Historical and
Contemporary Recognition of**

Racial Injustice



This just in from my old Oxford college. The Times They Are A' Changin' . . .

The Rhodes Must Fall movement began in South Africa and has now spread to the UK. In the past few weeks its efforts to remove a statue of Cecil Rhodes from Oriel College, Oxford has attracted a great deal of criticism. This criticism too often ignores the wider historical, current and future concerns raised by the movement, and has few answers to the movement's main aim: to ensure the equal participation of Black and minority ethnic people in societies still affected by racism. In the first of two articles by Runnymede's Director Dr Omar Khan, he explains why many of the criticisms miss the mark; the first focuses on the past, while the second turns to the present and

future

It's a clever debating tactic to try to turn your position's weakest point into a strength. Critics of the Rhodes Must Fall movement have bravely claimed that theirs is the side of historical truth while their opponent's position resembles those totalitarian regimes that write histories to suit their undemocratic purposes.

But of course British history as it is taught in our schools, sold on our bookshops' shelves and depicted on our screens is still dominated by an incurious Whiggism that almost entirely fails to address colonialism and racism. Not only are the [Magna Carta-based arguments for the expansion of African enslavement](#) brushed out of the 17th century story of the 'glorious revolution', but Britain's prominent role in expanding the slave trade and the continued legality of colour-based racism until the 1960s are carefully obscured by a focus instead on the antebellum American South and the 1960s US Civil Rights movement. There is no room here either for the question of who moved enslaved Africans to and governed over North America in the first place, or why Enoch Powell was joined by the majority of his party (and some Labour MPs) in affirming that ancient English liberties required white people to have the freedom to deny people a job because of the colour of their skin, an affirmation that was probably legally accurate until the 1968 Race Relations Act.

A key aim of the Rhodes Must Fall movement is to tell our history more openly and honestly. Counterarguments for keeping statues of racist colonisers to recognise explicitly the bad acts of the past elide a key point about our dominant national story. In Britain we *don't* currently teach the history of enslavement or colonialism well (if at all) – as [David Olusoga has asked](#), can anyone name a single British slave ship or slave-owner? Instead, the Department of Education has recently proposed adding Clive of India, a man Simon Schama describes

as a [‘sociopathic corrupt thug’](#) to the national curriculum, and presents a shoddy one-sided account of William Wilberforce and his unique contribution to the abolition of slavery.

The Rhodes Must Fall movement is not only or mainly concerned with statues, and [is rather making a wider point](#): that racism and colonialism are deeply embedded in Britain’s history, and not just in terms of African enslavement or Enoch Powell’s ‘rivers of blood’ speech. Our economic development as a global mercantile power and the manpower that fuelled the industrial revolution were built on the enslavement of Africans, working in Jamaica’s sugar plantations, Virginia’s tobacco fields (a crown colony from 1624, and where there were 300,000 slaves by the 1750s), and the cotton plantations of the Deep South whose raw materials helped make Lancashire wealthy.

The neglected reality of racial inequality at the centre of British history reveals four fallacies or errors among Rhodes Must Fall critics. First, they fail to see Cecil Rhodes as the crown prince of a central theme of British and indeed European history, reflecting not just Rhodes’ personal and depraved racism, but its implication in our wider economic, social and cultural history. In calling to remove statues of Rhodes, the Rhodes Must Fall movement [explicitly argues](#) their target isn’t just about Cecil Rhodes as an appalling individual racist, but what statues erected to honour him say about us as a society.

The second error critics make is that the Rhodes Must Fall movement is somehow opposed to free speech or wants to *silence* discussion about Cecil Rhodes. One difficulty for the Rhodes-statues-must-stand position is that that most such statues are currently unopposed by any counterbalanced (i.e. historically accurate) statues, installations or appropriate explanation, whether in our curriculum, wider national story or *in situ*. Viewers of a statue assume the person so represented must have done something worthy, something that distils for posterity values that can stand the test of time. (And of course they would be *right* in terms of why the statue

was initially erected.) In response, the Rhodes Must Fall movement is insisting *both* that racial inequality has deeper historical or structural roots in Britain *and* that Cecil Rhodes is reasonably viewed (even by defenders of his continued representation in British statuary) as a totemic symbol and apex – or, rather, nadir – of the moral and economic superiority that justified those inequalities.

When such a statue is erected at an ancient Oxford college, it only adds to the sense that we are reflecting on the form of an important national hero. There is something *particularly* potent about Cecil Rhodes's position in front of an Oxford college, so even it's true that we can't tear down all of his statues (or that of all of Britain's past racists), it's doesn't follow that we shouldn't remove *any* of them. It certainly doesn't help the critics' case when they fail to suggest what additionally we could or should *add* to the statue or to our wider discussion of enslavement or colonialism, and instead brush over these points as attempts to rewrite history or political correctness. If such concessions were considered, the continued placement of (some) colonial-era British heroes around the country would attract far less criticism.

As important as correcting historical inaccuracy is understanding its on-going effects on Black and minority ethnic people living in Britain today. Rhodes Must Fall critics' third error is misunderstanding or misidentifying the real harm these statues perpetrate on BME people. Why did people cheer so strongly or agree so widely that statues of Saddam Hussein in Iraq or Joseph Stalin across Eastern Europe should fall? Not just because they rejected their politics, but also because those statues were a reminder of the *personal* experience of injustice and the denial of human rights perpetrated by those rulers.

Similarly, it is one thing for a white British person to look on a statue of Cecil Rhodes and see moral error in someone who

might look like an ancestor. White people may visit the British Museum and feel greater personal connection to the large well-framed photos of a great archaeologist, but many others instead see the smaller more numerous unidentified bodies in the background excavating sites in Egypt or India as their more plausible ancestor.

It therefore suggests a lack of reflection or perhaps empathy to argue that black people looking on a statue of a racist coloniser today are expressing merely 'hurt feelings' or 'political correctness'. In reality, when a black person looks on Cecil Rhodes's statue, she sees a person who denied her basic moral worth, and would have justified enslavement, ruthless autocratic rule, and the sadistic treatment of her and her ancestors. Too many critics of the Rhodes Must Fall movement don't understand the moral badness of racism: specifically its denial of equal moral worth, or humanity, to *all* non-white people, and the consequent *group-based* nature of the harm.

Whatever sense of self-worth, talent or success a non-white person achieves as an individual is irrelevant to the colonial-era and modern-day racist, and seeing Rhodes so recognised is a deep wound that isn't merely in people's heads nor in any way irrational. The anxiety of living in a racist society is thinking that at any moment you might be [shoved off a train](#) by a fellow citizen, be denied a job, abused by a co-worker or detained by criminal justice institutions that are supposed to protect you, all merely because of the colour of your skin. As a corollary to the misunderstanding of the harm of racism, critics of Rhodes Must Fall seem unaware of [continued racial inequalities in British society](#), given their focus on mere feelings and ascribing totalitarian political correctness to those in favour of removing the statues.

The fourth and final error of critics of the Rhodes Must Fall movement is in fact an over-emphasis on the past, or on how

and whether the ancientness of a practice insulates it against contemporary moral judgments. There may be cases where a tradition's centrality in a nation's sense of self is so important that it cannot easily be jettisoned even if it harms some current citizens. In practice it's hard to imagine such examples, though it appears this is indeed the position of Dutch defenders of Zwarte Piet. This comparison will undoubtedly bring howls of protests from those who say they *aren't* defending Cecil Rhodes, but instead the freedom of Oriel College to continue to stand him up prominently in Oxford.

Yes, *of course*, Oriel College, Oxford and others are *free* to continue to portray Cecil Rhodes however it wants, and also free to say he represents something important about today's Britain and our values. But the question for us in the present is not only how should we understand our history, but how that history speaks to us for the kind of society and values we seek to affirm today and in the future. With Oxford colleges (and indeed all of Britain's – and [South Africa's](#) – major institutions) still having so few black representatives, it's curious that those well placed in those institutions should object to measures that might not only more accurately represent history, but also seek to make those places less filled with the cultural detritus of empire and so less stifling for non-white students, employees or customers.

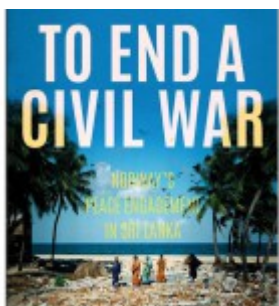
Note that this isn't just or only an issue for ethnic minority Britons, but for white Britons too, who need far better understanding of the diversity of their own country, and also greater ability to navigate a more interconnected world where India and China tell decidedly different stories about Britain's role over the past three centuries. In a context where 35% of primary pupils in London are white British, with an employment gap resulting in 500,000 'missing' ethnic minority workers, threatening the country's future economic prosperity and social cohesion, this is no idle question.

Nor, however, is it simply one of 'whitewashing' history. As we know from Michael Gove's recent efforts to alter the curriculum, all history involves emphasizing certain moments or individuals rather than others, and it's striking how much grandiose ['high minded tosh'](#) (to quote the Supreme Court Judge Lord Sumption) we still tell ourselves and our children in this 800th year of Magna Carta and 50th year of the first (lamentably weak) [Race Relations Act](#). It's a bizarre position to object to removing statues of Cecil Rhodes on grounds of historical accuracy while failing to interrogate our wider, deeper national myths.

In calling for the statue of Rhodes to be removed from Oriel College, Oxford, activists are calling for a more accurate portrayal of English history, less encumbered by the 17th century legacy of Sir Edward Coke and his many Whig heirs, left and right. Demanding that the Rhodes statue must fall is indeed symbolic, but not merely so: the aim is to start a wider more honest conversation not only about our past, but about the past's continued effects on Black and minority ethnic people living in the UK today, and indeed around the world.

It certainly showschutzpah to accuse these activists of totalitarian attacks on free speech, mere hurt feelings and of rewriting history when our current history is such a well-engineered and repeated fairy tale that ignores Britain's role in creating historic racial inequalities that persist to this day. This fantasy not only continues to harm Black and minority ethnic people living in Britain today, but also continues to benefit the descendants of all of Rhodes's fellow white British citizens, both economically and psychologically. Exposing that reality – and seeking to change it – is the true aim of the Rhodes Must Fall movement, and one that its critics have failed to address.

Now out: 'To End A Civil War' Kindle Edition



This just in from my publishers Hurst: the ebook versions of my book '*To End A Civil War*' are now live globally across all platforms. Apparently the easiest way to find them is through Kindle stores (via Amazon).

N. America: [Amazon.com
www.amazon.com/Kindle-Store/b?ie=UTF8&node=133140011](https://www.amazon.com/Kindle-Store/b?ie=UTF8&node=133140011)

UK: www.amazon.co.uk/Kindle-Store/b/?ie=UTF8&node=341677031

ES interviewed at Ottawa book launch: step up to the plate, Canada!

Chief of aid donor group urges funding boost



Erik Solheim, chair of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee, speaks at the University of Ottawa on Jan. 13.

[Kristen Shane](#)

Wednesday, 01/20/2016

The leader of a main group of aid donors says Canada's new government should set a path to boost aid to reach international standards.

Erik Solheim, chair of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Development Assistance Committee, said the new Liberal government should continue with the former Conservative government's focus on leveraging private-sector investment in developing countries, and go further.

If Britain's Conservative government can hit—during tough economic times—the global gold-standard of 0.7 per cent of gross national income spent on foreign aid, then Canada can do it too, said Mr. Solheim, speaking during a visit to Ottawa on Jan. 13. “No one expects Canada to go to 0.7 tomorrow. A trajectory of gradual increase is feasible,” he said.

Canada languished at 0.24 per cent in 2014 according to the OECD-DAC, or \$4.2 billion USD. No major political party during last fall's election campaign would produce a firm timeline to

reach that goal, though the NDP said they'd get to it eventually.

At a time when both Canada and the world are starting a new chapter of international development policy priorities, Mr. Solheim suggested niches Canada could lead on. With the world focusing for the next 15 years on achieving 17 new Sustainable Development Goals announced last year, Mr. Solheim suggested, Canada's new government could take the lead on Goal 14 for instance, to conserve and sustainably use oceans and marine resources.

He also spoke of the health of mothers and children: Canada's top aid priority for the last six years, one the Liberal government has deemed a valuable focus, with some tweaks. And he mentioned fragile states; Aid Minister Marie-Claude Bibeau has been tasked with focusing Canada's aid on the poorest and most vulnerable as well as supporting fragile states.

Mr. Solheim, a former Norwegian Socialist Left Party leader and member of Parliament, met with Ms. Bibeau and Foreign Minister Stéphane Dion in order to connect with the new government, one he described as having "a lot of promise, promising to reconnect with the world."

While in Ottawa, the former Norwegian international development and environment minister also spoke alongside the author of a new book on his and other Norwegian government officials' efforts in the early 2000s to end the Sri Lankan civil war. Mr. Solheim was the lead negotiator from 2000 to 2005 shuttling between the Sri Lankan government and independence-seeking Tamil minority rebels.

The ultimate goal of peace in the decades-long conflict wouldn't come until after the government finally crushed the rebels in May 2009 in a bloody military campaign that left thousands of civilians dead.

A new government came to power in Sri Lanka last year and co-

sponsored a resolution on itself at the United Nations Human Rights Council recognizing the need for truth, justice and reparations after the war.

Mr. Solheim spoke to *Embassy* after the book launch of *To End a Civil War* with author Mark Salter, presented by the University of Ottawa. The following are excerpts from Mr. Solheim edited for style and length.

Where Canada can lead

“We need Canadian leadership in the world. Development is not mainly about money, but it’s about leadership. And please fund areas where Canada can take global leadership..

“[Priorities] must come from the side of Canada, not from [our] side. I suggested one area as an example. The Sustainable Development Goal 14 is about oceans. There’s no clear owner of that goal. You need to set the policies right. And Canada has the longest coastline of any nation on the planet. It is well placed to lead on that.

“But there are so many other areas. “You have always played a role on women’s issues and maternal health. That’s another area where Canada can potentially lead. “There’s a strong desire to be effective on climate, but oceans is a key [part] of climate.

“Fragile states, we need nations who can really lead on some of the most difficult fragile states, like South Sudan, Central African Republic, Haiti and many others. “No one can lead everywhere. But Canada can lead somewhere.

“...Canada has no enemies. There is not one nation in the entire planet who doesn’t like Canada. You have good politicians. The prime minister is a kind of global rock star...but you also have strong civil society, strong civil service...You have all the systems and ability to lead.”

On the private sector and reaching 0.7

“You need a lot more both private sector investment and aid. There’s no contradiction. No one should argue that you should do aid and not private sector investment, or vice versa. We need both.

“The private sector can never pay for education in Central African Republic. But, on the other hand, if you want to build a hydroelectric power plant or solar plant, it might be better to make it a commercial entity and assist the private sector in doing it. For sure, you need both.

“Canada should step up. It should propose a trajectory for increasing its aid. And the Conservative government did well on the private sector. The new government should please continue with that. Don’t put that in the dustbin. Build up on it...

“The United Kingdom and their Conservative government has brought aid up to 0.7 at a time of great financial troubles. So it can be done. No one expects Canada to go to 0.7 tomorrow. A trajectory of gradual increase is feasible. “...It’s all about the political will. If David Cameron could do that in the United Kingdom, for sure it can be done in Canada.”

How Canada should work with Sri Lanka

“It should embrace the new government. It should engage with Sri Lanka at all levels. It should increase investment, encourage tourism, and in all ways engage with Sri Lanka.

“And it should also encourage Sri Lanka to find a settlement of the Tamil problem; [there’s a] Tamil diaspora here, they will want that. It should offer every support for such a settlement. “But to me, this is the most hopeful moment in Sri Lankan history. It’s a huge chance to get it right, and Canada should support Sri Lanka getting it right.”

On Sri Lankan government reconciliation efforts

“I think it’s a good start. But there [is] more to be done. “There must be a full stop in all sorts of violence. Still there are cases where people have been disappearing and who have been raped; that must stop.

“Now we are seven years after the war. All political prisoners must either be brought [to] a court or released. You can’t sit more than seven years in prison after the war. The time has come to release them, or if there are very serious accusations, bring them to court so that there is some serious consideration of the issue.”

Lessons learned from Sri Lankan peace talks

“You need patience. You need to keep all doors open, to speak to everyone, to speak to dictators and guerilla movements, and to so-called terrorists. You need to speak to everyone. “...You need to have overlapping ethnical identities. Because, I mean, say you’re an Indian, but you’re also a Tamil, you’re also a Hindu. If you insist on just one identity, it’s very difficult...

“You need to engage the big powers. Unless the big powers are working together, it’s very hard. There is no way whatsoever that Afghanistan could have been in this mess, or for that matter Syria, if it was not for the involvement of different powers dragging it in different directions. So whatever you can do to bring the major outside powers together is essential for peace everywhere.”

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Tamil Guardian's Twitter Feed From Washington DC Book Launch

<https://twitter.com/TamilGuardian/status/687738075682856960?s=04>

[Tamil Guardian](#)  [@TamilGuardian](#)

1. Live tweeting from the [@AtlanticCouncil](#) event on foreign intervention in [#srilanka](#) with [@SolheimDAC](#) and [@marsal61](#)

Foreign Intervention in South Asia: A Case Study from Sri Lanka

Thursday, January 14, 2016
3:30 p.m. – 5:00 p.m.
Atlantic Council Headquarters

Speaker Bios



Mark Salter is a writer, researcher, and consultant. While Salter is a teacher and BBC journalist by training, over the last twenty-five years, he has worked in a wide range of professional settings including international nongovernmental organizations, research institutes, and intergovernmental organizations. Salter's work focuses on issues of democracy, conflict, reconciliation, and diversity management. For ten years he served as a senior staff member of International IDEA, an IGO supporting democratic consolidation around the world. He was centrally involved in policy and advocacy initiatives with a wide range of organizations including the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights and the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Salter recently authored *To End a Civil War*, a book that tells the story of Norway's mediation effort in Sri Lanka during the country's decades' long civil war.



Erik Solheim took the lead of the main body of world donors, the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC), in January 2013. Since becoming Chair, he has emphasized reform of the Official Development Assistance, focusing more assistance to the least developed countries. Solheim also serves as the United Nations Environment Programme's Special Envoy for Environment, Conflict, and Disaster. Prior to his current post, Solheim served as Norway's Minister of the Environment of International Development and as Minister of International Development. He has played a pivotal role for climate and the environment. Solheim established the UN REDD, a global coalition to conserve the world's rain forests. As such, he is the recipient of many awards, including the UNEP's "Champion of Earth" Award.



Richard L. Armitage is the President of Armitage International, L.C. and a former US Deputy Secretary of State (2001–05). Prior to returning to government service in 2001, Armitage was President of Armitage Associates, L.C. from 1999 until 2001. From 1989-93, Armitage served in various high level diplomatic positions, including as a Special Emissary to Jordan's King Hussein during the 1991 Gulf War and as Director of US Assistance to the new independent states of the former Soviet Union. Prior to this, Armitage served in the Pentagon as Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs (1983-89) and the Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for East Asia and Pacific Affairs (1981-83). Armitage first visited Sri Lanka in 1981 and continues to maintain his long-standing relationship with the people and country of Sri Lanka. Armitage graduated in 1967 from the US Naval Academy and served three combat tours in Vietnam. He is the recipient of numerous US and foreign military decorations as well as awards for distinguished public service.

Panel begins [@AtlanticCouncil](#) with Bharath Gopalswamy



- BP: Intl involvement in [#srilanka](#) faced challenges, from lack of local support to questions of sovereignty
- **Mark Salter** begins remarks with an excerpt from his book, reflecting on visiting LTTE leader Pirabakaran's bunker. **He** speaks of Army's decision to blow up Pirabakaran's bunker, once visited by tourists
- [@marsal61](#) gives credit to Richard Armitage for working to get U.S. to talk to "terrorists", which was absolutely needed at the time
- [@marsal61](#) #srilanka failed to secure bipartisan support among Sinhala parties for peace process. And Norway did not sufficiently appreciate how important broad Sinhala support would be for peace

- Next [@SolheimDAC](#) speaks about Norway's lessons learned in [#srilanka](#). Still the main issues in [#srilankan](#) have not been resolved, but at a hopeful moment now. And we should have done more to generate broader international support for peace in [#srilanka](#)
- ES: Main reason for political problem in [#lka](#) is UNP and SLFP's inability to work together for peace. Sinhala political elite needed to come forward with a joint proposal for peace for [#Tamils](#)
- [@SolheimDAC](#) said he is the non-Tamil who met most with LTTE leader Pirabakaran. More people should have met him. Pirabakaran came to believe violence was only, best way. For sure a brilliant military leader, but insufficient engagement politically

Richard Armitage speaks next, said he admires Norway's history of involvement around the world. Can't say Norway failed. Can say intl community failed. Can say Sri Lanka failed. You can't want peace more than the parties want peace. Not well understood why US was involved in [#srilanka](#). Based in part on '87 meeting with Rajiv Gandhi -told RG not to get involved in lka

RA: US had a feeling of regret, not being able to persuade Rajiv Gandhi not to get involved. Also an issue of terrorism -very clear who the good guys and the bad guys were. [#srilankan](#) citizens were good guys and LTTE were bad. Personalities matter. George Bush believed in Ranil, that Ranil wanted peace so he could focus on creating a functioning economy. Need to consider impact of statements on all audiences: Sinhala community, Tamils and Buddhists

BP: Says he is an ethnic [#tamil](#) from India; asks whether Norway understands conflict better

[@SolheimDAC](#), Valid question and fair criticism. Norway should have had a bigger team. But we had unique insights into LTTE leadership. But ES said he had better insight into Tigers than [#Tamils](#)

[@marsal61](#) speaks of critical importance of getting people informed on local conflict to advise intl facilitators

[@SolheimDAC](#) says he believes both parties were sincere, and conflict could have ended with a negotiated political solution. LTTE started peace process at the peak of their power; LTTE was very close to taking control of full Jaffna peninsula

Questions begin. First question from former US Ambassador to [#lka](#) Teresita Schaffer; asks to look at efforts that failed, such as India's diplomatic efforts, Thimbu talks; Chandrika's efforts. Lessons for [#srilanka](#) and other peace efforts

RA: always thought LTTE wanted a separate state. Nothing else would be good enough

ES: LTTE wanted a protracted peace process to build confidence. Majority of Tamils and Sinhalese would have accepted a federal solution with wide-ranging autonomy for Tamils.

MS: Chandrika recognized need for public opinion and education to support peace

Question from [@gowricurry](#) about intl involvement in [#srilanka](#) now with respect to accountability mechanism

ES: Urgent issue for people to know what happened to ppl given to military custody; likely dead; need actual knowledge and closure. Another urgent issue is political prisoners – need to be tried or released. Urgent issue

of accountability, needs intl component bc Tamils tired of so many domestic commissions

RA: Sri Lanka said they'll get intl help with accountability mechanism but want it to be a "Sri Lankan" mechanism. Intl comm should be trying to get Tamils equal rights and equal treatment in [#srilanka](#)

MS: New report detailing torture in Northeast in 2015, released last week – just as brutal and horrible as it ever was. Impunity of military; military had de facto autonomy during conflict and unwilling to sacrifice that now

Question from audience regarding whether intl community accepted mass atrocities against [#Tamils](#) in order to exterminate LTTE

RA: wasn't in US govt at the time, but from his perspective, they just wanted the war to end

ES: knew the military wanted a full military victory, no matter the cost. The US had been willing to provide ships. Norway was willing to negotiate a surrender. Pirabakaran rejected this throughout. Many civilians killed, more than what we could accept. Collateral damage and bombings much more than we could accept. Nadesan and others surrendered and killed the next day

[@SolheimDAC](#) Pirabakaran's 12 year old son surrendered, was given a snack, and then killed. Totally unacceptable

MS: [@Callum_Macrae](#) 's film shows UN worker leaving Vanni, like Dutch leaving Srebrenica, Blue Helmets leaving Rwanda; extreme moral failure. But Sri Lanka bullied UN and UN let them.

Richard Boucher, former State Dept official, says US was meeting [#lka](#) govt daily, showing pictures of previous

day's bombings. US was meeting Gotabaya daily; saying to stop the bombings. Threatened stopping aid programs. Couldn't convince the [#lka](#) govt

Closing comments from panelists

ES: there was very limited room for moderates on both sides. Optimistic that room for moderates will prevail now

Solheim Calls On Diaspora To Work For Peace

Interview with Erik Solheim and myself at the 14 January Toronto launch of my new book.



Solheim Calls On Diaspora To Work For Peace

by [Ranjit Bhaskar](#) in Toronto

The Sri Lankan civil war holds many a lesson for the island-nation's diaspora community in Canada and the world in

general, according to [Erik Solheim](#), former Norwegian Minister for International Development and for the Environment. Solheim's name is synonymous with peacemaking in Sri Lanka.

“My biggest sorrow was that thousands of Tamils died unnecessarily due to lack of vision from both the Sinhala and Tamil leadership,” he said in Toronto this week, lamenting the futility of the civil war. The country having gained a measure of calm in recent years, Solheim called on the diaspora community to participate in the South Asian nation's economy and thereby help heal the ethnic fault line. It has long been suspected that the country's Tamil diaspora worldwide, including its largest presence here in Canada, helped fuel the civil war through remittances and arms shipments.

From 2000 to 2005, Solheim was the main negotiator of the process that led to a ceasefire agreement between the government and the separatist Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in early 2002 and the [Oslo Declaration](#). “Around that time, I was the most well-known foreigner in Sri Lanka next only to [then U.S. President] George Bush,” he recalled. “Also, I am the sole non-Tamil who has had the most face time with [LTTE chief] Velupillai Prabhakaran.”

Role of diaspora

Solheim was in Canada this week for the launch of [To End a Civil War](#), a book by [Mark Salter](#) on Norway's peace efforts to end the island nation's [bitter fight](#). He referred to the formation of an air force by the LTTE, the first by a non-state player that was made possible by diaspora contributions. “While it was an impressive achievement, it made absolutely no impact on the final outcome of the war.” Currently the Chairperson of the Development Assistance Committee for the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), Solheim said apart from political initiatives, a lasting solution to the ethnic fault line can be achieved through rapid economic growth.

Describing the [Tamil diaspora](#) as among the most successful in the world, he said it could play a big role in Sri Lanka's growth. "You now need to go back to invest and put your expertise to use," he told a largely Tamil audience at the Toronto book launch. "More so because diasporas are generally made up of the most industrious of a populace."

Bipartisan consensus

The peacemaker suggested that a bipartisan consensus between Sri Lanka's major political parties would further help the healing. The lack of such a consensus between the historically-opposed Sinhala political parties, the United National Party (UNP) and the Sri Lanka Freedom Party (SLFP), had played a role in prolonging the civil war. He hoped the current bipartisan administration of President Maithripala Sirisena (SLFP) and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe (UNP) can see through the process of rewriting the country's constitution and move ahead on [transitional justice](#).

Author Mark Salter said the importance of achieving bipartisan consensus is evident elsewhere. "Peace in Northern Ireland is a prime example of buy-in by all factions involved in a conflict." Salter said the inability of the then Wickremesinghe government to explain the peace dividend in simple terms to the majority Sinhalese Buddhist population was a key factor in the failure of the Sri Lankan peace process. Buddhists account for over 70 per cent of Sri Lanka's 21 million people.

Looking back

Solheim said he wished he had a bigger and broader team to engage more broadly with key groups on the island, including Buddhist leaders. "We should have also insisted on better access to Prabhakaran and spoken to him more often." In his opinion, Prabhakaran was a brilliant military leader, but a failed politician. "He thought every issue had a military

solution and went on to make many wrong decisions.” It was exacerbated by the death of LTTE political ideologue Anton Balasingham. “Prabhakaran became very isolated and was pushed to the wall. There was not one meaningful initiative from him in an international context.”

Solheim said straight-talking Balasingham was able to give his Norwegian team a unique insight into the LTTE’s leadership. “He never lied to us.” He said Prabhakaran’s biggest mistake was his decision to assassinate former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in May 1991. “It was an astronomical blunder that finally led to the LTTE’s destruction [in May 2009].” Solheim said Sri Lanka’s destiny is tied to India on many counts, with close proximity to its giant South Asian neighbour being one. “If one wanted, you could take a boat to Chennai from Jaffna, watch a movie and return.”

Canada’s “We’re back”

His Norwegian team had been in constant touch with India and the U.S., the two big international players, throughout the peace process. “No one nation can lead on all fronts in international affairs today,” Solheim told *New Canadian Media* when asked for his reaction to the new Canadian government’s global aspirations. “You must define a few areas of interest. But most importantly the desire to help must come from the heart.” Expressing delight over Prime Minister Justin Trudeau’s [“We’re back”](#) pronouncements, he was planning to meet Foreign Affairs Minister Stéphane Dion in Ottawa during his trip to the capital for the launch of Salter’s book.

The Toronto launch was organized by [Sri Lankans Without Borders](#) and was moderated by [Amaranth Amarasingam](#) of Dalhousie University.

<http://www.newcanadianmedia.ca/item/32753-sri-lanka>

Why my novel is banned from Israeli school curricula: Dorit Rabinyan



Excellent BBC interview with in-the-news Israeli authoress [Dorit Rabinyan](http://bbc.in/1RcdK5H) in which she gives a concise, clear – and in my view truthful – account of the reasons the Israeli Education Ministry has moved to stop her new novel, *Borderlife*, entering the national curriculum. Like thousands of others, I will definitely be buying the book once the English translation comes out. All power to her!

<http://bbc.in/1RcdK5H>